

Building a Revolutionary Trotskyist International

A Selection of Documents by
Jim Robertson
(1928–2019)



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Jim Robertson
(1928–2019)**

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Workers Vanguard

Jim Robertson at the Prometheus Research Library, 1988.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial Note	6
Introduction: James Robertson, 1928-2019, <i>Workers Vanguard</i> No. 1162, 4 October 2019	7
List of Abbreviations in Documents	19

1950s

Should the Bolsheviks Have Surrendered State Power?, 15 March 1954.....	21
Statement of Resignation from the Independent Socialist League, 12 April 1957.....	22
Crocodile Tears Stain the Monkscloth, April 1959	25

1960s

Letter on Ceylon, 8 August 1960.....	27
The Cuban Revolution and Marxist Theory, 17 August 1960.....	27
A Note on the Current Discussion—Labels and Purposes, 11 June 1961	30
New Stage in the Mortal Crisis of Stalinism, 28 May 1963.....	31
Amendment to P.C. Draft Resolution: “Preparing for the Next Wave of Radicalism in the United States,” 12 June 1963	36
Toward the Rebirth of the Fourth International, 14 June 1963.....	37
For Black Trotskyism, 3 July 1963	41
Spartacist Statement to International Conference, 6 April 1966	47
Memo on the Rhodesian Crisis, 17 May 1967	50
A Comment on Geoffrey White’s Resignation Statement, 29 July 1968.....	53
Letter on the Woman Question, 18 February 1969.....	55

1970s

Letter on the Chicano Question, 10 July 1970.....	57
Chilean Popular Front, November 1970.....	57
Letter to the IKD and Spartacus-BL, 14 March 1972.....	59
A Talk on the Labor Party Question, 5 November 1972.....	62
In Defense of Democratic Centralism, February 1973.....	66
Addition to Preface for <i>Marxist Bulletin</i> No. 8 on Cuba, 8 August 1973.....	69
Draft Postscript for Preface Addition to <i>Marxist Bulletin</i> No. 8 on Cuba, 27 August 1973	72
Letter to Comrade Samarakkody, 27 October 1973	73
Letter to a Trade Union Militant, 7 May 1974.....	84
Declaration for the Organizing of an International Trotskyist Tendency, July 1974	91
James P. Cannon Memorial, 27 August 1974.....	94
Rape and Bourgeois Justice, February 1975.....	101

On Northern Ireland, 14 March 1977	107
The Polanski Story, New Left Moralism and the Crisis of the Weekly, 18 February 1978	108
Who Cauterizes the Cauterizers?, 31 December 1978	110
No “Critical Support” to Popular Frontism, August 1979	111

1980s

A Social and Anthropological Journal, August 1983	121
On the Communist International’s Organizational Resolution, 19 July 1988.....	121
Presentation at the Fusion Conference of the iSt with the Rekken Group of Japan, August 1988 ..	122
On Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan, 12 August 1989	125
Where Is East Germany Going?, 27 December 1989	126

1990s

Stop the Nazis Through United Front Action!, 1 January 1990	129
For a New Workers Party!, 3 January 1990	129
Letter to Our Comrade Soviet Soldiers, 27 March 1990	131
Maintenance and the Communist Movement, June 1994.....	132
On Quebec Independence, 4 March 1995.....	133
Notes on Quebec, 20 May 1995.....	135
Internationalism Is a Dead Letter If...!, 22 November 1995.....	136
A Point on Regional Autonomy, 2 May 1998	137

2000s

On Permanent Revolution, 16 January 2001	139
Remarks on Youth, 19 June 2004	143
The Bolshevik School of Experience, 15 April 2006	144
On Running for Executive Office, February 2007	145

2010s

On the 1946 French Constitution, 22 August 2011	147
On the 1946 French Constitutional Referendum, 1 February 2013.....	147
On the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, 15 December 2013	148
The Revolutionary Tendency at Conception, 6 February 2014	148
Crimea is Russian, 1 March 2014.....	152
Correction on Crimea, 25 March 2014.....	152
On Greece: A Tactical Proposal, 16 July 2015	153
On the 1976 Quebec Air Traffic Controllers Strike, 30 November 2016.....	153
A Bit of Opportunism on the National Question, 27 January 2017	154
Letter on Caste, 1 July 2018.....	154

James Robertson Bibliography—1950-2019.....	155
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EDITORIAL NOTE

This *Prometheus Research Series* bulletin commemorates Jim Robertson, a lifelong fighter for communism and founding leader of the Spartacist League/U.S. and International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). As a collection, these writings document the key positions Jim fought for that shaped the ICL as a distinct political tendency on the left internationally and are testimony to his leadership in key class battles and struggles against all forms of oppression.

It is well known that the ICL has critically reviewed and repudiated many of its past positions. This in itself is a tribute to Jim Robertson. He forged a party that proved capable of coming back from collapse, stronger and with the revolutionary appetite and program to intervene in urgent struggles today. Against the notion of infallible leaders and eternal truths, Trotsky wrote: “Marxism is a theory of movement, not stagnation” (“Stalinism and Bolshevism,” 1937).

Some on the left have accused the ICL of “throwing Jim Robertson under the bus.” This bulletin gives readers the opportunity to judge for themselves. The Marxist method of evaluating a revolutionary party requires study of how it sought to advance the working class at a specific time and place in history. Lessons drawn from Jim’s lifetime of party building have enduring value for us today. To understand why the ICL has returned to the Comintern’s positions on the national question, permanent revolution and electoral tactics, and has corrected our previous approach to age of consent laws, we encourage readers to study the last three issues of *Spartacist* (English edition Nos. 68, 69, 70) and *Women & Revolution* No. 47 alongside this bulletin.

History does not stand still and neither can a revolutionary party. Unlike the bourgeois revolutions that were primarily driven by economic forces, proletarian revolutions require great political consciousness, ceaseless inquiry and correction. As Marx said: “Proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves

in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts...” (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852). Or, as Jim Robertson said often and succinctly: “Show me a finished program and I’ll show you a finished party.”

Unfortunately, Jim did not live to see the ICL’s qualitative turn. We sorely wish that he had and that he could inform our vigorous debates on how to intervene in a genuinely new period in world history. Trump has ripped apart the old liberal world order in a desperate attempt to reverse U.S. imperialism’s economic decline with unbridled military force and by bludgeoning allies and foes alike. To fight U.S. imperialism today, we are currently looking into how and why every tendency in the Trotskyist movement, including our own, underestimated the centrality of opposing U.S. imperialist hegemony at the end of World War II. Instead of vying for leadership of national liberation struggles as levers for socialist revolutions, the Spartacist tendency viewed them as obstacles to get past, while other tendencies capitulated to bourgeois nationalists, Stalinism or guerrillaism.

The obituary for Jim Robertson published in *Workers Vanguard* was chosen as the introduction to this bulletin because it gives a good sense of the man, the history that shaped him, and how he intervened to change history. Jim’s own writings are then presented in chronological order, beginning with his defense of the Bolshevik Revolution and his break from the “third camp” to Trotskyism. A few selections were not written by Jim alone. He worked in collaboration with others on many key programmatic documents. Documents are reproduced here without changes except for typographical errors. Anthologies are partial by definition, so we chose to conclude this bulletin with an extensive bibliography of Jim’s writings, which are available from the Prometheus Research Library upon request.

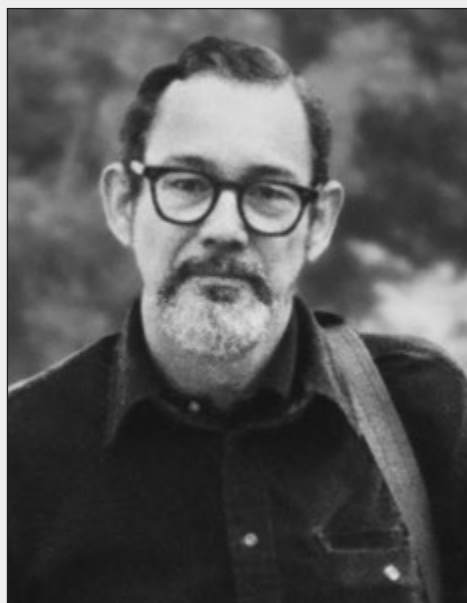
—Prometheus Research Library, June 2026

JAMES ROBERTSON

James Robertson, a founding leader of the Spartacist League/U.S. and its longtime National Chairman, died at his home in Northern California on April 7, at the age of 90. A member of the workers movement for more than 70 years, comrade Robertson remained an essential component of the leadership of the SL/U.S. and the International Communist League until the last weeks of his life. He leaves behind his wife and comrade, Martha; his two sons, Douglas and Kenneth; two stepdaughters, Rachel and Sarah; and his grandchildren.

Historically, revolutionary Marxist parties have not outlived their founding leaders with their program and purpose intact. Comrade Robertson's aim was to do his level best to reverse that verdict. In the last major political struggle of his life, Jim was key to the fight to correct a long-standing perversion of Leninism on the national question in the ICL, particularly as it applied to relatively advanced multinational states. Out of this struggle emerged a new generation of leaders who have become a key component of the ICL's International Executive Committee, along with senior cadre who are critical to preserving our slender threads of revolutionary continuity.

Speaking at a memorial gathering of comrades and sympathizers following Jim's death, the current National Chairman of the SL/U.S. noted that revolutionary continuity "is primarily programmatic but is also personal because program is embodied in human beings." In party educationals and countless informal discussions, Jim gave a living sense of his political history and the factional struggles that were key to finding his way to the program of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party. This history took him from the Communist Party (CP) to Max Shachtman's



Workers Vanguard

1928-2019



Workers Party/Independent Socialist League (WP/ISL), to James P. Cannon's Socialist Workers Party (SWP), and then to being a central leader of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT). Expelled from the SWP in 1963-64, RT cadre went on to found the Spartacist League/U.S.

Later in his life, Jim remarked that what he learned, and had to learn, in the course of the factional battles he waged was that the "Russian question" is *the* defining criterion of revolutionary Marxism in the imperialist epoch. This issue encompasses both an understanding of the Bolshevik Party that led the conquest of power by the working class in the

1917 Russian Revolution and the need to defend the gains of that revolution despite the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union.

From the early days of the SL/U.S., this programmatic understanding was central to our intervention into the Vietnam antiwar movement. Against the social-patriotic call to "Bring Our Boys Home," we fought for the defeat of U.S. imperialism and raised the call "All Indochina Must Go Communist!" In a 7 February 1965 cablegram to Ho Chi Minh, sent the day the U.S. began bombing North Vietnam, we declared: "Heroic struggle of Vietnamese working people furthers the American revolution" (printed in *Spartacist* No. 4, May-June 1965). In the 1980s, when the winds of the imperialists' anti-Soviet Cold War II drive were blowing red-hot, we stood out for our sharp-edged Soviet defensism, calling to "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples!" and demanding "Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution" in Poland.

Comrade Robertson initiated some of our most hard-hitting and angular slogans, propaganda

and actions. He was a central architect of the largest and most significant mobilization of our international tendency, as we intervened into an incipient proletarian political revolution in the East German deformed workers state (DDR) in 1989. As masses of workers, soldiers, students and others marched under banners reading “For Communist Ideals” and “No Privileges,” we raised the call for a “Red Soviet Germany” through socialist revolution in West Germany and proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist misleaders of the DDR.

We were in a political battle, although one marked by a disproportion of forces, with the abdicating Stalinist regime over the future of the DDR. We were defeated when Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev gave the green light for the capitalist reunification of Germany. But we fought with everything we had! Jim would later draw an analogy to Lenin’s intervention at a session of the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets in June 1917. After a Menshevik leader declared that there was no party prepared to assume power, Lenin yelled out, “Yes, there is.” As comrade Robertson remarked: “That was us in the DDR in 1989-1990. I do not believe that we should diminish or deny this simply because we were defeated. We will be defeated a lot.”

In 1991-92, the counterrevolution that had engulfed the deformed workers states of East and Central Europe destroyed the Soviet Union. Recognizing the devastating impact of this defeat on the struggles and consciousness of the working class, Jim underlined:

“We’re in an unusually deep trough, and the experiences that are immediately available to us are

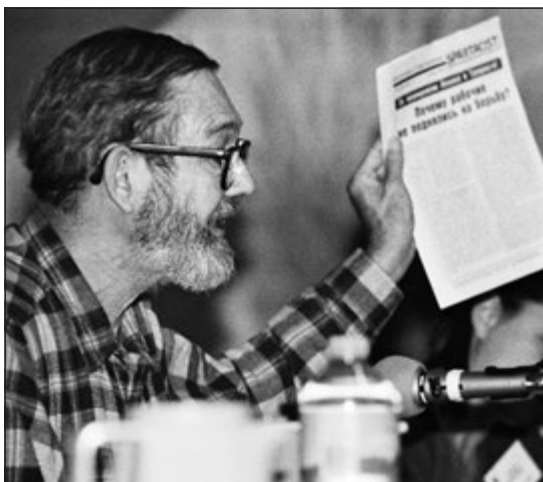
not very good. So we had better make very heavy reference back to the experiences of the workers movement when it could see much further: 1918 through 1921.”

Our quadrilingual theoretical journal, *Spartacist*, has been a central vehicle for keeping those experiences, embodied in the first four Congresses of the Communist International, alive. Jim, who was the founding editor and a crucial component of the editorial board of the English-language edition until his death, always stressed that this was not a matter of passing on received wisdom but of critical evaluation. He took particular satisfaction in our articles “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 61, Spring 2009) and “Why We Reject the ‘Constituent Assembly’ Demand” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 63, Winter 2012-13). Having played a key role in motivating both, Jim saw these articles as vital extensions of Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*.

California, Calvinism and Communism

Born in Berkeley in 1928, Jim was a child of the Great Depression and often recalled its utter destitution. He also remembered the impact of the 1936-37 West Coast maritime strike from the vantage point of a young boy seeing the detritus thrown from unworked ships floating in San Francisco Bay.

Some 80 years later, Jim was a key impetus for our “Then and Now” pamphlet contrasting the 1934 victories of three citywide strikes waged



Workers Vanguard



Spartakist

Left: Jim with ICL’s Russian-language leaflet to fight capitalist counterrevolution in USSR. Right: East Berlin, 1990: ICL-initiated united front rallied 250,000 in Treptow Park against sellout of DDR. ICL fought for revolutionary reunification of Germany.

amid the Depression—San Francisco longshoremen, Minneapolis Teamsters and Toledo auto workers—with the ongoing devastation of organized labor today. Seeking to arm a new generation of working-class fighters, the pamphlet drives home that a crucial difference is that the 1934 strikes were led by “reds” committed to mobilizing the class power of the workers as opposed to the current labor misleaders, who are committed to the interests and profits of American imperialism. In fighting to implant a class-struggle perspective in the working class, Jim had a keen appreciation of the relationship of the Leninist party to the proletariat: Unions mean the unity of workers, while the party means split—i.e., the fight to forge the vanguard of the class by winning over the most class-conscious workers.

Jim’s family, on all sides, was staunchly Presbyterian. The lessons inculcated by his Calvinist upbringing would continue to define him, even after he became an atheist in his teens. He maintained a commitment to knowledge and probity, as well as a keen appreciation of monetary matters. The battle against the ignorance, superstition and all-sided reactionary character of the Catholic church would also inspire him as a youth to side with the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War against Franco’s fascist-aligned forces. A polymath with a wide range of interests, Jim was an avid scuba diver and acquired an impressive collection of British coins; he had a fervent interest in Roman and Mediterranean history, including the transition from antiquity to feudalism.

The American Civil War and the fight to abolish black chattel slavery was another living issue for Jim from a young age. While his mother’s side of the family had been slaveholders, his great-grandfather fought on the side of the Union in the Civil War. In 1984, Jim was the moving force behind our tearing down the Confederate flag in San Francisco’s Civic Center. As a tribute to the inspiration of his great-grandfather, a picture of his gravestone was printed in *Workers Vanguard* accompanying our article “We Tore Down the Flag of Slavery!” (WVNo. 353, 27 April 1984).

Raised mostly in the Bay Area and the Central Valley, where his mother taught in a series of small-town grade schools, Jim remained a Cali-



Jim addressing Spartacist League founding conference, September 1966. (Inset) First issue of *Spartacist*, February-March 1964.

Spartacist

fornian throughout his life. His idea of a good American meal was beef enchiladas, rice and beans. He also had a keen appreciation of the brutal oppression and degradation of Mexicans who labored in the fields of the Central Valley. The incarceration of Japanese Americans in concentration camps during World War II was also a living memory for him. When his mother taught in a small Mennonite community, his only friends were the Japanese American kids who shared many of his interests. The image of Japanese Americans being held in a pen in Merced, California, waiting to be shipped to the camps was indelibly imprinted on his consciousness.

In notes for memoirs taken by his wife Elizabeth Robertson, whose death from cancer in 2005 was a body blow to Jim, he spoke to the impact of these experiences in “incubating a communist conscience”:

“A pronounced revulsion to racism; the absurdly simple idea that the material requirements of life ought to be produced and distributed upon the basis of the need for them rather than according to profitability to the owners of industry; a hard-core atheism flowing fairly straightforwardly from immersing an unknowingly dedicated Calvinist into a year of Roman Catholic school where he got A’s in catechism and then back to a secular school; and with the sole exception of the beloved Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a thoroughgoing distrust of existing government and institutions.”

At 18 years of age, Jim joined the Communist

Party in Richmond, California, in late 1946. At the time, he fully shared the Stalinists' pro-FDR "anti-fascist popular front" politics.

Black and Red

Jim was assigned to work in the CP youth organization, which was overwhelmingly made up of young black workers, many of whom had come from the South to work in the Richmond shipyards during World War II and were now laid off. As Jim once remarked, the idea that the North was "promised land" had been dashed, and now these black workers looked to the Soviet Union. The stories of the daily racist humiliation and degradation his new comrades were subjected to deepened Jim's awareness of the centrality of black oppression to both the foundation and maintenance of American capitalism.

Years later, in the late 1950s, veteran SWP leader Richard Fraser would win Jim to his program of revolutionary integrationism, which is counterposed to both liberal integration schemes and black nationalism. Rooted in a proletarian-centered perspective to fight against every manifestation of racial oppression under capitalism, revolutionary integrationism is based on the understanding that the only road to black freedom lies in shattering this racist capitalist order through proletarian revolution, and that black workers, as the most oppressed and also most conscious and combative layer of the working class, will play a leading role in that struggle.

Describing Fraser as his "last personal teacher" at a memorial meeting following his death in 1988, Jim described his impact: "I was really quite ready to run into comrade Fraser's presentation and historical foundation, that one can achieve the abolition of racial division in this country *only* through a profound, pervasive, far-going social revolution in which the working class comes to power." One of the founding documents of the SL/U.S., "Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom" (1966) elucidated Fraser's program of revolutionary integrationism, incorporating lessons from our early intervention into the black freedom struggle. This perspective animated the SL-initiated labor/black mobilization to stop the Klan in Washington, D.C., on 27 November 1982 and our other anti-fascist actions. The sight of 5,000 black people, unionists and other intended victims of Klan terror victoriously marching the KKK's planned route in D.C. was one of our proudest moments.

During his two years in the CP, Jim took the first

steps in what would be a lifelong study of the lessons of the Russian Revolution. His branch leadership did not encourage reading Lenin, so Jim went out and bought a copy of *The State and Revolution*. He was struck by the flagrant contradiction between Lenin and the class-collaborationist politics of the CP. This would later be amplified by his awareness of growing income and other inequalities in the Soviet Union, belying the Stalinists' claim that the Soviet Union was steadily marching toward socialism.

As a chemistry student at UC Berkeley, Jim was introduced to Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and other works by a young couple who supported Max Shachtman's Workers Party. He would later often recall that when he "confessed" to being a "Trotskyite" (an experience he described as akin to telling your parents you were gay in the 1950s), he was told that it wasn't so easy. There were two Trotskyist parties: one was "for Russia and against Stalin" and the other was "against Russia and against Stalin." Having expressed a preference for the former, Jim was told that was "old fashioned" and was directed instead to Shachtman's party. He joined its youth organization in 1948.

From the CP to the "Third Camp"

One of the founding leaders of American Trotskyism, Shachtman had split from the SWP in 1940, having repudiated the party's defense of the Soviet Union. It would take some years for the full pro-imperialist implications of this defection from Trotskyism to play out. The Shachtman organization's plunge into increasingly overt support for U.S. imperialism began not long after Jim joined, and it would propel him into opposition. In 1951, Shachtman floated the idea of supporting an American-led war against the Soviet Union under the condition that it would have some kind of labor cover. Shortly thereafter, Jim debated Shachtman in front of the Bay Area branch.

This took some guts, and it was an early marker of Jim's political intransigence and audacity. At the debate, he used Shachtman's 1941 article "Working-Class Policy in War and Peace." In that piece, Shachtman had correctly excoriated the SWP's "Proletarian Military Policy"—which advocated trade-union control over military training during World War II—as a concession to social-patriotism. Opposition to this policy remains a hallmark of our international organization, codified in our *Prometheus Research Series* No. 2, "Documents on the 'Proletarian Military Policy'" (February 1989).

Jim also got a good education in Marxist classics in Shachtman's organization, which he would refer to as a model for the education of new comrades in the SL. Unfortunately for Al Garber, who ran this educational program, it armed the student to polemically excoriate the teacher's abject revisionism. Garber had argued that Stalinism could have been avoided if the Bolsheviks had called for new elections in 1921, at the end of the devastating Civil War, and handed over power to whichever party won. In a 1954 document titled "Should the Bolsheviks Have Surrendered State Power?" Jim argued that this would have been "a betrayal of the first magnitude of socialism and would have assured the defeat" of the October Revolution. Garber snarled that Jim belonged in the SWP, to which Jim retorted that Garber belonged in the Socialist Party. A few years later, those organizations were exactly where each of them ended up.

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution had a tremendous impact in puncturing the Shachtmanites' position that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a new "bureaucratic collectivist" ruling class. In the face of a working-class uprising, the Hungarian Communist Party bureaucracy polarized and split. A sizable minority, including a central military commander and the Budapest chief of police, went over to the side of the workers. This confirmed Trotsky's understanding of the Stalinist bureaucracy as an unstable caste, a parasitic excrescence sitting on top of the workers state. As Jim would later remark in a presentation on the antecedents of the Spartacist League, "Imagine a proletarian revolution in a capitalist country where one-quarter of the Republican Party or the Tories goes over to the side of the workers. This is a fantasy! Everything Trotsky said was right."

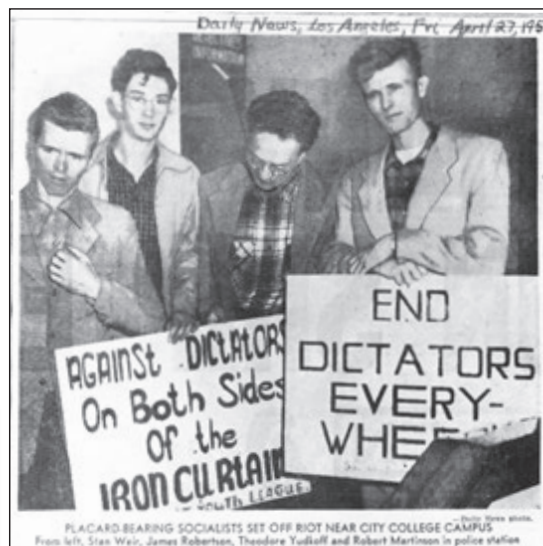
The same year as the events in Hungary, Khrushchev's "secret" speech on the crimes of Stalin propelled hundreds of shocked and disaffected Stalinists out of the Communist Party, breaking the dominance of the CP on the left. For his part, Shachtman was preparing to totally liquidate into the "State Department socialists" of Norman Thomas's decrepit Socialist Party.

Jim (second from left) as member of "Third Camp" Shachtmanite Independent Socialist League in 1951. Below: Jim's 1954 document (signed James Thompson) in defense of Russian Revolution against leading Shachtmanite.

FORUM

A Discussion and Information Bulletin Published by the Independent Socialist League

**SHOULD THE BOLSHEVIKS HAVE SURRENDERED STATE POWER?
A Discussion Article, by....James Thompson**



Los Angeles Daily News/UCLA Library

As one of the leaders of the Shachtman youth organization's Left Wing Caucus, which opposed the liquidation, Jim once again debated Shachtman. In the aftermath of the debate, Shachtman wrote that it was pointless trying to save Jim from "something he badly wants and badly needs—experience with a sterile, intolerant revolutionary phrasemongering sect like the SWP."

And that is where Jim went, joining the SWP in 1957. He always fondly recalled his collaboration with veteran SWPer Murry Weiss, who was central to the party's regroupment with the Left Wing Caucus. This regroupment would lay the basis for the founding of the SWP's youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). Comrade Robertson and other former Caucus leaders Shane Mage and Tim Wohlforth became leaders of the YSA. Although Jim described their view of the SWP as some kind of Trotsky memorial society, he thought that he would "rather be in an honorable irrelevant memorial association to Trotsky" than stay with the Shachtmanites.

The SWP, the RT and the Cuban Revolution

The SWP was pretty hollowed out by the time Jim joined, most immediately reflecting the impact of the stagnation and repression of the 1950s Cold War witchhunt. With the SWP having spent some years making little to no impact on society, the Trotskyist program had increasingly become irrelevant for much of the party

leadership. Looking for something else to latch on to, the SWP found it in the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro, whose petty-bourgeois guerrilla forces took power in Havana in 1959 and whose government expropriated the Cuban bourgeoisie in 1960-61. Jim often recalled longtime SWP leader Morris Stein enthusing that the Cuban Revolution was the best one he was going to see in his lifetime.

In embracing Fidel Castro as an “unconscious Marxist,” the SWP leadership dumped both the centrality of the working class as well as the need for a Leninist vanguard party to lead the struggle for power by the proletariat. In 1960, Shane Mage wrote an oppositional document, “The Cuban Revolution and Marxist Theory,” which was co-signed by Robertson and Wohlforth. In a 2014 presentation on “The RT at Conception,” Jim commented that since they were all new boys in the SWP, he didn’t think the document would have much impact. But they were also leaders of the SWP’s youth organization, and in January 1961 the party leadership called a plenum on the Cuban question. As Jim recalled: “The point of it was to bring us to heel, to stop us. They hit us pretty hard. We didn’t recant. Instead we called a faction meeting” (*Marxist Studies for Cadre Education* No. 10, June 2018). That was the beginning of the Revolutionary Tendency in the SWP.

A finished understanding that Cuba had become a deformed workers state in 1960 with the pervasive nationalizations and the liquidation of the bourgeoisie as a class is presented in an additional preface to *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8, “Cuba and Marxist Theory.” Written by Jim in 1973, the preface spelled out the exceptional circumstances that had led to this outcome: the absence of the working class as a contender for power, the flight of the Cuban bourgeoisie, the intransigent opposition of the Eisenhower administration and the existence of the Soviet Union as a military and economic counterweight to U.S. imperialism.

This analysis of the Cuban Revolution unlocked the process through which revolutions of insurrectionary peasant forces led by Stalinists had succeeded in smashing capitalism and establishing deformed workers states after World War II. It was a vital contribution, reaffirming Trotskyism against the disorientation and impressionism of the postwar Fourth International. The majority of Trotskyists, relying on sterile “orthodoxy,” initially insisted that without proletarian revolution there could be no social overturn of capitalism. Then, following the Yugoslav peasant-based revolution and Tito’s subsequent break with Stalin, many Trotskyists hailed the Yugoslav Stalinists as “com-

rades” and “left centrists.” Michel Pablo, who had emerged as leader of the Fourth International after the decimation of its central cadre in Europe during the war, generalized the embrace of the Yugoslav Stalinists into a broad revisionist course. He argued that the establishment of deformed workers states in East and Central Europe, most of which were created from the top down by the forces of the Red Army, demonstrated that the Stalinist parties “retain the possibility in certain circumstances of roughly outlining a revolutionary orientation.” Thus the very need for a revolutionary Trotskyist international was liquidated.

Although in a partial and limited way, Cannon’s SWP had fought Pabloite revisionism and united in the International Committee (IC) with other organizations that claimed to defend Trotskyism. But the SWP’s embrace of Castro’s guerrillas paved the way to its reunification with the Pabloites in 1963. The RT opposed this course. Jim was particularly proud of writing the following section of the RT’s 1963 resolution, “Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International”:

“Experience since the Second World War has demonstrated that peasant-based guerilla warfare under petit-bourgeois leadership can in itself lead to nothing more than an anti-working-class bureaucratic regime. The creation of such regimes has come about under the conditions of decay of imperialism, the demoralization and disorientation caused by Stalinist betrayals, and the absence of revolutionary Marxist leadership of the working class. Colonial revolution can have an unequivocally progressive significance only under such leadership of the revolutionary proletariat. For Trotskyists to incorporate into their strategy revisionism on the *proletarian* leadership in the revolution is a profound negation of Marxism-Leninism no matter what pious wish may be concurrently expressed for ‘building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries.’ Marxists must resolutely oppose any adventurist acceptance of the peasant-guerilla road to socialism—historically akin to the Social Revolutionary program on tactics that Lenin fought. This alternative would be a suicidal course for the socialist goals of the movement, and perhaps physically for the adventurers.”

—Printed in *Spartacist* No. 1, February-March 1964

Domestically, the RT, seeking to win black militants to revolutionary Marxism, fought against the SWP’s criminal abstention from the growing left wing of the civil rights movement. A July 1963 document written by Robertson and Shirley Stoute titled “For Black Trotskyism” recalled Trotsky’s admonition that “if it happens that we in the SWP are not able to find the road to this strata, then we are not worthy at all.” In December 1963, the SWP leadership expelled Robert-



Spartacist

West Berlin, 1970: Jim (center) with comrades Liz Gordon and Al Nelson during European tour to seek out possibilities for revolutionary regroupment.

son and four other leaders of the RT in the first political expulsions in the history of the party.

The Obligation of Revolutionary Internationalism

Following Cannon's death in August 1974, comrade Robertson memorialized him in a presentation to an SL/U.S. national gathering the same month. He spoke to Cannon's unique capacity, evolved out of his times and his political struggles, "to be the successful strategist and leader of a proletarian revolution in North America." Jim noted, however, that Cannon had ducked the international responsibility that he ought to have taken up after Trotsky's murder:

"Cannon had an abiding failure. He became the principal individual authority responsible for the world Trotskyist movement in August 1940 and basically didn't do anything about it (though the SWP was internationalist and willing to commit energy, lives). I think the reason was pretty simple: Cannon felt he was not good enough to be a world leader of the Marxist movement, and he was right....

"So Cannon backed off, and we're stuck with the job. He stuck us with it doubly. Because he was a lot better than we are—and when I say 'he' I mean not only Cannon personally but the immediate

working crew that made up the 'Cannon regime.'... "There was a Cannon regime, and they were doing the best they could. But they didn't accept the international challenge, and yet it is an obligation. Yes, if you know that you don't know anything, go patiently, quietly, perseveringly; struggle with the greatest patience and attention for international collaborators. We have to go that way, not back off and wait in national isolation for somebody else to come forward and say, 'I can do it,' and then we say, 'all right; we'll give you our authority.' We have to persist; we have to intervene."

—*Spartacist* (English-language edition)
No. 38-39, Summer 1986

From the beginning, our founding cadre understood that we would never survive as a revolutionary organization in national isolation, not least under the pressures of operating in the most powerful imperialist country on earth. We considered ourselves to be in programmatic agreement with the International Committee (until our definitive break with them in 1967). In particular, Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League in Britain had published very impressive and orthodox-sounding documents in defense of authentic Trotskyism. At the same time, the RT had had its own bad experiences with Healy's bureaucratic organizational practices, which were aimed at coercing compliance with his dictates. In 1962, Healy's American toady, Wohlforth, had split the RT, and he would later serve as the finger man for our expulsion by the SWP leadership.

We also had a major political difference with Healy over Cuba. In what we would describe as "inverted Pabloism," the Healyites answered the SWP's embrace of Castro's petty-bourgeois guerrillas by denying that capitalism had been overthrown in Cuba. Nonetheless, from what we could tell from their written documents, we had significant programmatic agreement, and that was central.

A Spartacist delegation attended the 1966 IC Conference in London, where comrade Robertson spoke on our behalf. He addressed our differences over Cuba, noting: "If the Cuban bourgeoisie is indeed 'weak' as the I.C. affirms, one can only observe that it must be tired from its long swim to Miami, Florida." He criticized the IC's enormous overestimation of the imminence of the final "crisis of capitalism" and argued that the IC had "not done very well" in fighting Pabloist revisionism. Healy's response was swift. Charging that Robertson's supposed "unexcused" absence from a Conference session was an act of petty-bourgeois American-chauvinist contempt, he demanded that Jim apologize. Jim refused to bow to the demand that he falsely confess.

In the Spartacist delegation's final statement to the conference, Jim argued:

"We believe it is a violation of Leninist practice to demand that a comrade affirm to his comrades what he does not believe.... The Spartacist organization has been subjected to a series of slanderous attacks, despite our basic political agreement on the necessity of the fight against revisionism. This is an attempt to substitute for international democratic centralism for the American section a mechanism not of consciousness and discipline but of fear and obedience."

A year later, the contradiction between Healy's organizational practices and the IC's professed program was resolved with its embrace of Mao's "Cultural Revolution" and of the so-called "Arab Revolution," which was composed of despotic nationalist regimes in the Near East.

Forging a Cadre Collective

Doubtless Healy thought that after our break with him, we would simply shrivel up and die. But we didn't. From the first issue of *Spartacist* (February-March 1964), we had declared our intention to resolve the disparity between our size and our goal of forging a Leninist vanguard party through: revolutionary regroupment with leftward moving elements of other self-professed Marxist organizations and winning individual supporters from among radicalized youth and militants in the civil rights struggle, as well as seeking to intersect key sections of the working class.

It was a period of intense political ferment and tumultuous social struggle in the U.S. The civil rights struggles had shattered the reactionary 1950s Cold War consensus. Opposition to the pro-Democratic Party liberal pacifism of the Martin Luther King leadership had generated a left-wing split of young black militants. The impact of the Cuban Revolution was now combined with growing opposition to the Vietnam War. The New Left was growing by leaps and bounds.

Although our forces were small and in the early years somewhat amorphous, we fought to intervene to the best of our capacity. What comrade Robertson brought to bear were the lessons of Leninist party building, especially the training and development of cadre that he had learned in particular from the work and history of James P. Cannon. He understood that our recruitment would predominantly come from individuals and groups attracted to our program and analysis as expressed in our propaganda, not some phony pretense of "mass work." At the same time, Jim looked for opportunities where we could, in an exemplary way, demonstrate our program in action.

In 1964, when black Harlem was under police siege following an upheaval of protest against the cop killing of a black teenager, the SL initiated the Harlem Solidarity Committee. Its purpose was to rally working-class support for the besieged black population. The response was a nearly 1,000-strong rally in New York's garment district. Speaking to the crowd, Jim took on the cops' campaign to charge communists with inflaming the upheaval in Harlem. As he defiantly declared, "Unfortunately there aren't many Reds in Harlem now—*but there will be!*"

In 1968, in the course of an intense internal faction fight, Jim succeeded in forging a cadre collective of those comrades who had been won to the SL/U.S. in its early years. Then, after a series of regroupments and fusions, we were able to realize our perspective of being a fighting propaganda group with the establishment of *Workers Vanguard* as well as *Women and Revolution*. We founded a national youth organization, which in turn provided many of the young comrades who would go on to fight for a class-struggle perspective in key unions.

In notes for his own obituary written in 1990, Jim wrote: "He breached the gap from the old left under James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman to the New Left, bringing along several hundred at the time so they did not spend their lives in futile adventure or Yuppiedom." And, by the time of our Third National Conference in 1972, we finally had the cadre, language skills and financial resources to systematically pursue our international extension.

Reforge the Fourth International!

The international Spartacist tendency was formally launched in 1974 with the "Declaration for the Organizing of an International Trotskyist Tendency" (DOITT). Adopted by the SL/U.S. and the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand, as well as supporters in Europe, the DOITT document stated:

"The international Spartacist tendency is just that, a tendency in the process of consolidation. But from its international outset it declares its continuing fidelity already tested for a decade in national confines to Marxist-Leninist principle and Trotskyist program—Revolutionary, Internationalist and Proletarian.

"The struggle for the rebirth of the Fourth International promises to be difficult, long, and, above all, uneven."

From our first days, Jim was often part of international delegations that pursued opportunities for principled revolutionary regroupment.



Thomas R. Copi

April 1967: Jim (center) protesting U.S. imperialism's war against Vietnam. Against liberal pacifism, Spartacists fought for military victory to the Vietnamese National Liberation Front.

He personally focused particular effort on Britain, living in London in the mid 1970s. There he collaborated in the writing of our "Theses on Ireland," a critical extension of a Leninist understanding of the national question especially in relation to geographically interpenetrated peoples. Jim was also central to winning an oppositional faction from Alan Thornett's Workers Socialist League, which included several young Irish and Turkish members, laying the basis for founding the Spartacist League/Britain in 1978.

By the time of our first International Conference in 1979, we had sections in France, Germany, Australia, Canada, the U.S. and Britain. Of the nearly 300 delegates and observers in attendance who had been members of other organizations, the majority had been left splits from Ernest Mandel's Pabloite United Secretariat. Others included former pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing Stalinists, anti-revisionist Trotskyists and former Third Campists, as well as ex-members of the Black Panthers and women's and gay rights radical organizations.

Nonetheless, although we had won many youthful militants from self-proclaimed Trotsky-

ist groups, we had failed to win veteran fighters whose experience would have helped shape a new generation. It wasn't for lack of trying. Our most notable effort to find, in Cannon's words, "the initiating cadres of the new organization in the old," was a long fraternal experience with the comrades of Edmund Samarakkody's Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP) in Sri Lanka. In 1960, Jim had written a letter to the SWP Political Committee protesting its public silence over the betrayals of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), which had signed on to a popular-front electoral pact with the bourgeois-nationalist, Sinhala-chauvinist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). In 1964, the LSSP joined the SLFP government, leading Samarakkody to split from the LSSP. Later that year, he and his comrade Meryl Fernando, both Members of Parliament, cast their votes in favor of a motion of no confidence, a principled act that brought down the coalition government.

The DOITT document outlining the prospects for revolutionary regroupment took particular note of Samarakkody's RWP as having "emerged with integrity from the welter of betrayals perpetrated by the old LSSP" and abetted by the United Secretariat (as well as Healy's IC). In the course of written and other discussions with Samarakkody's group beginning in 1971, it became clear that they had not broken from a parliamentary framework. Evidence of this included Samarakkody repudiating his 1964 vote against the popular front. Relations had seemingly reached an impasse when in 1979 we received a proposal for fusion.

Comrade Robertson headed a delegation to Lanka for discussions. As another comrade who was part of that delegation recently wrote: "These ten days of intense political combat were a display of Jim's capacities as a clear-headed political leader, combining steely programmatic firmness with a masterful sense of diplomacy. The trip was conditioned by many factors, but chiefly Jim's well-known commitment to extend our forces internationally." Attending our 1979 International Conference, Samarakkody made clear that he intended to maintain his provincial operation on the left fringe of the Sri Lanka popular front and would not allow his organization to be subject to the correctives of international democratic-centralism. The fusion was off, as Samarakkody packed his bags and left before the conference ended.

Nonetheless, we learned that we had polarized the RWP, and several of its younger comrades were won to our tendency. They were animated by Jim's insistence that the struggle against Sinhala chauvinism by the working class of Sri Lanka "can be no

less a precondition for successful revolution than the struggle against Great Russian chauvinism was for the Bolsheviks.” As our Lankan section, they fought with great determination and courage against the government’s escalating war against the Tamil population. Internationally, our sections organized and participated in protests with Tamil exiles protesting the terror in Sri Lanka.

We lost these comrades largely due to our inability to communicate in each other’s languages. Despite concerted efforts by our Sri Lankan comrades and comrades in New York, we never succeeded in breaking the Sinhala-English barrier. In a later document titled “Internationalism Is a Dead Letter If...!” Jim wrote: “Without the language capacity to bridge the gulfs between the people of the world we are not merely lost, we are non-starters.” Referencing himself as “the pathetic walking example of this problem” despite several years of studying Spanish, some French and a prolonged attempt to learn German, Jim ended with the salutation “For a Welders’ and Bilinguals’ Government!”

Maintenance and the PRL

Jim’s reference to “welders” was not meant jocularly. Throughout his political life, he fought against bourgeois society’s veneration of “intellectual labor” and contempt for those who work with their hands. In part, this reflected his study of, and work in, chemistry. In remarks at the 1994 SL/U.S. National Conference, he counterposed “unifying communist values” that seek to overcome the division between mental and manual labor to “the bourgeois dichotomy between the doer and the thinker, the blue and the white collar, work and leisure, dirty and clean, menial and advantaged.”

Jim dedicated his presentation (printed as “Maintenance and the Communist Movement,” WVNo. 605, 2 September 1994) to Nina Hartley. A porn star and fighter for sexual liberation, Hartley, in Jim’s words, “personifies the struggle against a parallel kind of invidiousness and hypocrisy, in her case sexual, inherent in the bourgeois order.” Jim was a key contributor to *Women and Revolution*, which was published from 1971 to 1996. *Women and Revolution* was not only a tool for intervention into the 1970s women’s liberation movement but also a means to illuminate social questions arising out of the fundamental character of women’s oppression, taking up subjects like human origins and early society as well as culture and art.

Inside the party, Jim encouraged women comrades to become leaders of the organization. In part, this came from his experience in the SWP,

where male National Officers had female secretaries. While these extremely competent and devoted women cadre shared their opinions with the national leaders, they did not speak at Political Committee meetings. As one of our early leading women comrades wrote: “Jim said he didn’t want me to be like that; he wanted women in our party to seek authority in their own right.” The leaderships of the SL/U.S. and the ICL have always been distinguished by their many Marxist women cadre.

On the book-learning side of the equation, Jim pursued a lifelong dedication to building a Marxist library and collecting archival material documenting the history and experiences of the workers movement, both in the U.S. and internationally. This started during his years in Shachtman’s organization, and it wasn’t easy as an impoverished student in the midst of the McCarthyite witchhunt. Thus, Jim was understandably quite proud when Louis Sinclair, the bibliographer of Trotsky’s works, found items in Jim’s library that he wasn’t aware of during his visit to the Bay Area in 1958.

Noting Lenin’s admonition that “he who takes somebody’s word for it is a hopeless idiot,” the tasks and perspectives document adopted at the Fourth SL/U.S. Conference in 1974 spelled out the importance of archival work:

“One of the crucial tasks of the vanguard of the proletariat is the struggle to function as the memory of the working class. An important component of this struggle for continuity is the systematic assembling, propagation and critical assimilation of the primary documentary history of the workers movement. Given the passage of time and the accumulation of distortions and vulgarizations, only the precise, verified reconstruction of past realities can serve as a true compass.”

Jim’s personal collection became the basis for the Prometheus Research Library (PRL), a working facility for Marxist and related studies and also the library and reference archives of the SL/U.S. Central Committee. He remained PRL director until his death.

From the beginning of the PRL, Jim pushed an ambitious publishing program to make available rare and important documentation from the history of the communist movement. Our earliest *Prometheus Research Series* bulletin (August 1988) published the first complete and accurate translation of the “Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work.” Adopted by the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921, the document stands as a codification of communist organizational practice as it was

forged by the Bolsheviks and tested by the 1917 workers revolution.

Given the early PRL's very limited editorial experience, Jim approached George Breitman, one of the principal editors of Pathfinder's series of Trotsky's works, who together with other old-time cadre had been drummed out of Jack Barnes's SWP in 1984. With Breitman's help, the PRL began to collect Cannon's writings from the 1920s, work that eventually led to *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* (1992), which Jim co-edited. A PRL memo based on Jim's notes contrasted such collaboration with one's opponents in the workers movement to the record of Stalinism:

"By all historical accounts Stalinism ended the moral and political framework of the old radical movement where anarchists, Marxists, syndicalists, co-operativists and even single-taxers worked together on issues of mutual interest. One of Stalinism's more poisonous qualities, and it is quite total, is the conviction that if you have serious political disagreements with someone you can't give them the time of day, let alone a reference to an old document."

In this spirit, Jim was also personally involved in providing documentation and commentary to historian Bryan D. Palmer when he was working on *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928*.

Most, but not all, of the *Prometheus Research Series* bulletins were conceived of (if not co-edited) by Jim, based on his years of research and reflection. This is also true of the PRL's second book, *Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933* (2002). Jim had heard rumors of this factional battle from his early days in Shachtman's organization, but it took him years to get his hands on the key documents. Jim realized that despite the absence of any principled programmatic difference, this early fight between Cannon and Shachtman presaged their 1939-40 battle over the Russian question. It was an early example of the petty-bourgeois impressionism that would lead to Shachtman's break with Trotskyism. And it demonstrated Cannon's commitment to programmatic integrity and proletarian centrality.

"We of the Older Generation..."

Dick Fraser once wrote that Robertson had appropriated the "worst aspects of Cannonism and Shachtmanism." Jim hoped that Fraser meant Cannon's political intransigence and Shachtman's easy-going, democratic organizational practices.



Workers Vanguard

At SL-initiated demonstration in NYC hours after government massacre of members of Branch Davidian religious commune in Waco, Texas, 1993.

But he knew he didn't. Despite political differences, Robertson and Fraser remained friends and political collaborators, particularly on the fight for black liberation, until Fraser's death in 1988. Two years later, we produced a PRS bulletin containing a selection of his works as a tribute.

Other, unmitigatedly hostile opponents would present Jim as a raving megalomaniac surrounded by handraisers and hacks. These included Tim Wohlforth, who had contrasted his own putative status as a Marxist leader to Cannon, whom he called a vulgar "window-smasher." The misnamed Bolshevik Tendency, an outfit started by embittered ex-members, joined this chorus. The subjective malice animating the BT was seen in its embrace of Bill Logan—a social and sexual psychopath who was expelled at our first International Conference—as its leader.

The truth of the matter is that Jim never aspired to be "*the* leader" and was keenly aware that he stood far in Cannon's shadow. As he put it in his memorial to Cannon, Jim knew that he, and we, could not "wait in national isolation for somebody else to come forward and say, 'I can do it.'" So he grasped the nettle. Not on his own, but through an ongoing struggle to forge a collective leadership.

Against those posturing as “100 percent” leaders, who were unable to tolerate any corrective or criticism, Jim argued that if you were right 70 percent of the time it was a pretty good track record. Jim often said that “the party flies on two wings,” underlining the value of comrades in the left and right wings of the party.

He also liked to quote Oliver Cromwell’s entreaty: “I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.” And when the party was wrong, Jim insisted that we publicly correct ourselves. Others, particularly of the *líder máximo* school, take this to be evidence of weakness and disarray. For our part, we recognize that frankly acknowledging our mistakes is, as Lenin put it, “the hallmark of a serious party” that seeks to both learn from its errors and impart these lessons to the proletariat.

Revolutionary politics is, as Cannon put it, “a devourer of men.” Against pretty big odds, comrade Robertson persisted in the struggle to forge a Leninist party. It took its toll. As part of coping with the stresses and to overcome a great personal shyness, he drank, a lot. By the late 1980s, he was also keenly aware of the impact of aging on his political capacities for central party leadership. He often spoke of the “Rickover Syndrome,” referring to U.S. Navy admiral Hyman Rickover, who was forced to retire at 82 after nearly sinking the nuclear submarine USS *La Jolla* during its 1981 sea trials.

In the early 1990s, Jim and his family moved to California, which he described as “semi-retirement.” Nonetheless, although removed from the administrative leadership of the party, he continued to be central to shaping our international line and to our propaganda, as well as to internal struggles in the ICL. With his health threatened by alcoholism, he stopped drinking and later also gave up smoking. This bought Jim, and us, some 25 more years of his life and political experience. In that time, he sought to pass on the lessons he had learned to newer party leaders.

In a 1977 internal educational on party history, Jim noted:

“The reason that we stress the continuity of international communism and Trotskyism is because we have so little.... It’s very thin, comrades, this continuity. And it seems to me and has always seemed to me that to be a good communist requires two components, each of which is necessary. One is akin to the university students, that is the mastery of the texts: to know, to read, to study, to be able to have the historic precedents through book learning at one’s fingers. And the other is analogous to the apprenticeship program where you learn by doing under the direction and supervision of those who know better than you. And without components of both I do not think it’s possible to build the Bolshevik party without having to start all over again which is unlikely.”

The founding leadership of the SL had the advantage of coming onto the scene at a time when society was erupting in the U.S. and internationally in social struggle. The current generation has to fight to persevere in a political climate that, since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92, has overwhelmingly been defined by a dearth of class and social struggle and a great retrogression of consciousness.

One of Jim’s favorite quotes was from a talk by Lenin in January 1917, when he said: “We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution.” The following month, the February Revolution in Russia opened the way for Lenin and the Bolshevik Party to intervene in a political struggle that would culminate in the October Revolution. Advising our younger comrades to not be taken in by pretenders to Marxism who denounce us for lacking immediate perspectives, Jim underlined: “Don’t pay so much attention to your immediate perspective, because you don’t know what’s going to happen in February! What is your *program*? That is the decisive question.”

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS IN DOCUMENTS

ACFI	American Committee for the Fourth International	IIDB	International Internal Discussion Bulletin
AFL	American Federation of Labor	IKD	Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands/International Communists of Germany
ANC	African National Congress	ILD	International Labor Defense
BA	Bay Area	IMG	International Marxist Group
BASL	Bay Area Spartacist League	IP	<i>Intercontinental Press</i>
BLP	British Labour Party	IS	International Secretariat
BLPI	Bolshevik Leninist Party of India	IS	International Socialists
BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland/ Federal Republic of Germany [West Germany]	ISL	Independent Socialist League
BT	[International] Bolshevik Tendency	iSt	international Spartacist tendency
Cal	University of California, Berkeley	IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
CAMD	Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants	JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/ People's Liberation Front [Sri Lanka]
CC	Central Committee	KAPD	Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands/Communist Workers Party of Germany
CCP	Chinese Communist Party	KJO	Kommunistische Jugendorganisation/Communist Youth Organization
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail/ General Confederation of Labor	KMT	Kuomintang/National People's Party
CI	Communist International	KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands/ Communist Party of Germany
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations	LF	Leninist Faction
CLA	Communist League of America	LRCI	League for a Revolutionary Communist International
CP	Communist Party	LSSP(R)	Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary)/ Lanka Equal Society Party (Revolutionary)
CPCGB	Communist Party of Great Britain	LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party/Lanka Equal Society Party
CSL	Class Struggle League	LTF	Ligue Trotskyste de France/ Trotskyist League of France
CWA	Communication Workers of America	MAC	Militant Action Caucus
CWC	Communist Working Collective of Los Angeles	MIR	Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria/Movement of the Revolutionary Left [Chile]
DC	District of Columbia, Washington, D.C.	MNR	Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario/Revolutionary Nationalist Movement [Bolivia]
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik/ German Democratic Republic [East Germany]	NDP	New Democratic Party [Canada]
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment	NI	<i>New International</i>
EU	European Union	NMU	National Maritime Union
FI	Fourth International	NPAC	National Peace Action Coalition
FLN	Front de libération nationale/ National Liberation Front [Algeria]	NZ	New Zealand
GPU	Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie/State Political Administration		
IC	International Committee of the Fourth International		
ICL	International Communist League		
IEC	International Executive Committee		
IG	Internationalist Group		

ÖBL	Österreichische Bolschewiki-Leninisten/Austrian Bolshevik-Leninists	SGJ	Spartacist Group Japan
OCI	Organisation Communiste Internationaliste/Internationalist Communist Organization	SL	Spartacist League
OCRFI	Organizing Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International	SL/ANZ	Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand
OL	October League	SL/NZ	Spartacist League/New Zealand
PB	Political Bureau	SL/U.S.	Spartacist League/United States
PC	Political Committee	SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
PCF	Parti Communiste Français/French Communist Party	SLL	Socialist Labour League [Britain]
PCI	Parti Communiste Internationaliste/Internationalist Communist Party	SMC	Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam
PFP	Peace and Freedom Party	SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
PL	Progressive Labor Party	SpAD	Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands/Spartacist Workers' Party of Germany
POR	Partido Obrero Revolucionario/Revolutionary Workers Party [Bolivia]	Spartacus-BL	Spartacus-Bolschewiki-Leninisten/Spartacus Bolshevik Leninists
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista/Workers Party of Marxist Unification [Spain]	SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands/German Social Democratic Party
PPS	Polska Partia Socjalistyczna/Polish Socialist Party	SP-SDF	Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation
RCL	Revolutionary Communist League [Britain]	SRs	Social Revolutionaries [Russia]
RCY	Revolutionary Communist Youth	SSEU	Social Service Employees Union
RH	<i>Revolutionary History</i>	SU	Soviet Union
RIT	Revolutionary Internationalist Tendency	SWP	Socialist Workers Party
RMC	Revolutionary Marxist Caucus	SYC	Spartacus Youth Club
RSL	Revolutionary Socialist League	SYL	Socialist Youth League
RSP	Revolutionary Samasamaja Party/Revolutionary Equal Society Party [Sri Lanka]	TLD	Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands/Trotskyist League of Germany
RT	Revolutionary Tendency	TUEL	Trade Union Educational League
RU	Revolutionary Union	UAW	United Auto Workers
RWP	Revolutionary Workers Party [Sri Lanka]	UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
SDP	Sozialdemokratische Partei/Social Democratic Party	UP	Unidad Popular/Popular Unity [Chile]
SDS	Students for a Democratic Society	USec	United Secretariat of the Fourth International
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands/German Socialist Union Party [East Germany]	USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands/Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany
SFIO	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière/French Section of the Workers' International	W&R	<i>Women and Revolution</i>
		WL	Workers League
		WP	Workers Party
		WV	<i>Workers Vanguard</i>
		YSA	Young Socialist Alliance
		YSL	Young Socialist League
		YSp	<i>Young Spartacus</i>
		ZAPU	Zimbabwe African Peoples Union

SHOULD THE BOLSHEVIKS HAVE SURRENDERED STATE POWER?

15 March 1954

This was published as a discussion article in Forum, May 1954, under the name James Thompson. Forum was an internal bulletin published by the Independent Socialist League.

As the main point in his review of Deutscher's recent Trotsky biography Comrade Beilas has presented a viewpoint which warrants comment and discussion in broader circles than merely the Berkeley SYL unit in which the talk was given.

Specifically, in dealing with the period in Bolshevik Russia around 1921, just after the conclusion of the Civil War, Beilas proposes that the subsequent Stalinist evolution could have been avoided if 1) the Bolsheviks had not permanently outlawed even those parties which accepted Soviet parliamentarism as did sections of the SRs and Mensheviks of the time; and if factions had not been prohibited within the Communist Party as well. And further 2) that at this time the Communists should have called for new elections to the All-Russian Soviets and turned the state power over to whatever majority party or coalition emerged from the Soviet elections. Although Beilas recognizes at least some of the implications in this retrospective proposal (he agrees with Deutscher that the CP would not have been reaffirmed in power), he states that whatever the outcome of this course it would be a lesser evil to the course that history actually took.

I want to disagree in the strongest possible way with the *second* of these conclusions of Comrade Beilas and with their implications as lessons for the future. Even assuming, as is likely, that the Bolsheviks would have been only a plurality party in the event of elections at that time, to have allowed the exercise of power to pass into the hands of any of the existing parties formally accepting the Soviet framework would have been, in those specific circumstances, a betrayal of the first magnitude of socialism and would have assured the defeat of the first world revolution of 1917-23. In advance, success of the German revolution of 1923 would have been precluded. To be sure, such a course of action would have postponed the emergence of bureaucratic collectivism to another time and perhaps another place, but would hardly have eliminated it as *the* alternative to capitalism given the failure of the working class to hold power.

Among the consequences of the Beilas idea, two are outstanding. Firstly, the surrender of governmental power by the Bolsheviks would have been the first and decisive step in a renewed counter-revolutionary attempt resulting in the dismemberment of Soviet Russia into imperialist spheres of influence and the imposition of a dictatorial regime over the populace. For as Deutscher points out, there was *no* other party capable of governing Russia through the Soviets, let alone guiding the Third International along revolutionary lines whose results would have been the only way of bringing real succor to the dispirited Russian Revolution (eg successful proletarian revolution in Germany). Look at the Menshevik and Left Social Revolutionary parties in this period—the Mensheviks were openly calling for the restoration of the capitalist order and the both of them hailed the Kronstadt uprising of March, 1921, with its alternate cries of “Soviets without Communists” and “Non-recognition of Soviet Power.” At *best*, such a situation as Beilas favors would have led to the imperialist interventionists and White Guardists being stimulated and encouraged to new efforts against a government now incapable of vigorous defense and prone to compromise.

Second, it is inescapable in the Beilas framework that, at least if one's Marxian foresight were good enough, the October Revolution should never have taken place, for to what avail was it if its only outcome were the reintroduction of capitalism and that after an incredibly bloody, destructive Civil War? The Beilas notion is in support of the Mensheviks' theoretical view that Russia was ripe for capitalism only.

There is no dispute about the first of the Beilas proposals concerning the maintenance of the party democracy and of viable Soviets containing politically (but not militarily) oppositional elements. For our hindsight can and does alert us to the necessity of stomping on the tendrils of Stalinism and combatting those practices which might give it nourishments. But this is far different from the surrender of power by the *only* party

capable of maintaining the workers' power at a moment when a disoriented, partially demolished working class together with a hostile peasantry, though fiercely adhering to the October Revolution, might through reaction to the just terminated Civil War and the still existing War Communism allow their own dominance in society to be irretrievably lost. And the party which allowed this to happen would be lost as well, not perhaps as a party, but surely as a *revolutionary* party, for

it would find subsequently that it had attracted those elements and tendencies which all along had been calling for such a course.

To be sure when the revolution was at such an ebb as to reveal a gap between the working class and its leading party, then was the revolution in dire straits, but the answer is not the social suicide by the workers which Beilas proposes.

James THOMPSON

Berkeley, Cal.

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STATEMENT OF RESIGNATION FROM THE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST LEAGUE

12 April 1957

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Young Socialist League, youth group of the ISL.*

To break finally and irrevocably with an organization which has been one's principal concern for eight years is a serious matter. This is not, however, a resignation from the political group joined, for today the ISL is merely a woefully disintegrated remnant of the Party in which membership was originally taken.

The vicious circle of political retreat, organizational decay, and personal demoralization which has trapped the Shachtman group for some years has had remarkable consequences. At one time the Workers Party was an avowed and vigorous revolutionary Marxist body, which sought to give meaning and direction to its work from the standpoint of the revolutionary doctrine associated with the names Lenin and Trotsky. The past half dozen years, particularly, have witnessed a persistent, though gradual, wavering, and beclouded transition to the aims of reformist socialism.

Theoretical Retreat

War and Stalinism

This transition has taken place under the influence of a desperate Stalinophobic reaction to the expansion of Russian power at the end of the Second World War into East and Central Europe and to the establishment of bureaucratic collectivist regimes in Asia, through Stalinist domination of anti-colonial movements. The revisionism in the ISL, therefore, first showed itself with complete clarity in taking a position toward the threatened Third World War.

In 1951 Shachtman wrote:

"Without hesitation or ambiguity, we can say that ***the only greater disaster*** that humanity could suffer ***than the war itself***, which would be disaster enough if it broke out, would be the victory of Stalinism as the outcome of the war." (Emphasis added.)

With this perspective, the ISL was forced to seek a basis for its anti-war policy in the forces existing within the framework of capitalist imperialism. Twist and turn as it would, it was, if tenuously, tied within that framework.

The first anti-war recipe elaborated that same year (1951) with this one-sided perspective reads as adopted by the ISL Convention:

"Faced by the coming war crisis, the socialist movement will more urgently than ever call upon the working-class movement to take command of the nation and, should it prove necessary as a result of the reactionary and imperialist drive of Stalinism, to take command also of the defence of the nation. Even if, at the outset, ***a labor government which takes over the nation*** and defends the interest of the working people on the basis of a genuinely democratic course in foreign and domestic policy which ***is not in fact subordinated to the interests of capitalism and imperialism should not yet be a socialist labor government***, the socialist movement stands pledged to support and defend it in word and in deed in any war in which it is threatened by a reactionary enemy, Stalinist Russia included." (Emphasis added.)

This labor government is a strange animal indeed! Never before seen in life (or in ***Marxist*** theory). It is either a lie or a delusion of its authors. To a Leninist, for a working class to smash capitalist imperialism and take command of the nation in war or peace necessarily requires the socialist revo-

lution, i.e., the establishment of proletarian state power as the outcome of a process of struggle culminating in the victory of a socialist working class with a revolutionary party at its head. "But," might have replied the authors of this anti-capitalist, perhaps not yet socialist government, "the need to replace capitalism is urgent, and where is a socialist-minded working class, not to mention a revolutionary party?" To which one must reply: in America some way off, no doubt; but, this unfortunate fact does not deny the necessity for these prerequisites, merely their immediacy. For Marxists to engage in such day dreams instead of working for the real possibility of emancipation is in effect to deter the avowed goal.

In more recent years the conclusion of the Korean war, the limited relaxation generally in the cold war, and above all the more clearly seen horror associated with nuclear warfare, have forced into the background the Shachtmanite toying with "a democratic war against Stalinism." In the meantime, the "lessons" derived from the new line have sunk deeply into the minds and conduct of the bulk of the ISL, members and leaders, and corrupted their revolutionary consciousness.

Reform or Revolution

But is not the ISL a revolutionary organization? It certainly asserts that it is. What, however, is meant by the declaration? Max Shachtman stated it exactly last summer in a government hearing on the listing as "subversive" of the ISL, formerly the Workers Party, and the former youth section, the Socialist Youth League.

To the question: "When the organizations (ISL, WP, SYL) use the word 'revolution' what do they mean by that?" Shachtman replied: "The reorganization of society on fundamentally different economic foundations..."

Moreover to the question: "Do you use the word 'revolution' to indicate the means whereby this change will be brought about?" Shachtman answered: "No. That is not involved in the term 'revolution' as we employ it."

Further on a contrasting was made with the meaning of reformism as follows: Question to Shachtman: "When you use the term reformist you mean a socialist organization which intends to achieve its ends by reformist methods. Can you be more explicit?"

Reply: "Reformists seek to make capitalism work in a way in which we think only socialism can work—they want to reform it here and there...we are for a more radical change of the basis of society."

Thus by an attempt at terminological confusion the ISL would have it both ways: accommodate itself to the enormous pressures and hos-

tilities which are operative against revolutionary socialists, yet be "revolutionary" to silence left-wing critics and keep supporters with uneasy memories in line.

Consider, however, the more honest answer which an avowed reformist socialist gives to the same question.

He asks: "Is democratic Socialism revolutionary?" And goes on: "If to be a revolutionary merely means to be opposed to the present unjust conditions and to strive for a society in which the existing evils are removed and the basic human needs satisfied, who would not be a revolutionary? But it is obviously not enough to reject the present bourgeois order and advocate the classless society to deserve the title of a revolutionary. One must also want 'the revolution,' which includes wanting the techniques necessary to carry through a revolution and the consequences which flow from that. If we mean by revolution such an historically conditioned sequence of concrete actions, can democratic socialism support it?"

To which the author answers himself: "Socialism is not and cannot be revolutionary in the Marxist, which is the precise historical sense of the term." And: "To accept this conclusion implies by no means the endorsement of a shallow reformism. Democratic Socialism does not aim at reforming bourgeois society, thereby risking to consolidate it; it aims at changing it from within."

—from "The Meaning of Democratic Socialism"
by Pierre Bonnel, published by the Young
People's Socialist League, 1956

In passing, it should be noted that the "democratic" "Socialist" author is a member of the French Socialist Party, currently leading the French government in conducting the bloody colonial war in Algeria.

What all this means is that the ISL has conducted a verbal sleight of hand so that reformist socialists are to be seen as revolutionary socialists and reformers are taken to be reformist socialists (though the confusion between the latter two is partly inherent since, despite different professed aims, the means proposed are similar or overlapping; thus some liberals want a labor party and some reformist socialists want to work for a "classless" Democratic Party).

The Nature of the State

Theoretically central to the above discussions of war position and terminological designation is the question of the class character of any given state. If the class character of a state apparatus is not irremediable then perhaps the state can be won (electorally) for the workers and by a non-revolutionary, perhaps not yet socialist, labor party. If on the contrary and in accord with Leninist thought, a state has an inherent, i.e.,

built-in, class commitment, then to effect fundamental change, recourse must be had to the creation of another and different kind of state by the revolutionary people.

On this question wherever it has arisen as in analyzing the post-war British Labour Government, the ISL has for some years practiced a special kind of “avoidism” taking refuge, when pushed, in discussions revolving around “governments” and quantitative estimations of how good they are.

Organizational Disintegration

Today and for some years past the Independent Socialist League has been a hollow shell, in distinction to an earlier period in which the vigorous internal life, the activity and sacrifice of the members, were such that any movement could be proud of them.

Some Symptoms

(1) The ISL has a discussion bulletin. The last issue to come out before the present crisis was in 1954—over two years ago. Before that there had been only a couple of bulletins a year for four years. In the last months while the fate and future of the ISL have been in the balance, one slim bulletin has appeared. Some years back the membership participated in the life of the party to such an extent that one or more thick bulletins a *month* came out.

(2) The past couple of conventions, constitutionally to be held every two years, have been held perhaps three years apart and in a perfunctory manner by any previous standards.

(3) The national committee of the ISL has been a paper committee for years. There are no plenary meetings apart from convention times; it does not even receive minutes of the deliberations of its sub-body, the Political Committee. Thus the leadership of the organization has rested exclusively in the hands of a largely uncontrolled little group of half dozen leaders in one locale.

These and similar considerations clearly reveal that the organization lacks internal life, possesses a most apathetic membership and is characterized by an absence of democracy. Not that it is bureaucratic; there is simply an internal vacuum—nothing.

The Crisis in Leadership

While successive sets of national leaders inherited from pre-war days have defected or decamped, their replacements coming up from the ranks of the League have been meager

indeed. Two whole political generations are simply not willing to assume the responsibilities and sacrifices of party work. Those who in the war years came to political maturity and then considered themselves professional revolutionists, are today mainly dispirited: family men first, socialists second. Those recruited into the youth leagues off the campus in the post-war period are, to the extent that they are still around, busy furthering themselves in their academic and professional careers and part-timing their socialism. Hence the apparatus and national office of the League are being strangled for lack of personnel and have little hope for the future.

Politics and League Life

The decline of the ISL has proceeded by interaction and mutual exacerbation at both levels—the changing role it conceives for itself as a socialist movement and its ability to build and hold a devoted cadre. For what real point is there to self-sacrifice by the membership, if the results of such work are increasingly seen as essentially irrelevant to social progress, which is supposedly to come without a necessary participation and eventual leadership of a revolutionary vanguard in the working class. Thus the demoralizing tendencies mutually reinforcing and accelerating, have resulted in Shachtman’s current proposition to liquidate what is left of the ISL and enter the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation, itself the recent product of a similar surrender on the part of the Socialist Party.

Dissolution into the SP-SDF

With the foregoing remarks on the ISL in mind not too much need be said about the Shachtman “unity” proposal. The following should be noted:

(1) It is no unity proposal as hitherto known by that name. There is no political basis for unity, merely that the SP-SDF will accept the ex-ISL people into their ranks.

(2) It involves a political capitulation to the pro-capitalist and imperialist policies of the SP-SDF as Shachtman makes clear by the insistence that the ex-ISL members in the SP-SDF will keep their particular ideas in their pockets for a long time and not oppose the leadership of Norman Thomas & Co.

(3) It is a liquidationist proposal which virtually guarantees the disappearance of the Shachtman tendency in short order. If entrance into the SP-SDF is obtained, the bulk of the ISL members will have found simply a rest home; those who may have gone along with the illusions that their leadership was executing some kind of “Lenin-

ist” tactic will drop out or go over consciously to reformism. Should entry not be made in the fairly near future, the situation will be even more disastrous. Already the ISL membership is living with “bags packed.” The entry idea has unleashed all the centrifugal forces in the ISL and at a point when the League is on the border line of collapse anyhow.

(4) It is a move essentially independent of the regroupment taking place among the former supporters and members of the shattered Communist Party. This is shown by the testimony of PC member Hal Draper that the entry question was first raised in the Political Committee over a year ago, before the Khrushchev revelations; and it was made public before the Eastern European revolutions wreaked their toll on the American CP.

(5) It is being argued in terms and leads to activity by the ISL which does real disservice generally to the cause of a militant class-struggle socialist reunification. The SP-SDF is a bitterly sectarian grouping which conceives of its “democratic” socialism as violently hostile to all varieties of Leninism, its heirs and assigns, all variants and deviations from same, real and alleged. But the preponderance of radicals in America come under one or the other of the SP-SDF’s proscribed listings. Few will follow the lead of the ISL in forsaking the advocacy of their beliefs in order to coexist in a little sect under the leadership of social democrats crusted with age.

Moreover the ISL must exhibit a fundamental hostility to every regroupment enterprise and

proposal not seemingly leading to membership in the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation.

Immediate Reason for Leaving the ISL

The precipitating reason for this resignation is that the ISL is proposing not only to liquidate itself, but to destroy as well the more viable, militant Young Socialist League.

The ISL exerts a great influence in the YSL. To counteract this demoralizing control it is necessary to attack the ISL. This, however, is incompatible with continued membership. These obligations have led to a muting of criticism of the ISL. To continue this situation would be an abdication of responsibility in the Young Socialist League.

Some of the ISL’s supporters recently leveled an untruthful and personal attack in the pages of the *Young Socialist Review* against the present writer so as to discredit his views and the achievements of the present Bay Area Young Socialist Clubs, YSL, with which he is associated. In order to make a satisfactory reply it was impossible not to take up the question of the role and character of the ISL. Such action necessarily brings to an end the writer’s membership in the Independent Socialist League.

James Robertson

San Francisco Bay Area Branch, ISL

April 12, 1957

Stanley Larssen and David Carleton, being in substantial agreement with the above statement, also tender their resignations from the ISL at this time.

Received from Berkeley on April 17, 1957



The Tibetan Brigade

CROCODILE TEARS STAIN THE MONKSCLOTH

April 1959

This is Robertson’s first statement of Trotskyist Soviet defensism. It was issued by the Eugene V. Debs Club of Berkeley and East Bay Young Socialist Alliance, youth group of the Socialist Workers Party, distributed at the University of California at Berkeley, and printed in Young Socialist, Vol. 2, No. 9, June 1959. It was reprinted in Spartacist No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80, under the title “Tibet: Mao’s Afghanistan.”

A hue and cry has gone up throughout the “free” world and especially in the United States over the latest alleged atrocity of the Chinese (Communist) government. This “atrocity” is the attempt, assured of final success, to reestablish Chinese dominance in the face of revolt planned and led by the Tibetan priestly and landowning classes.

The situation is clear enough in broad outline. To their discredit, the Chinese government has attempted to conciliate with the Tibetan feudal classes for the past eight years. At the same time, as the product of a revolutionary upheaval, the Chinese regime brings with it certain reforms. These reforms, such as rudimentary education, threatened the age-old system of oppression of

the peasants by the native rulers. These latter worthies, headed by their “god-king,” felt undermined, and while they still had at least a measure of popular support staged a coup which ran into Chinese military resistance.

As an aside to those in the West who profess to admire the quaint devotion of the more backward in Asia to their religious leaders, let it be noted that these condescending attitudes went out with the “humble, devout” French serf of before 1789 and the “carefree, contented” Negro slaves in America. Oppression and obscurantism that lead to blighted and shortened lives are vicious. The path of human betterment is through increasing men’s understanding and control of their universe, not by use of rosaries and prayer wheels.

Several defenses have been put forward in favor of the Tibetan feudalists. (1) “Freedom and democracy”!! When in the last two thousand years have the Tibetan people voted or been asked about anything? The very revolt was in part against the eventual possibility of that sort of thing.

(2) “Another Hungary”. In Hungary the revolution fought to go forward, seeking to smash the Stalinist bureaucracy (the brothers of Mao and company) in favor of rule from below and for socialism, and *against* the old order of great landed estates, privately owned factories, clericalism, and political rule by Admiral Horthy’s fascist gang.

(3) “Self-determination” might have been a serious basis for deciding in favor of Tibetan independence could someone figure out how the Tibetan people are to express their choice in a nation where the “god-king” gives all the answers as well as asks all the questions. But in reality this aspect is without meaning.

The real choice for Tibet if Chinese control were thrown off is not independent nationhood but abject dependence on American arms, money and advisors. One has but to look at the other reactionary and feudal regimes in Asia to see both the reality and mean-

ing of American imperialist domination: the military dictatorships in Pakistan and Thailand, the corrupt “democracies” of Viet Nam and the Philippines, the personal tyrannies in South Korea and Formosa. Not a pretty picture.

The victory of the Chinese Communist government is clearly the progressive choice in the present contest. However, to recognize this is not to whitewash that regime. But even in its distorted way it is part of great and positive changes on the Asian mainland, changes that eventually will be the Maoists’ own undoing. Through these very achievements the regime will be overthrown by the mass of people anxious to rule their own destinies without the intervention of a privileged elite. That is the future; the Tibetan monk-rulers are the past.

But what about the hue and cry in America? How easily fine words are twisted to meet the needs of American “world leadership”! How morally corrupt our public figures are, men whose political complexion runs the entire respectable spectrum. Nationally a pro-Tibetan committee has been set up ranging in composition from the Formosa lobby mouthpiece, Henry Luce of Life-Time-Fortune, to Norman Thomas, accurately described as “the State Department socialist.” At California, the self-styled “Tibetan Brigade” has sprung up and in its publicity seeking fashion faithfully echoes the rhetoric of their elders.

All this noise in a country that backs dictators the world over and as in Guatemala forcibly puts puppets into power with plots staged by the Counter Intelligence Agency. And at a time when, to take a most outstanding example, in Algeria, a whole people have been waging a desperate, bloody war for years against fascist colonials and an imperialist army supplied with American arms.

Here is hypocrisy of world-historic proportions. We socialists say: no thank you!



LETTER ON CEYLON

8 August 1960

This letter was sent to the Socialist Workers Party Political Committee after the Lanka Sama Samaja Party entered into a popular-front electoral bloc with the bourgeois nationalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party. It appeared in Spartacist No. 62, Spring 2011, under the title "No to Public Silence on LSSP Betrayal."

New York

To the Political Committee:

Dear Comrades,

I am addressing you on the matter of our party's public silence concerning the recent and continuing betrayal of the Ceylonese working class and of the world Trotskyist movement by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. I refer, of course, to that party's entry into a "Popular Front" electoral pact with the Stalinist party and with the left bourgeois nationalist party represented by the widow Bandaranaike.

In raising this matter privately with several members of your body I was told that letters have been sent the Ceylonese and that your view is that for the present a greater advantage is to be gained by revolutionary Marxists in the LSSP through our remaining publicly silent. I must disagree and urge you to reconsider.

When I read in the NY Times of the electoral pact and then of the election and finally of the continued support by the LSSP to the new capitalist government, my concern over this classically social-democratic capitulation was mitigated by two thoughts: 1) first that the construction of a

genuine Trotskyist party for the island could perhaps emerge out of the shambles, and 2) that now the blocks would really be put to Pablo, not over an obscure vote by his English followers in a provincial British Labour Party meeting, but over a clear act of historic proportions by a major party, an act about which the central world organs of the FI would have to take a stand and on the grounds *for* or *against* elementary revolutionary principle.

But the silence in the Militant weakens both these hopes. Within Ceylon our silence, while it may temporarily continue our "respectability" in the mouths of the leaders, also places a terrible weapon in their hands against any militants they may have to contend with—"Even the Americans are only privately disturbed and are treating this as a matter between comrades." And as for Pablo's stature before the world movement, every day of delay allows him to say in effect: "You're another maneuverer subordinating principle to tactics."

Comrades, that you condemn the Ceylonese ex-Trotskyists, I have no doubt; but your failure to raise this publicly and with great seriousness does the movement internationally a disservice.

With comradely greetings,
James Robertson

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND MARXIST THEORY

17 August 1960

This Revolutionary Tendency document was submitted to the January 1961 plenum of the SWP and printed in SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 22, No. 1, February 1961. It was reprinted in Spartacist Marxist Bulletin No. 8, 1966: "Cuba and Marxist Theory—Selected Documents on the Cuban Question."

The Cuban Revolution, as it has developed in the last 19 months, poses some uncomfortable theoretical problems for Marxists. Of course these are problems that should fill us with delight, for they stem from the fact that the Cuban Revolution has gone farther, faster and deeper than any of us

had anticipated; has, in fact, become a profound social revolution. Nevertheless, the paradoxes and problems remain and can even pose certain dangers for us.

What is so shocking about Cuba is this: that a revolutionary movement stemming from the

urban middle classes and winning the support of the peasantry, which gained power when the U.S. finally decided to dump its former puppet, Batista, proceeded once in power to follow an authentically revolutionary course. It broke up the old army and police forces and armed the workers and poor peasants, expropriated the major economic holdings of U.S. capital, broke with the representative political leaders of the Cuban liberal bourgeoisie. And all this without the *existence* (not to speak of the intervention) of a revolutionary socialist party and without any autonomous action on the part of the working class!

The inconsistency of all this with certain of our expectations deriving from the Theory of Permanent Revolution is only too obvious. If we rightly believe that every revolution in our time must go beyond “bourgeois-democratic” bounds in order to achieve real success, and can find full vindication for this aspect of the theory in the Cuban Revolution, we *also* have believed that this process can take place only under the leadership of the working class and with the guidance of a Marxist party!

Some comrades have sought to conjure away this difficulty by slapping a ready-made label onto the Cuban Revolution. Cuba, we are told, has become a “workers’ state” or, alternatively, is ruled by a “workers’ and farmers’ government.” Alas, to substitute a system of ready-made categories for Marxist analysis, far from solving any theoretical problems, merely *generalizes* them, gives them an urgency and importance far beyond their present status. Cuba is to be called a “workers’ state”? Then isn’t it necessary to answer the *general* problem of the conditions under which we can expect *proletarian revolutions* to be victorious under middle class leadership and without even the participation of the working class or a working class party? The Castro regime is a “workers’ and farmers’ government”? And what, then, is the nature of the Cuban *state*? If anything, the social composition of the state apparatus, of the armed forces and militia, is more proletarian than that of the government—and thus we are back with our previous problem. Even dodging that undodgeable question, we are still confronted with a very queer animal—a “workers’ and farmers’ government” in which there are no workers or farmers and no representatives of independent workers’ or farmers’ parties! Surely neither the Fourth Congress of the CI nor the Transitional Program envisaged such a phenomenon.

We make no contribution to Marxist theory or to an understanding of the Cuban Revolution if we start from the idea that before we can support

a revolution we must baptize it “proletarian” or if we are looking for non-working class shortcuts to socialist revolution. Above all must we abjure the tendency to think in abstract categories, to seek before all else for a tidy ideological pigeonhole into which to cram an unruly reality. A scientific theory is perpetually on trial before the facts and every failure to correctly predict and explain the facts points to the possibility of an inadequacy in the theory. Concretely, if in certain specific countries at the present specific historical conjuncture our theoretical expectations as to the need for working class leadership in order to achieve the main goals of the bourgeois-democratic revolution are contradicted by reality we must recognize that, although this does not require a general theoretical revision, it most certainly does require a reexamination and modernization of these specific aspects of the theory.

In this brief paper we do not intend to carry out such a reexamination, nor have we any intention of here setting forth a developed theoretical analysis of the Cuban Revolution; rather, we will try to lay out a theoretical framework within which such an analysis can eventually be developed.

Our starting point must be the immediate historic task confronting the Cuban Revolution: overcoming the backwardness and impoverishment of the masses imposed by centuries of colonialism and most particularly by the past 50 years of sugar monoculture inspired by and benefitting only the U.S. capitalists. To do this required one absolute precondition—a radical land reform. But since the great sugar estates and sugar mills were largely U.S. owned *no* step could be taken without an immediate clash with U.S. imperialism, and no thoroughgoing reform could be carried out without an end to U.S. economic domination of the island.

Now these aims—modernization, land reform, national independence—most assuredly are not *socialist* tasks. They merely lay the foundation upon which the Cuba of the future will be built. But will that Cuba be capitalist or socialist? Posing this question indicates one essential aspect of the Cuba problem—that *the answer will not be found in Cuba*. An independent, isolated, socialist Cuba standing against the enormous power of the U.S. is an obvious absurdity. But no less absurd is the idea of an independent development of Cuban capitalism. It is therefore false to argue that Cuba must be *either* a “capitalist state” *or* a “workers’ state”; either a “capitalist government” or a “workers’ and farmers’ government.” We are dealing with an extremely dynamic and contradictory process whose fate is bound up with that of the entire Latin American revolution.

The U.S. State Department, for so long so brutally blind in its Latin American policy, has awakened abruptly to this fact. The sharp switch in 1959 from a pro-Castro to a violently anti-Castro line was scarcely motivated by considerations restricted to Cuba; the essential was that by expropriating U.S. property and above all by reorienting its trade from the U.S. to the Soviet bloc, Cuba had taken a decisive lead in the Latin American revolution and was leading it in an exceedingly dangerous direction.

The aim of U.S. policy has finally become perfectly clear: to prop up, at whatever cost, the more-or-less “democratic” bourgeois regimes while gradually liquidating the old-style dictatorships; and at the same time to intensify to the breaking point the economic pressures on Cuba. After a certain time the Castro regime, out of pure economic necessity, would be forced to come to terms with the State Department. The alternative of complete economic dependence on the Soviet bloc is, in fact, no alternative; as the New York Times put it in a recent editorial. “Castro is in danger of becoming a Soviet pawn and he should remember that the fate of pawns is usually to be sacrificed.” Who can doubt that Cuba would be on the bargaining table at any future Summit?

This is not an unreasonable strategy; far from it. It can be upset by only one thing—a dramatic spread of revolutionary unrest which would break through the solidarity of the Latin American bourgeoisie with U.S. imperialism and open a real perspective for Cuba. Although “Castro-type” revolutions remain a possibility in the most backward countries, such as Guatemala and Paraguay, the decisive countries of Latin America are those which have already experienced the initial growth of capitalism and in which there exists an already sizable industrial working class: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, Mexico. In these countries a “classless” revolution is impossible—the task of leadership is already on the shoulders of the proletariat.

Thus we see the two possibilities open to the Cuban Revolution—to return to subordinate status in a U.S.-dominated capitalist Western Hemisphere, or to be taken up and carried forward by a Latin American socialist revolution.

In this context is there anything concrete to be said about the nature of the Cuban government and state? It is clearly too early to answer in terms of finished categories, *for the nature of the Cuban Revolution itself is not yet decided by history*. Given the enormous prestige of Fidel Castro and the

influence within the government of the Cuban Stalinists a deal between Castro and Kennedy/Nixon, with the tacit blessing of Khrushchev, would require no political counter-revolution within Cuba. Similarly, if successful proletarian revolutions were to break out in the main countries of Latin America no additional revolution would be required to bring Cuba into a socialist federation of the Americas.

Our emphasis must therefore be on the *transitional* and *open* character of the Cuban Revolution. The Cuban state is a *developing* state, scarcely more than a year old: its class character *will be determined* by the development of the revolution. The Cuban government is a democratic middle-class regime basing itself on, and under continual pressure from, the workers and peasants. Is this self-evident description any less useful than the abstract, arbitrary and false label “workers’ and farmers’ government”?

It is precisely because the Castro government is so clearly not a workers’ government that it is so important not to hastily label the state a “workers’ state.” If a workers party were in power it would little matter how quickly nationalization of industry proceeds. In the present fluid situation the middle class leadership of the Revolution presents the greatest internal danger to the advance of the Revolution. This makes it mandatory that we advocate the creation of a genuine revolutionary working class party in Cuba today.

If we say that the final decision as to the Cuban Revolution will be made on a Latin American scale, this is not to counsel passivity upon Cuban Marxists. The Cuban Revolution has still a lot of room for progress toward the establishment of an authentic workers’ democracy, with its own institutional forms of workers’ and peasants’ power and with a functioning system of workers’ control of production on all levels. Tendencies toward authoritarianism, paternalism, bureaucratization and thus eventual bourgeoisification are obviously present and strong; the status of the Stalinists in the government and unions, the suggestion of the need to restrict the right to strike, are ominous signs. As American Marxists, our obligation, as the most outspoken and militant defenders of the Cuban Revolution against our own ruling class, is at all times to discuss it clearly and critically, and without any fetishism.

Shane Mage
Tim Wohlforth
James Robertson

A NOTE ON THE CURRENT DISCUSSION— LABELS AND PURPOSES

11 June 1961

This appeared in SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 22, No. 16, June 1961.

A discussion proceeds at several levels. In a review of the debate in the Fourth International and Socialist Workers Party on Yugoslavia and the East European Buffer Zone generally and also on China, principally over the years 1949 through 1952, preliminary to the internal explosion of the FI in 1953, the power of hindsight after ten years provides a brilliant confirmation of the existence of several layers to a discussion, their mutual interactions and outcome.

Faced with the new and unexpected development of Stalinist parties winning civil wars, creating new states and struggling against domestic capitalism and world imperialism, all of the participants scrounged around to come up with a most extensive assortment of labels and an incredible number of pages of plausible supporting arguments. The governmental *regimes* were variously bourgeois, Bonapartist, transitional, workers and peasants, and workers. The *states* were state capitalist, degenerated bourgeois, transitional, peasants, deformed workers, and undeforming workers in their class character. The Stalinist *parties* in power during the transformations were petty-bourgeois, peasant, workers and peasants, and working-class. To top things off leading proponents of these views were hopping from one position to another. Among the starting line-up, on one side Cochran, Hansen and Pablo were eager to assign a proletarian quality to the developments, while Wright, Bleibtreu, Germain and Peng were resisters.

Most of the literary exchanges and resolutions were at an objective level, that is, external in several senses to the Trotskyist movement. There was a clash of emphases and evaluations on the nature of the disputed reality and from these analyses, conclusions were drawn in such a way as to preserve maximum *formal* consistency with established Trotskyist doctrine. There were both correct and mistaken evaluations. Eventually the

participants zig-zagged their way to the conclusion (*now* incontestable from within the basic programmatic framework of Trotskyism) that the resulting states were and are “deformed workers states” meaning that in their essence they are identical with the Russian degenerated workers state. The rights and wrongs at this level were *related to*, but *not identical with* the more covert and also evolving question—what did the crystallizing tendencies *want*, what were they seeking to achieve?

The verdict on this too is in, through the Leninist criteria of measuring words with deeds. Some comrades sought to strengthen and renew the political armament of the revolutionary vanguard of the working class, the Trotskyist movement, others sought political generalizations to facilitate accommodation and subordination to other movements and forces.

And over the Cuban question the same underlying issue is posed—what do you *want*, comrades? Take the use of the transitional demand “the workers and peasants government.” It is transitional right enough, that is, it is a bridge, but bridges go *two* ways. *Either* the workers and peasants government is the central demand of the Trotskyists in urging the workers and peasants to take power into their own hands through their mass organizations—i.e., the struggle for soviet power (this is the use the Cuban Trotskyists put it to); *or* it is a label to apply from afar to the existing government and thus serve, not for the first time, as an orthodox sounding formula to side-step the consummation of proletarian revolution and to justify revolution “from above” by leaders “one of whose principal difficulties is imbuing the working people with a sense of revolutionary social responsibility.”

In short, is the Cuban revolution to pass forward over that bridge to soviet power or is an American SWP majority to go backwards?



The Sino Soviet Dispute

NEW STAGE IN THE MORTAL CRISIS OF STALINISM

28 May 1963

This document was submitted for the Revolutionary Tendency by Shane Mage, James Robertson and Geoffrey White, and was printed in SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 24, No. 21, June 1963. It was reprinted (slightly abridged) under the title "Bureaucracy and Revolution in Moscow and Peking" in Spartacist No. 3, January-February 1965.

(1) The open split between the ruling groups in the Peoples' Republic of China and the Soviet Union is a fact of world-historical significance. On the surface the split appears to be a dispute over ideological questions among self-proclaimed 'Marxist-Leninists'. In its underlying reality, however, the split has a vastly different meaning. It signifies the eruption of irreconcilable material antagonisms between national Stalinist bureaucracies. The context of this struggle is the mortal crisis of the Stalinist system squeezed between the pressures of unyielding world imperialism and of rising working classes internally.

(2) The crisis of Stalinism is caused by the growing power of the new generation of industrial and intellectual workers in every country of the Soviet bloc. This generation, thanks to its own efforts and to its birthright—the structural and ideological heritage of the October revolution—has been able to achieve magnificent economic successes despite obstruction, incompetence, and misleadership of the Stalinist rulers. The new working class of the Soviet bloc has embarked on a struggle to cast off Stalinist repression and obscurantism and to establish proletarian democracy.

(3) The suppressed Hungarian and Polish revolutions showed that proletarian democracy can be won only through the smashing of the Stalinist bureaucratic and police apparatus by revolutionary mass action. These struggles, and their repression by the monolithically united counter-revolution, definitively verified Trotsky's program of *political revolution*. Political revolution—successful repetition of the Budapest commune in Moscow and Peking—will be the climax of the movement of the Soviet bloc proletariat.

(4) Marxist politics and Marxist theory constitute a unified whole. Both are entirely based on the specific class interests of the proletariat, the only really revolutionary class of modern society. The developing political revolution in the Soviet bloc is comprehensible only in terms of this dialectical inter-relationship of theory and practice: the development of a revolutionary-Marxist vanguard party is indispensable to the victorious struggle of the workers, and no party can under-

stand the political development of the Soviet bloc, manifested currently in the Peking-Moscow split, unless it consciously and directly analyzes from the point of view of the Soviet-bloc proletariat, i.e., *on the basis of the political revolution*.

(5) Only confused centrists could try to explain the Sino-Soviet dispute in terms of the indigestible 'ideological' apologia issued by the two sides and limit their conclusions to a judgment as to which of these positions is more or less 'correct', is righter or leftier. The Marxist, proletarian, view *starts* with the recognition that the political groups symbolized by *both* Khrushchev and Mao Tse-Tung are mortal and irreconcilable enemies of proletarian democracy, of socialism, and of the working class. Only on *this* basis can the real issues in their conflict be grasped.

(6) The opposition of the Peking and Moscow ruling groups is grounded in their identity. The fundamental fact is that both constitute privileged bureaucracies able to maintain their caste power only through a system of totalitarian repression. Their specific caste interests, as the usurpers of power and privilege within a social structure historically deriving from the proletarian revolution, define them ultimately as anti-proletarian and pro-capitalist despite the fact that they are obliged *in extremis* to defend the organism upon which they are parasites against imperialist military onslaughts.

(7) As a privileged caste formed and organized on a national basis, the Bonapartist bureaucracy of every deformed workers state always and inevitably seeks to maximize its own economic and political power. This takes place necessarily at the expense of the workers and peasants, and, if possible, at the expense of the imperialist sphere—but at the same time no Stalinist bureaucracy has shown hesitancy to defend or increase its own power at the expense of another deformed workers state and of *its* ruling caste. The 'ideological' struggle between Peking and Moscow reflects the real incompatibility of the material interests of two counter-revolutionary national bureaucratic castes.

(8) The real issues in the Peking-Moscow clash are posed in terms of conflicting power-political

and economic needs. These needs reflect the different origins of the two wings of the bureaucracy, and above all they reflect the different relationship of forces between each, imperialism, and the working class. The differential impact of American imperialism upon the Chinese and Russian states raises their antagonisms to the level of sharp struggles. The Maoist leadership must contend with an American policy quite unreconciled to the Peking regime and actively employing all available means to destroy it. The American imperialists even maintain a competing paper regime in the form of the old tyrant, Chiang Kai-Shek, on Formosa. The Russians are more free from an immediate restorationist threat from imperialism and are driven by other forces to seek a detente with the American government. But what Khrushchev is prepared to offer in the Kremlin's side of a coexistence deal is to go even further in acting as imperialism's indirect policeman not only among workers in the advanced countries, but over the colonial revolutions—of which the Chinese is one! Thus the particular coloring to the Sino-Soviet ideological exchanges is arrived at.

(9) Unlike the Soviet bureaucracy, which developed in and through the degeneration of an authentic proletarian revolution, the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy has its origins in a struggle whose nature was petty bourgeois and whose direct historical mission was basically bourgeois. Its heroic epoch, the Chinese civil war, was a combination of an elemental peasant struggle for the land and a nationalist struggle against foreign domination and for national unification. The leadership forged in this vast revolutionary upheaval took shape as a military elite, selected on the basis of the qualities of combativity, devotion, and discipline. Basically alien to the urban proletariat, and cut off from its own petty-bourgeois roots by the very fact of its militarization, this bureaucratic caste was welded together through the structure and leadership of the Communist Party and the ideology of Stalinism.

(10) China's change into a deformed workers state was initiated in a mass peasant-based revolutionary civil war which was followed by a military-bureaucratic process of structural transformation into a form of society modeled upon the Stalinized Soviet Union, economically and politically cut off from the capitalist world, and economically and politically integrated into the Soviet bloc. The bureaucratic caste completed this transformation in a forced response to the overwhelming objective requirements of military defense in the Korean War and the need for rapid economic recovery and growth. Though this was done in a pragmatic

fashion, it was perfectly consistent with Mao's fundamental conception of the 'Bloc of Four Classes', whose true meaning is the claim of the Communist Party leadership to state power as a supra-class 'Peoples' Democratic Dictatorship'.

(11) The success of Mao Tse-Tung and his followers in channeling and distorting into the form of a national-bureaucratic straitjacket the socialist drives of the Chinese revolution testifies only to the thoroughly and consistently counterrevolutionary nature of the Maoist bureaucracy. The profoundly nationalist outlook of the Chinese Stalinist leaders is reflected in the nationalism of their foreign policy.

(12) The nationalist nature of Chinese foreign policy is demonstrated most dramatically by the fact that Peking's border claims against New Delhi are supported by the Chiang Kai-Shek regime occupying Formosa. The obligation of Marxists to give *unconditional* defense to the deformed Chinese workers state in order to prevent its military defeat by a capitalist power cannot be permitted to obscure the fact that the extremely sparse population of these wastelands is neither Chinese nor Indian. The claims of *both* China and India rest on alien conquest. Humiliation of Nehru's military pretensions in the border conflict is obviously a triumph for Chinese foreign policy, and has gained Peking much closer friendship with the military dictators of Pakistan and Burma. It is an equally obvious blow to Soviet foreign policy, which had made enormous and partially successful efforts to secure a relationship of special closeness with the Nehru regime. It is irrelevant to the Chinese and Russian Stalinists, but of absolute importance to Marxists, that the Chinese policy of posing the question in national-chauvinist rather than class-revolutionary terms has done serious damage to the chances of the proletarian revolution in India and elsewhere in Asia.

(13) The Chinese Stalinist policy of Chinese hegemony over non-Han nationalities is as much a violation of the right of peoples to self-determination and contradiction of the basic interests of the international proletarian revolution as is the Great Russian chauvinism of the Kremlin. This is shown most clearly in the cases of Tibet (where Chinese policy resulted in an uprising under reactionary leadership) and of Formosa. Though the Peking bureaucrats use the most violent language to denounce imperialist treaties at the expense of China, they completely endorse the imperialist *Cairo* agreement (among Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang) which gave Formosa to China. Using this imperialist treaty as a pretext, the Chinese Stalinists refuse to recognize the right of the For-

mosan workers and peasants to self-determination and reiterate their intention to seize Formosa by force of arms. The practical effects of this policy are to give political aid to Chiang in his oppression of the Formosan people and to help U.S. imperialism in its policy of isolation and containment of the Chinese revolution.

(14) The extreme antagonism between Peking and Washington is rooted in the appetites of U.S. imperialism which still resents its 'loss' of China, seeks by all means to hamper and frustrate Chinese development, and openly professes its desire to see the present Chinese government overthrown by counterrevolutionary forces. This continual pressure has led the Chinese Stalinists to formulate a bitterly anti-U.S. foreign policy, at profound variance to the Kremlin's basic line of a bi-lateral deal between the super-powers. The underlying nationalism of the Peking line, however, continually acts to upset all efforts to break through the *cordon sanitaire* imposed by Washington.

(15) The economic policy of the Chinese Stalinists has undergone the most staggering shifts. Until 1957 the CCP's general line attempted to balance rapid industrialization with gradual agricultural collectivization and slight improvements in living standards—a policy which permitted impressive, even spectacular, economic progress. This course culminated in the brief 'Hundred Flowers' period when the momentary thaw allowed the general proletarian and intellectual revulsion against the Maoist-Stalinist bureaucracy to emerge into the open. The working-class opposition was immediately and brutally suppressed in the 'Anti-Rightist' campaign. The warning of inevitable political revolution, however, led the bureaucracy to make a radical new departure in economic policy: the demands for workers' democracy were to be buried through transformation of the entire nation into a tightly disciplined economic unit under the slogan of an immediate transition to full communism through the medium of the 'rural peoples' communes'.

(16) The 'great leap forward', viewed objectively, was an attempt to achieve rapid economic development through methods of total military mobilization. It was an act of criminal bureaucratic adventurism, and failed ignobly. The forced communization of the peasantry, the elimination of all restraints on the duration and intensity of labor, and the uprooting of technical specialists led to an economic collapse unprecedented in the history of the Soviet bloc. The decline in industrial and agricultural production, in industrial employment, and in living standards was too drastic to be concealed, despite the fact

that the total breakdown in economic planning involved the non-existence of meaningful statistics (and, after 1959, of any statistics at all).

(17) The Chinese economic collapse increased the tension between Peking and Moscow to the breaking point. China was not only unable to fulfill commitments under its trade treaty with the Soviet Union, but simultaneously demanded that the U.S.S.R. give it increased aid. To top it off, the Chinese Stalinists pressed Khrushchev to increase his military spending and to help them expend Chinese resources in the development of a Chinese atomic bomb. Khrushchev's reaction was the brutal withdrawal of Soviet technicians at the end of 1960, and the rapid reduction of Sino-Soviet trade to a level reflecting China's vastly reduced export capability.

(18) The Chinese Stalinists claim that the abandonment of the 'leap forward' and the return of private agriculture on a significant scale are merely temporary retreats within an unchanging policy. The basic policy of the Chinese Stalinists is the construction of 'communism in a single country' on a pauper technical basis using the unaided labor of hundreds of millions of peasants. The continued rejection of birth control shows how adamantly the Maoists refuse to depart even slightly from this reactionary conception, despite the efforts now being made, for the first time since 1957, to increase trade with the capitalist powers.

(19) The authoritarian attitude of the Chinese Stalinists toward the workers, peasants, and intellectuals has always been coupled with the preoccupation of maintaining close ties with the masses, and of winning genuine support for government policies, if possible. They have sought to gain mass support through a pretense of 'Leninism' as well as through their familiar 'thought-reform' tactics. Similarly, in the period of the first Soviet Five Year Plan, Stalin sought to appeal to the idealism of the workers and the youth on the basis of a seemingly 'revolutionary' line in foreign as well as domestic policy: forced collectivization and the 'Third Period' were inseparable aspects of a single ultra-leftist line. In China, though real enthusiasm among certain sections of the population at the start of the 'leap forward' is well attested, this had disappeared by 1962. Nevertheless the profession of a 'leftist' foreign policy remains necessary for the Mao regime in order to hold together its cadres, to distract international attention from its catastrophic economic blunders, and, in addition, to face the intransigent hostility of imperialism.

(20) The Chinese Stalinists, in their dogmatic reiteration of the Stalin-Zhdanov line on everything from Art to Yugoslavia, and in their con-

tinued practice of the Stalin cult, express clearly their real nature. Only people whose own political line has become hopelessly muddled can discover any inconsistency between the Chinese position on 'destalinization' and their criticisms of Khrushchev's foreign policy. The Chinese Stalinists' ideological line is a consistent reflection of their international isolation, the insuperable economic difficulties confronting them, and their inability to make any real concessions to the demands of the Chinese people for greater freedom except at a deadly risk of political revolution. In contrast, the Soviet bureaucracy is in an almost diametrically opposite situation.

(21) The very growth and successes of the Soviet economy have exploded Stalin's autarchic fantasy of the 'two world markets' (the final formulation of 'Socialism in One Country' until Mao resurrected it with his communes) and have forced the Soviet Union to adopt a policy aiming at integrated economic planning within the Soviet bloc and steadily increasing interdependence with the capitalist states. The growth of the Soviet proletariat in size, skill, and cultural level has confronted the Soviet bureaucracy with a gigantic social force that can be temporarily averted from political revolution only at the price of real concessions, of which the liquidation of the Stalin cult was the most profound. The terrible economic drain involved in preparations for modern war, and the general knowledge outside China of the real nature of nuclear war, give the Soviet bureaucracy powerful incentives to promise the people of the Soviet bloc an effective reduction in international tensions.

(22) The basic line of the Soviet bureaucracy is to preserve its power and privileges through a combination of repression with peripheral political concessions to and steady improvement in the living standards of the Soviet people. It therefore feels a profound need for an overall accord with U.S. imperialism which would permit recovery of economic resources now wasted on military purposes and would allow the Soviet Union much freer access to Western markets. Of course the price for this hoped-for accord between the U.S. and the Russian bureaucracy is to be at the expense of others.

(23) The Soviet Union is becoming a steadily more important factor in the world economy and in international politics, as is shown in varying ways by the increasing Soviet oil exports to the West, the spectacular rapprochement between the Kremlin and Vatican, and the decisive military and economic support provided for the pro-Soviet regime in Cuba. This process of steady

improvement in the bargaining position of the Soviet bureaucracy *vis-a-vis* U.S. imperialism has resulted in a general Soviet-U.S. entente on *decisive* political questions (against political revolution in the Soviet bloc, for neo-colonialism under the aegis of the U.N. in the backward countries) dating at least from the Suez and Hungarian affairs.

(24) U.S.-Soviet cooperation, nevertheless, has been limited drastically by the refusal of the U.S. government to make any concessions on what is, to the Soviet bureaucracy, the quintessential matter: disarmament. The Soviet Stalinists have sought to persuade U.S. capitalists that disarmament is in their immediate economic interest. The Khrushchev position is utopian, not because the economic argument is fallacious, but because it conflicts with other, more fundamental, interests of U.S. imperialism. Imperialist power in the world can ultimately not be preserved without armed force. The U.S., therefore, cannot and will not disarm. The Soviet economy, freed from the burden of armaments, would develop so rapidly that the U.S. would soon find itself in an inferior political and economic situation, and this would be fatal for capitalism.

(25) In the context of its coexistence strategy the Kremlin is willing to give material aid to petty-bourgeois-led colonial revolutionary movements, as in Algeria, while attempting to prevent their development into proletarian revolutions. For example, while maintaining 'correct' diplomatic relations with the French government, the Kremlin, via the Czech government, gave great quantities of arms to the FLN to fight the French, and simultaneously, via the French CP, aided the FLN in its campaign to exterminate opponents within the movement. (After this, the Soviet protests against the outlawing of the Algerian CP sound singularly hollow.) Where such revolutions cannot be confined within capitalist limits, as in Cuba, Soviet aid is accompanied by pressures toward internal dictatorship and suppression of anti-Stalinist currents and of subordination to the general line of the Kremlin. Thus, even when seemingly aiding revolutions, the Khrushchev line is directly anti-working-class and counter-revolutionary.

(26) The counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism in all its forms without exception cannot be permitted to obscure the fundamental thesis of the Trotskyist movement that the Stalinist bureaucracy is defined by its role as a parasite upon the economic structures of the kind established initially by the October Revolution. The regimes in the Soviet bloc, now including Cuba, are deformed *workers states*: i.e., they are based on property forms estab-

lished, directly or however indirectly, by the October Revolution, property forms which are the basis for the development of a socialist society. However, the working class in these countries does not wield political power, does not control production, and does not decide the international policy of these states. Thus we see the Soviet-bloc countries as workers states which have become degenerated or been born deformed. Their present form can only be temporary, and it is wrong to interpret these temporary distorted forms as a new or inevitable stage in the development of society. We stand for the defense of these states as of every conquest of the working class. The Fourth International's call for a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucracy in the workers states constitutes the most effective defense of these states and is part of the strategy of world revolution against imperialism.

(27) The Trotskyists totally reject a sectarian, abstentionist, 'plague on both your houses' approach to a phenomenon of world-historical significance, the split between the Moscow and Peking wings of the counter-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy. Thus as in every clash within the labor bureaucracy the contending formations may be compelled to seek mass support through actions whose potential consequences transcend and contradict the real aims of the bureaucrats. We support all actions, however and by whoever initiated, which are in the interest of the working class, since as Marxists we have no interests distinct from those of the working class as a whole. Our intervention tends always to transform actions initiated by the bureaucracy into struggles against the bureaucracy, whereby the working class can develop the alternative revolutionary leadership required for its self-liberation.

(28) In their polemics against the Soviet leaders, the Chinese Stalinists have pointed out aspects of the counter-revolutionary Kremlin line, its conciliation to imperialism and open revision of basic Leninist concepts. In practice, of course, the Chinese have gone as far as the Soviets in supporting those anti-working-class national bourgeois regimes which are willing to take a pro-Chinese line in foreign policy (Algeria, Guinea, Ghana). Nevertheless, within the Communist parties outside the Soviet bloc, these Chinese criticisms help to disrupt the discipline of the parties, and stimulate the emergence of tendencies seeking a more militant struggle against their own ruling class.

(29) In response to the Chinese attacks the Kremlin leaders have found that their most potent weapon is the issue of *Stalin*. Every partial exposure of the reality of the Stalin era, every degree of latitude for the expression of variant views in

politics, economics, and the arts, is a gain for the workers, and every attempt to maintain or increase repression under the pressure of 'Stalin's Heirs' in Peking and Moscow is an attack upon the vital interests of the working class.

(30) The basic orientation of the Marxists is always to the workers, never to bureaucratic leaderships. We side with the Communist workers of the western and colonial countries who, however confusedly, seek a revolutionary policy instead of the reformist coexistence line. We side with the workers of the Soviet bloc (and those young intellectuals seeking to be their spokesmen) who are striving to free themselves from bureaucratic oppression and thereby to restore the revolutionary and socialist democracy of the Lenin era. The tactical problem for the Marxists is to establish ideological and political contacts with these revolutionary tendencies in order to develop common actions against imperialist capitalism and its Stalinist bureaucratic labor lieutenants controlling the deformed workers states. The strategic goal of the world Trotskyist movement is the emergence of a new revolutionary leadership on the basis of the transitional program of the Fourth International. 'Our work must be directed so that the workers on whom we have influence should correctly appraise events, not permit themselves to be caught unawares and prepare the general sentiment of their own class for the revolutionary solution of the tasks confronting us.' (L.D. Trotsky)

(31) The *program* of the Fourth International for the Soviet Union as set forth in 1938, which posed the central task of the Soviet workers as the *restoration of Soviet democracy*, is entirely valid today not merely for the U.S.S.R. but for the deformed and degenerated workers states generally. The key points of this program are:

- freedom of the trade unions and the factory committees
- legalization of all parties recognized as soviet parties by the workers and peasants
- revision of the planned economy from top to bottom in the interests of producers and consumers. Factory committees should be returned the right to control production. A democratically organized consumers' cooperative should control the quality and price of products
- reorganization of the collective farms in accordance with the will and interests of the workers there engaged
- proletarian internationalism should replace the reactionary international policy of the bureaucracy. No secret diplomacy—the complete diplomatic correspondence of the state should be published

– only the victorious revolutionary uprising of the oppressed masses can revive the regime of Soviets and guarantee its further development toward socialism. There is but one party capable of leading the Soviet masses to insurrection—the party of the Fourth International

The struggle of the masses in the Soviet bloc is today developing in accordance with this program of workers' democracy. The Trotskyists seek to intervene in support of every struggle, every demand, however limited or partial, in accordance with this program.



AMENDMENT TO P.C. DRAFT RESOLUTION: “Preparing for the Next Wave of Radicalism in the United States”

12 June 1963

This proposed amendment to the majority resolution for the SWP's 1963 Convention was written with Shane Mage and Geoffrey White and submitted by the Revolutionary Tendency. It appeared in SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 24, No. 23, June 1963.

Substitute the following for the entirety of paragraph 41:

41. A) Our mass work, linked with a general propaganda offensive, is an indispensable part of our preparation for the next wave of radicalism in the United States. Our aim is to prepare for the successful transition from propagandistic modes of work today to the building of a mass revolutionary party and to vying for leadership in the class struggle in the following period. Of pivotal importance is the ability of the party to solidify its general gains from current work by laying down and strengthening its roots in the mass movement.

B) In the Negro movement, North and South, there are today real opportunities. In the North our spearhead should be based on a combined approach. We aim to work with organizations selected on the basis of their militancy in particular localities and regions; we are also involved in supporting the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants (CAMD). This kind of activity should be coupled with such direct involvement as sustained mass sales of appropriate issues of the press in the Negro ghettos and making vigorous and sharply directed campaigns during elections. We will then ourselves be in a position to become involved in and grow from new stages and turns in the struggle. An example of such a turn is that promised by the Philadelphia mass picket line for Negro jobs at construction sites. As regards the South today, we are witnessing from afar a great mass struggle for equality. Our separation from this arena is intolerable. The party should be prepared to expend significant material resources

in overcoming our isolation from Southern struggles, in helping to build a revolutionary movement in the South, our forces should work directly with and through the developing left-wing formations in the movement there. A successful outcome to our action would lead to an historic breakthrough for the Trotskyist movement. Expressed organizationally, it would mean the creation of several party branches in the South for the first time—for example, in Atlanta, Birmingham or New Orleans.

C) In maintaining its orientation to the working class as a whole, the party must steadily seek to make or find opportunities to recreate Trade Union fractions at selected spots across the country in industries important to the class struggle. Moreover, every party branch should develop contact with the most important unions and factories in its area; for example, through regular, long-term press sales, and accompanied, where possible, by direct electoral campaign approaches.

D) Unless the party is able to create and develop nuclei in the broader layers of the working class movement in this preparatory period, it will be condemned to sterile isolation or an accelerating political degeneration in the face of the certain upsurges ahead in the class struggle. Thus the party's taking hold today in the mass movement is a ***necessary pre-condition*** for going forward on the morrow in the historic mission of leading the working class to power. These primary considerations must be kept in mind in deciding the division of labor between mass work and general party activity.



TOWARD THE REBIRTH OF THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL (DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE WORLD MOVEMENT)

14 June 1963

This was submitted by the Revolutionary Tendency to the SWP's 1963 Convention in opposition to the Political Committee's March 1963 document "For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement." It was printed in SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 24, No. 26, June 1963, in Spartacist No. 1, February-March 1964 and reprinted in Marxist Bulletin No. 9, "Basic Documents of the Spartacist League, Part I," 1966.

Introduction

1. For the past fifteen years the movement founded by Leon Trotsky has been rent by a profound theoretical, political, and organizational crisis. The surface manifestation of this crisis has been the disappearance of the Fourth International as a meaningful structure. The movement has consequently been reduced to a large number of grouplets, nominally arrayed into three tendencies: the "International Committee," "International Secretariat (Pablo)," and "International Secretariat (Posadas)." Superficial politicians hope to conjure the crisis away through an organizational formula—"unity" of all those grouplets willing to unite around a common-denominator program. This proposal obscures, and indeed aggravates, the fundamental political and theoretical causes of the crisis.

2. The emergence of Pabloite revisionism pointed to the underlying root of the crisis of our movement: abandonment of a working-class revolutionary perspective. Under the influence of the relative stabilization of capitalism in the industrial states of the West and of the partial success of petit-bourgeois movements in overthrowing imperialist rule in some of the backward countries, the revisionist tendency within the Trotskyist movement developed an orientation away from the proletariat and toward the petit-bourgeois leaderships. The conversion of Trotskyism into a left satellite of the existing labor and colonial-revolutionary leaderships, combined with a classically centrist verbal orthodoxy, was typified by Pablo—but by no means was confined to him or his organizational faction. On the contrary, the Cuban and Algerian revolutions have constituted acid tests proving that the centrist tendency is also prevalent among certain groups which originally opposed the Pablo faction.

3. There is an obvious and forceful logic in the proposals for early reunification of the centrist groups within the Trotskyist movement. But "reunification" on the basis of centrist politics cannot signify re-establishment of the Fourth

International. The struggle for the Fourth International is the struggle for a program embodying the working-class revolutionary perspective of Marxism. It is true that the basic doctrines of the movement, as **abstractly** formulated, have not been formally denied. But by their abandonment of a revolutionary perspective the revisionists concretely challenge the programmatic bases of our movement.

4. The essence of the debate within the Trotskyist movement is the question of the perspective of the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard elements toward the existing petit-bourgeois leaderships of the labor movement, the deformed workers states, and the colonial revolution. The heart of the revolutionary perspective of Marxism is **in the struggle for the independence of the workers as a class** from all non-proletarian forces; the guiding political issue and theoretical criterion is **workers' democracy**, of which the supreme expression is workers' power. This applies to all countries where the proletariat has become capable of carrying on independent politics—only the forms in which the issue is posed vary from country to country. These forms, of course, determine the practical intervention of the Marxists.

Europe

5. The recovery and prolonged prosperity of European capitalism has not, as revisionists of all stripes contend, produced a conservatized workers' movement. In reality, the strength, cohesion, cultural level, and potential combativity of the European proletariat are higher today than ever before. The defeat of de Gaulle by the French miners and the persistent, currently accelerating, electoral swing to the Left in the bourgeois-democratic countries of Europe (most notably Italy, Great Britain, Germany) illustrate this fact.

6. The European workers' attempts to go beyond partial economic struggles to the socialist transformation of society have been frustrated by the resistance and treason of the labor bureaucracy. The four years of reaction in France follow-

ing the seizure of power by de Gaulle show the terrible price still exacted for tolerance of these misleaders. The Belgian general strike showed once again that “leftist” bureaucrats like Renard would also do all in their power to block or divert a movement capable of threatening capitalist rule. But the experiences of both France and Belgium prove a spontaneous desire of the workers to engage in struggle against the capitalist class—rising on occasion to an open confrontation with the system.

7. The task of the Trotskyists in the European workers’ movement is the construction within the existing mass organizations (unions and, in, certain instances, parties) of an alternative leadership. Marxists must at all times retain and exercise political and programmatic independence within the context of the organizational form involved. Support to tendencies within the labor bureaucracy, to the extent that they defend essential interests of the working class or reflect class-struggle desires within the labor movement, is correct and even obligatory; but this support is always only conditional and critical. When, as is inevitable, the class struggle reaches the stage at which the “leftist” bureaucrats play a reactionary role, the Marxists must oppose them immediately and openly. The behavior of the centrist tendency around the Belgian journal *La Gauche* in withdrawing during the general strike the correct slogan of a march on Brussels, in order to avoid a break with Renard, is the opposite of a Marxist attitude toward the labor bureaucracy.

8. The *objective* prospects for development of the Trotskyist movement in Europe are extremely bright. Large numbers of the best young militants in all countries, rejecting the cynical and careerist routinism of the Stalinist and Social-Democratic bureaucrats, are earnestly searching for a *socialist* perspective. They can be won to a movement capable of convincing them, practically and theoretically, that it offers such a perspective. The structural changes stemming from European integration pose the issues of workers’ democracy and of the independence of the political and economic organs of the working class as the alternative to state control of the labor movement—and impel the working class into increasingly significant class battles. If, under these objective conditions, the West European Trotskyists fail to grow at a rapid rate it will be because they themselves have adopted the revisionist stance of a satellite of the labor leadership as opposed to a perspective of struggle around the program of workers’ democracy.

Soviet Bloc

9. Since the Second World War, the countries of Eastern Europe have been developing into modern industrial states. As the proletariat of the deformed workers’ states increases in numbers and raises its living standards and cultural level, so grows the irrepressible conflict between the working class and the totalitarian Stalinist bureaucracy. Despite the defeat of the Hungarian workers’ revolution, the Soviet-bloc proletariat has won significant reforms, substantially widening its latitude of thought and action. These reforms, however, do not signify a “*process* of reform” or “destalinization process”: they were yielded only grudgingly by the unreformable bureaucracy, are under perpetual attack by the faction of “Stalin’s heirs,” and remain in jeopardy as long as Stalinist bureaucratic rule prevails. These concessions are historically significant only to the extent that they help the proletariat to prepare for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. Real destalinization can be accomplished only by the political revolution.

10. A new revolutionary leadership is emerging among the proletarian youth of the Soviet bloc. Inspired by twin sources—the inextinguishable Leninist tradition and the direct and tangible needs of their class—the new generation is formulating and implementing in struggle the program of workers’ democracy. Notable in this regard is the point made recently by a long-time participant in Soviet student life. Regarding the fundamental character to much of the widespread opposition among Russian youth, it was stated, “Because he is a Marxist-Leninist, the Soviet student is much more radically dissatisfied than if he were an Anglo-Saxon pragmatist.” (David Burg to *The New York Times*.) The Trotskyists, lineal continuers of the earlier stage, have an indispensable contribution to make to this struggle: the concept of the international party and of a transitional program required to carry through the political revolution. Assistance to the development of a revolutionary leadership in the Soviet bloc through personal and ideological contact is a primary practical activity for any international leadership worthy of the name.

Colonial Revolution

11. The programmatic significance of workers’ democracy is greatest in the backward, formerly colonial, areas of the world: it is precisely in this sector that the program of workers’ democracy provides the clearest possible line of demarcation between revolutionary and revisionist tendencies. In all of these countries the struggle for bour-

geois democratic rights (freedom of speech, right to organize and strike, free elections) is of great importance to the working class because it lays the basis for the advanced struggle for proletarian democracy and workers' power (workers' control of production, state power based on workers' and peasants' *councils*).

12. The theory of the Permanent Revolution, which is basic to our movement, declares that in the modern world the bourgeois-democratic revolution cannot be completed *except* through the victory and extension of the proletarian revolution—the consummation of workers' democracy. The experience of all the colonial countries has vindicated this theory and laid bare the manifest inner contradictions which continually unsettle the present state of the colonial revolution against imperialism. Precisely in those states where the *bourgeois* aims of national independence and land reform have been most fully achieved, the *democratic* political rights of the workers and peasants have not been realized, whatever the social gains. This is particularly true of those countries where the colonial revolution led to the establishment of deformed workers' states: China, North Vietnam...and Cuba. The balance, to date, has been a thwarted success, either essentially empty, as in the neo-colonies of the African model, or profoundly deformed and limited, as in the Chinese example. This present outcome is a consequence of the predominance of specific class forces within the colonial upheavals, and of the class-related forms employed in the struggles. These forms imposed upon the struggle have been, for all their variety, exclusively "from above," i.e., parliamentary ranging through the bureaucratic-military. And the class forces involved have been, of course, bourgeois or petit-bourgeois. A class counterposition is developed out of the complex of antagonisms resulting from failure to fulfill the bourgeois-democratic revolution. The petit-bourgeois leaderships with their bureaucratic forms and empiricist methods are ranged against participation by the workers as a class in the struggle. The involvement of the working class is necessarily centered on winning workers' democracy and requires the leadership of the revolutionary proletarian vanguard with its programmatic consciousness of historic mission. As the working class gains ascendancy in the struggle and takes in tow the more oppressed strata of the petit-bourgeoisie, the Permanent Revolution will be driven forward.

13. The Cuban Revolution has exposed the vast inroads of revisionism upon our movement. On the pretext of defense of the Cuban Revolu-

tion, in itself an obligation for our movement, full unconditional and uncritical support has been given to the Castro government and leadership, despite its petit-bourgeois nature and bureaucratic behavior. Yet the record of the regime's opposition to the democratic rights of the Cuban workers and peasants is clear: bureaucratic ouster of the democratically-elected leaders of the labor movement and their replacement by Stalinist hacks; suppression of the Trotskyist press; proclamation of the single-party system; and much else. This record stands side by side with enormous initial social and economic accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution. Thus Trotskyists are at once the most militant and unconditional defenders against imperialism of both the Cuban Revolution and of the deformed workers' state which has issued therefrom. But Trotskyists cannot give confidence and political support, however critical, to a governing regime hostile to the most elementary principles and practices of workers' democracy, even if our tactical approach is not as toward a *hardened* bureaucratic caste.

14. What is true of the revisionists' approach toward the Castro regime is even more apparent in regard to the Ben Bella regime now governing Algeria on the program of a "socialist" revolution in cooperation with French imperialism. The anti-working-class nature of this petit-bourgeois group has been made clear to all but the willfully blind by its forcible seizure of control over the labor movement and its suppression of all opposition parties. Even widespread nationalization and development of management committees seen in the context of the political expropriation of the working class and the economic orientation towards collaboration with France cannot give Algeria the character of a workers' state, but leaves it, on the contrary, a backward capitalist society with a high degree of statification. As revolutionaries our intervention in both revolutions, as in every existing state, must be in accordance with the position of Trotsky: "We are not a government party; we are the party of irreconcilable opposition" (*In Defense of Marxism*). This can cease to apply only in relation to a government genuinely based on workers' democracy.

15. Experience since the Second World War has demonstrated that peasant-based guerilla warfare under petit-bourgeois leadership can in itself lead to nothing more than an anti-working-class bureaucratic regime. The creation of such regimes has come about under the conditions of decay of imperialism, the demoralization and disorientation caused by Stalinist betrayals, and the absence of revolutionary Marxist leadership of

the working class. Colonial revolution can have an unequivocally progressive significance only under such leadership of the revolutionary proletariat. For Trotskyists to incorporate into their strategy revisionism on the *proletarian* leadership in the revolution is a profound negation of Marxism-Leninism no matter what pious wish may be concurrently expressed for “building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries.” Marxists must resolutely oppose any adventurist acceptance of the peasant-guerilla road to socialism—historically akin to the Social Revolutionary program on tactics that Lenin fought. This alternative would be a suicidal course for the socialist goals of the movement, and perhaps physically for the adventurers.

16. In all backward countries where the proletariat exists as a class, the fundamental principle of Trotskyism is the independence of the working class, its unions, and its parties, in intransigent opposition to imperialism, to any national liberal bourgeoisie, and to petit-bourgeois governments and parties of all sorts, including those professing “socialism” and even “Marxism-Leninism.” Only in this way can the ground be laid for working-class hegemony in the revolutionary alliance with the oppressed petit-bourgeois strata, particularly the peasantry. Similarly, for a working-class party in an advanced country to violate class solidarity with the workers of a backward country by politically endorsing a petit-bourgeois colonial-revolutionary government is a sure sign of centrist opportunism, just as refusal to defend a colonial revolution because of the non-proletarian character of its leadership is a sign of sectarianism or worse.

17. The inter-relationship between bourgeois-democratic and proletarian-democratic struggles in the colonial revolution remains as formulated in the founding program of the Fourth International, a formulation which today retains complete validity:

“It is impossible merely to reject the democratic program; it is imperative that in the struggle the masses outgrow it. The slogan for a National (or Constituent) Assembly preserves its full force for such countries as China or India. This slogan must be indissolubly tied up with the problem of national liberation and agrarian reform. As a primary step, the workers must be armed with this democratic program. Only they will be able to summon and unite the farmers. On the basis of the revolutionary democratic program, it is necessary to oppose the workers to the “national” bourgeoisie. Then, at a certain stage in the mobilization of the masses under the slogans of revolutionary democracy, soviets can and should arise.

Their historical role in each given period, particularly their relation to the National Assembly, will be determined by the political level of the proletariat, the bond between them and the peasantry, and the character of the proletarian party policies. Sooner or later, the soviets should overthrow bourgeois democracy. Only they are capable of bringing the democratic revolution to a conclusion and likewise opening an era of socialist revolution.

“The relative weight of the individual democratic and transitional demands in the proletariat’s struggle, their mutual ties and their order of presentation, is determined by the peculiarities and specific conditions of each backward country and to a considerable extent by the *degree* of its backwardness. Nevertheless, the general trend of revolutionary development in all backward countries can be determined by the formula of the *permanent revolution* in the sense definitely imparted to it by the three revolutions in Russia (1905, February 1917, October 1917).” (*The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*)

Conclusions:

18. The task of the international revolutionary-Marxist movement today is to re-establish its own real existence. To speak of the “conquest of the masses” as a general guideline internationally is a qualitative overstatement. The tasks before most Trotskyist sections and groups today flow from the need for political clarification in the struggle against revisionism, in the context of a level of work of a generally propagandistic and preparatory nature. An indispensable part of our preparation is the development and strengthening of roots within the broader working-class movement without which the Trotskyists would be condemned to sterile isolation or to political degeneration in the periods of rising class struggle and in either case unable to go forward in our historic task of leading the working class to power. Above all what can and must be done is the building of a world party firmly based on strong national sections, the assembling of a cadre of working-class militants won and tested in the process of the class struggle and on the firm basis of the revolutionary perspective of the Fourth International, the program to realize workers’ democracy—culminating in workers’ power. A fundamental statement expanding on this perspective, its opposition to Pabloism, and its relevance in the United States is contained in the Minority’s “In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective” (in SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 23, No. 4, July 1962).

19. “Reunification” of the Trotskyist movement on the centrist basis of Pabloism in any of its variants would be a step away from, not toward, the

genuine rebirth of the Fourth International. If, however, the majority of the presently existing Trotskyist groups insists on going through with such “reunification,” the revolutionary tendency of the world movement should not turn its back on these cadres. On the contrary: it would be vitally necessary to go through this experience with them. The revolutionary tendency would

enter a “reunified” movement as a minority faction, with a perspective of winning a majority to the program of workers’ democracy. The Fourth International will not be reborn through adaptation to Pabloite revisionism: only by political and theoretical struggle against all forms of centrism can the world party of socialist revolution finally be established.



FOR BLACK TROTSKYISM

- Against the P.C. Draft “Freedom Now”
- In Defense of Programmatic Fundamentals
- For Building a Black Trotskyist Cadre

3 July 1963

Written with Shirley Stoute, this document was printed in SWP Discussion Bulletin Vol. 24, No. 30, July 1963, and reprinted in Marxist Bulletin No. 5R, “What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism,” 1978.

“If it happens that we in the SWP are not able to find the road to this strata [the Negroes], then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie.”

—by L.D. Trotsky, quoted in the SWP 1948-50 Negro Resolution

I. General Introduction

The Negro Question has been posed before the party for exceptional consideration and with increasing sharpness as the gap has widened over the past ten years between the rising level of Negro struggle and the continuing qualitatively less intense general Trade Union activity.

1. Basic Theory: National or Race-Color Issue? Breitman vs. Kirk, 1954-57

To our understanding, what was involved then was a *shading* of theoretical difference. Breitman saw the Negro people as the embryo of a nation toward whom the *right* of self-determination was acknowledged but not yet, at least, advocated. Kirk interpreted the Negro question as a *race* issue which, under conditions of historic catastrophe (e.g., fascism victorious) could be transformed into a national question. Hence he agreed to the support of self-determination should it become a requirement in the Negro struggle but he assumed it could conceivably arise only under vastly altered conditions. Both parties agreed to the inappropriateness of self-determination as a *slogan* of the party then.

The present writers agree essentially with Kirk’s view of the time, in particular with the 1955 presentation, “For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question” (SWP Discussion Bulletin A-30, August 1955). We concur in noting the *absence* among the Negro people of those qualities which could create a separate political economy, however embryonic or stunted. This absence explains why the mass thrust for Negro freedom for over a hundred years has been toward smashing the barriers to an egalitarian and all-sided integration. But integration into what kind of social structure? Obviously only into one that can sustain that integration. This is the powerful reciprocal contribution of the Negro struggle to the general class struggle.

It is the most vulgar *impressionism* to see in Negro moods of isolationist despair over the winning of real points of support from other sections of society today as some kind of process to transform the forms of oppressive segregation into a protective barrier, behind which will occur the gestation of a new nation. Negro Nationalism in ideology and origins is somewhat akin to Zionism as it was from the turn of the century until the Second World War. The large Negro ghettos of the Northern cities are the breeding grounds for this ideology among a layer of petit-bourgeois or declassed elements who vicariously imagine that segregated residential areas can be the germ sources for a new state in which *they* will exploit

(“give jobs to”) Black workers. Hence it is that separatist moods or currents among Negroes have a very different foundation and significance than as a national struggle.

As for the specific issue of self-determination, we find that the 1957 party resolution makes a good and balanced formulation:

“Theoretically the profound growth of national solidarity and national consciousness among the Negro people might under certain future conditions give rise to separatist demands. Since minority people have the democratic right to self-determination, socialists would be obliged to support such demands should they reflect the mass will. Yet even under these circumstances socialists would continue to advocate integration rather than separation as the best solution of the race question for Negro and white workers alike. While upholding the right of self-determination, they would continue to urge an alliance of the Negro people and the working class to bring about a socialist solution of the civil rights problem within the existing national framework.”

2. From Theoretical Weakness to Current Revisionism

However, it is of immediate importance to point out that this background dispute is far from the central issue in our criticism of the 1963 Political Committee Draft Resolution, “Freedom Now: the New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation and the Tasks of the SWP.” Thus the 1948-50 party resolution, titled “Negro Liberation Through Revolutionary Socialism,” even though it contains the theoretical outlook that Breitman upheld, is a solidly revolutionary document in its intent and aims. What has happened in the interval is simply that the present party Majority has made the earlier theoretical weakness the point of departure for the profound degradation now arrived at in the 1963 Majority document of the role of the working class in the United States and of its revolutionary Marxist party as well. With evident loss of confidence in a revolutionary perspective by its authors, the essential revision in the 1963 draft is, however qualified, nothing other than the *substitution* of the axis of struggle as oppressed versus oppressor to replace class versus class.

3. The 1963 Revisionism

The essence of what is “new” is found in the following portions of the 1963 PC draft:

“But here, as in Africa, the liberation of the Negro people *requires* that the Negroes organize themselves independently, and control their own struggle, and not permit it to be subordinated to any other consideration or interest. (Emphasis added.)

“This means that the Negroes must achieve the maximum unity of their forces—in a strong and disciplined nationwide movement or congress of organizations, and ideological unity based on dividing, exposing and isolating gradualism and other tendencies emanating from their white suppressors. This phase of the process is now beginning.

“Having united their own forces, the independent Negro movement will then *probably* undertake the tasks of division and alliance. It will seek ways to split the white majority so that the Negro disadvantage of being a numerical minority can be compensated for by division and conflict on the other side.” (Emphasis added.)

and

“The general alliance between the labor movement and the Negro fighters for liberation can be prepared for and preceded by the cementing of firm working unity between the vanguard of the Negro struggle and the socialist vanguard of the working class represented by the Socialist Workers Party.”

The lesser sin of this schema of the future for the Negro struggle is the complete capitulation to Negro nationalism. (For one to see this vividly, re-read the quotations above substituting, say, “Algerian” for “Negro” and “French” for “whites.”) It is serious enough that the draft envisions no effort to compete with the Black nationalists’ understandable reaction to liberal-pacifist toadying. Certainly it is the duty of Marxists to struggle to separate militant elements from a regressive ideology. To say that the Negro struggle must not be subordinated to any other consideration is to *deny* proletarian internationalism. *Every struggle*, without exception, acquires progressive significance only in that it furthers directly or indirectly the socialist revolution internationally. Any struggle other than the workers’ class struggle itself has, at best, indirect value. Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks were obligated to wage a two-front ideological dispute in order to free the revolutionary vanguard from misconceptions on this score—against the petit-bourgeois nationalist socialists who saw the national struggle as having a progressive historical significance in its own right; and against the sectarian view of Rosa Luxemburg and the workers’ party in Poland which, from the correct premise that the nation-state had become reactionary in the modern world drew the oversimplified and erroneous conclusion—“against self-determination (for Poland).” Lenin pointed out that independent working class involvement in the struggle for national self-determination in several important ways furthered the class struggle and *thereby* acquired justification. Similarly Trotsky pointed out that defense of the Soviet Union was subordinate to and a part of the pro-

letarian revolution internationally and that in the event of a clash of interests the particular lesser interests of the part (and a degenerate part at that) would for revolutionists take second place.

It is worthy of note that the Negro struggle in America is more directly related to the class struggle than any essentially national question could be—for the Negro struggle for freedom is a fight by a working class color caste which is the most exploited layer in this country. Hence *any* steps forward in *this* struggle immediately pose the class question and the need for class struggle in sharpest form.

The graver consequence of the proposed Majority draft is its necessary corollary that the Majority would see the revolutionary workers' party excluded from one more area of struggle. In their 1961 Cuban question documents the Majority made it clear that for them the Cuban Revolution and, by implication, in the Colonial Revolution as well, the revolutionary working class party is, prior to the revolution, a dispensable convenience. This view has now been explicitly generalized and confirmed by the Majority, as in Section 13 of their "For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement":

"13. Along the road of a revolution beginning with simple democratic demands and ending in the rupture of capitalist property relations, guerilla warfare conducted by landless peasant and semi-proletarian forces, under a leadership that becomes committed to carrying the revolution through to a conclusion, can play a decisive role in undermining and precipitating the downfall of a colonial or semi-colonial power. This is one of the main lessons to be drawn from experience since the Second World War. It must be consciously incorporated into the strategy of building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries."

By their extension of this line to include the Negro question in the U.S., the SWP Majority has made the most serious overt denial yet of a revolutionary perspective. What they have done is to *a priori* exclude themselves from struggling for the leadership of a most crucial section of the American working class, and instead to consign that struggle to a hypothetical parallel united Negro Peoples' Organization which would "probably" one day work with the socialist working class leadership in the U.S. In essence the erroneous conclusions drawn by the Majority from the Cuban Revolution will now be incorporated into the party's American perspective in the form of "waiting for a Black Castro." Thus the party's supreme responsibility, the American revolution, is being vitiated!

* * *

II. To the Socialist Revolution— The Broad Tasks

1. Method of Objectivism versus Analytical Approach

In surveying current developments the descriptive articles and reports of Breitman have been valuable (for example, his "New Trends and New Moods in the Negro Struggle," SWP Discussion Bulletin, Summer 1961). However, the material is flawed and limited by its shaping and presentation through an approach which is "objective," "sociological," "descriptive." This stands in contrast to the indicated *analytical* approach for Marxists. Underlying this difference in method of treatment is the closely correlated difference between viewing the developments as an external observer—now given formal codification in the PC draft resolution—as against conceiving developments from the standpoint of involvement in their fundamental solution. For the Negro struggle to this solution integrally involves the revolutionary Marxist party which is missing in Breitman's approach to current events.

2. Our Point of Departure— The Socialist Revolution

Our point of departure comes in turn as the *conclusion* that the Negro question is so deeply built into the American capitalist class-structure—regionally and nationally—that only the *destruction* of existing class relations and the change in class dominance—the passing of power into the hands of the working class—will suffice to strike at the heart of racism and bring about a solution both real and durable. Our approach to present struggles cannot be 'objective.' Rather it rests on nothing other than or less than the criteria of what promotes or opposes the *socialist revolution*.

Therefore we can find an amply sufficient point of departure in a key statement of the 1948-50 resolution:

"The primary and ultimate necessity of the Negro movement is its unification with the revolutionary forces under the leadership of the proletariat. The guiding forces of this unification can only be the revolutionary party."

3. Negro Mass Organizations and the Revolutionary Party

It would be foolhardy and presumptuous to seek after any pat schema detailing the road to be travelled in going from today's struggles to our ultimate goals. But there are certain qualities and elements which, as in all such social struggles, do and will manifest themselves along the way.

One such matter is that of the basic approach to organizations of Negro workers and youth. The generality is that in an American society in which large sections of the working people are saturated with race hatreds and intolerance of the particular needs of other parts and strata, special organizations are mandatory for various strata. This consideration finds its sharpest expression in the Negro struggle. Today in the wake of the upsurge in mass civil rights struggles there is a felt and urgent need for a broad mass organization of Negro struggle free of the limitations, weaknesses, hesitations, and sometimes downright betrayal which afflict the currently existing major competitors. This need will be with us for a long time. Participation in the work of building such a movement is a major responsibility for the revolutionary party. Very likely along the way a complex and shifting combination of work in already existing groups and the building of new organizations will be involved. But as long as we know what we are aiming for we can be oriented amidst the complexities and vicissitudes of the process.

At bottom what the Marxists should advocate and aim to bring about is a *transitional* organization of the Negro struggle standing as a connecting link between the party and the broader masses. What is involved in working from a revolutionary standpoint is to seek neither a *substitute* to nor an *opponent* of the vanguard party, but rather a unified formation of the largely or exclusively Negro members of the party together with the largest number of other militants willing to fight for that section of the revolutionary Marxist program dealing with the Negro question. Such a movement expresses simultaneously the special needs of the Negro struggle and its relationship to broader struggles—ultimately for workers' power.

This approach to the special oppression of the Negroes stems from the tactics of Lenin's and Trotsky's Comintern. It was there that the whole concept was worked out for relating the party to mass organizations of special strata under conditions where the need had become evident and it becomes important that such movements contribute to the proletarian class struggle and that their best elements be won over to the party itself. The militant women's organizations, revolutionary youth leagues, and radical Trade Unionists' associations are other examples of this form.

Parenthetically, it should be noted how little there is in common between this outlook and that of the 1963 PC draft. Thus even in the *hypothetical* case that a separate social and material base was somehow created sufficient to generate

a mass Negro national consciousness, the Bolshevik response is *not* just to back away and talk of facilitating eventual common work between a "them" of that nationality and an "us" of the (white) socialist vanguard of the (white) working class. Even if a new state—a separate Black Republic—were created, our Negro comrades, even at this greatest conceivable remove, would become nothing other than a new section of a politically common international party—the Fourth International. And their struggle for socialism would continue to be our cause too.

4. Toward a Black Trotskyist Cadre

To return to the realities of the Negro struggle as it is and to the SWP as it is, there is one vital element without which the basic working program remains a piece of paper as far as *actual* involvement in the struggle is concerned. That element is an existing section, however modest, of Negro party members functioning actively and politically in the movement for Negro freedom.

Viewed from this aspect the current PC draft is at once a rationalization and an accommodation to the weakness of our party Negro forces, and, moreover, will exacerbate this weakness. This organizational abstentionism is obtrusive in the draft's direct implication that it doesn't really matter about the SWP because the Negro movement can get along well enough without the revolutionary working class party and one day the Negro vanguard may turn in our direction anyway. The key paragraph of the PC draft quoted in this article sums up a permeating thread of the entire resolution, places the party's role as one of fraternal relationship between two parallel structures: the (white) working class and its vanguard on the one side, and the Negro people and their vanguard on the other. This conception denies the fundamental necessity that the party will lead, must lead, or should even try to lead the decisive section of the working class in America. The resolution gives credence to the concept that "we cannot lead the Negro people." This is absolutely contradictory to a revolutionary perspective. *Our leadership* means the revolutionary class struggle program carried out by revolutionists in the mass movements, fused into the revolutionary party. Just as trade unionists will not join the revolutionary party if they do not see it as essential to winning the struggle, so Negro fighters for liberation will not join the party on any basis other than that the *only* road to freedom for them is the revolutionary socialist path of struggle through the combat army. Negro militants will *not* see any advantage in joining a party which says in effect:

'We cannot lead the Negro people. We are the socialist vanguard of the white working class, and we think it is nice to have fraternal relations with *your* vanguard (that of the liberation movement).'

Likewise, once we have recruited Negro militants to the party, the line expressed in the PC draft serves not to help them to develop as Trotskyist cadre and to recruit other Black workers on the basis of our program, but rather would serve to waste and mislead them. When the party denies its role of leadership of the Black masses, then for what reason do we need a Black Trotskyist cadre? The logic of this position means that there is no role for a Negro as a party member that differs from that he could play without entering the party, or, as in the case of the position taken on southern work, membership in the party would actually *isolate* him from important areas of work because 'the party is not needed there.'

Some comrades, in response to the criticisms made here, will say that the party is not giving up a revolutionary perspective, but is only being realistic and facing the fact that the majority of our membership is white and that we have only a tiny and weak Negro cadre. We must seek to become *in reality* what we are *in theory*, rather than the reverse—i.e., adapting our program to a serious weakness in composition. If we take this road of adaptation the party program in a process of gross degeneration will become based on a privileged section of the working class.

Negroes who are activists in the movement, such as, for example, the full-time militants around SNCC, are every day formulating concepts of struggle for the movement. The meaning of the line of the PC draft is that we are not interested in recruiting these people to our white party because we have the revolutionary socialist program for the section of the working class of which we are the vanguard, and *they* (Negro militants) must lead *their own* struggle, although we would like to have fraternal relations with them. This is the meaning of the PC draft.

To the concept of the white party must be counterposed the concept of the revolutionary party. For if we are only the former, then Black workers are misplaced in the SWP. There are three main elements which we recruit to the party: minority workers, white workers, and intellectuals. In the process of the work which brings these elements to the party there are special considerations which must be made with reference to the suspicions of minority peoples ("white caution") in regard to personnel, etc. However, once *inside* the party we are all only revolutionists. All of these elements are fused in the struggle to achieve the

revolutionary program into revolutionists who as a whole make up the revolutionary party. Thus the "white caution" in Negro organizations is wrong inside the party. An internal policy of "white caution" equals paternalism, patronization, creation of "party Negroes," etc., and has no place in a Bolshevik party.

The statement by Trotsky, quoted at the head of this article, that if the SWP cannot find the road to the Negroes then it is not worthy at all, finds its concurrent counterpart in the choice now before us. Either the revolutionary perspective in the U.S. has become blunted and lifeless *or else* its expression today as a living aim of the party pivots, in the context of relative working class passivity and active Negro struggle, upon the development of a Black Trotskyist cadre.

The principal aim of this article is to show that this deficiency in forces is not the fault of objective conditions—isolation and the like—but is rooted in the complex of related political and organizational faults stemming from a loss of confidence and orientation toward the proletarian revolution by the SWP Majority.

* * *

[Because of the pressures of other work upon the authors, the last two sections of this article have not been completed in time for the bulletin deadline even in the rough form of the first sections. The sections which it had been hoped to include are:

III. The Party

- (1) External and inner party aspects of winning and building a Negro cadre.
- (2) Against "ours is a white party" and against patronization.
- (3) Qualitative difference of required approach inside and outside the party.
- (4) Priorities in Negro work—defining the most recruitable layers by the party.

IV. Mass Work Today

- (1) Essential and common flaw in agitation based on either "Federal Troops to the South!" or "Kennedy—Deputize and Arm Birmingham Negroes!"
- (2) Against Union decertification hearings as a way to fight Jim Crow; for mass picketing to break racial exclusion in unions.
- (3) Specific aims and balance of our work—North and South.
- (4) Appraisal of existing organizations, including SNCC, the Muslims, etc.

In lieu of these developed sections, we are concluding with a few fragmentary notes. It is our

hope that the coming party Convention will act to continue a literary discussion following the Convention in the fast changing Negro Question. In addition, for a brief statement of views on mass work, attention is directed to the Minority Tendency's amendment to the PC draft on the American Question (in Discussion Bulletin Vol. 24, No. 23, June 1963).]

1. **The Black Muslims** are, with many contradictions, primarily a religious organization. Their political activity is primarily limited to the propaganda sphere. They do not have a program for struggle to meet the demands of the Black masses in the community today, although their promise of political candidates would represent somewhat of a turn. We take exception to comrade Kirk's statement that, "The foundation of the Muslim movement is basically a reflex of the lumpen proletariat to gradualism, to the betrayal of the intellectuals and the default of the union movement." The Muslim movement has a petit-bourgeois program—Black business, Black economy, separate on this basis, for this goal, is the answer to the oppression. Their internal organization is bureaucratically structured, with heavy financial drainage on the rank-and-file membership to the enrichment of 'The Messenger.' On the other hand, while they call to all levels of Black society, businessmen, workers, even socialists and communists, as long as they're Black, in reality the appeal is attractive mainly to the working class and especially to the lumpen layers, but they are no longer lumpen when they join the movement. One tendency of the leadership represented by Malcolm X condemns American *capitalist* society and shows favor toward Cuba and Red China as opposed to Chiang Kai-shek. Another tendency claims that international affairs don't concern them and the Black man's problems in America have no relation to the Cuban Revolution, etc. It is realistic to expect that we may be able to win some of its periphery and membership to the revolutionary program, but because of the religious, non-action oriented, exacting and bureaucratic nature of the organization, this can best be done through discussion and common action where possible, rather than on the inside.

2. **R. Vernon** as prosecuting attorney of "The White Radical Left on Trial."

In his article comrade Vernon states: 'The

absurdity of a *Militant* talking trade unions and Negro-White unity at the same time that it sounds like the very voice of the depths of the Negro ghetto is offered with a straight face.' This is but one blatant indication that comrade Vernon is not making criticism from the point of view of a revolutionary and does not see the struggle for socialism—the class struggle—as having any essential connection to the Negro struggle for equality. Vernon's current writings, "Why White Radicals are Incapable of Understanding Black Nationalism" and "The White Radical Left on Trial," are based on the premise, or attempt to prove, that Marxism and revolutionary socialism have no place in the struggle of the most exploited section of the American working class nor in the colonial revolution either. For Vernon the building of a revolutionary party aiming toward the American revolution is at best irrelevant and international working class solidarity meaningless. In short, there is little in comrade Vernon's articles that is common to Marxism. Furthermore, his views are saturated with the spirit of the treacherous justification 'that ours is a white socialist revolutionary party'—the logic of which is liquidationist.

Lest any comrades think we are too harsh in criticizing Vernon as having theoretically surrendered to Black Nationalism and rejected Marxism (with or without quote marks), let them ponder such a remark as, "The problem of revolutionary nationalism has never been dealt with adequately in any Marxist or 'Marxist' movement anywhere. Lenin only scratched the surface..." Of the entire, penetrating, historically verified theory of the Permanent Revolution, Vernon says not a word! Yet, above all, Trotsky's theory tackles 'the problem of revolutionary nationalism' and lays bare its solution.

Moreover, even if "Lenin only scratched the surface," our luck has finally turned. Vernon coolly informs us that the SWP has now proved its unique worth: "It is the only group whose internal life can, and did, produce the WWR ['Why White Radicals...'] document...." Apparently Vernon, the author of WWR, has capitulated to his own ego even more fully than to nationalism!

We are happy to accept comrade Vernon's finding that the Tendency we support is the most distant from his views of any in the party.



SPARTACIST STATEMENT TO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

6 April 1966

These remarks, made at the London conference of Gerry Healy's International Committee, were published in Spartacist No. 6, June-July 1966. This was included in Marxist Bulletin No. 9, "Basic Documents of the Spartacist League Part I."

In behalf of the Spartacist group, I greet this Conference called by the International Committee. This is the first international participation by our tendency; we are deeply appreciative of the opportunity to hear and exchange views with comrades of the world movement.

Therefore, we feel we have the responsibility to present to you our specific views where they are both relevant and distinctive, without adapting or modifying them for the sake of a false unanimity which would do us all a disservice, since we have, in our opinion, some valuable insights to offer.

We are present at this Conference on the basis of our fundamental agreement with the International Resolution of the I.C.; moreover, the report of Comrade Slaughter was for us solidly communist, unified throughout by revolutionary determination.

1. What Pabloism Is

The central point of the Conference is "The Reconstruction of the Fourth International, destroyed by Pabloism." Therefore the issue, "What is Pabloism?" has properly been heavily discussed. We disagree that Pabloism is but the expression of organic currents of reformism and Stalinism, having no roots within our movement. We also disagree with Voix Ouvrière's view that Pabloism can be explained simply by reference to the petty-bourgeois social composition of the F.I., any more than one could explain the specific nature of a disease by reference solely to the weakened body in which particular microbes had settled.

Pabloism is a revisionist answer to *new* problems posed by the post-1943 Stalinist expansions. And Pabloism has been opposed within the movement by a bad "orthodoxy" represented until the last few years by the example of Cannon. We must answer new challenges in a *truly orthodox* fashion: as Gramsci put it, we must develop Marxist doctrine through its own extension, not by seeking eclectic absorption of new *alien* elements, as Pabloism has done.

The pressure which produced Pabloism began in 1943, following the failure of Leon Trotsky's perspective of the break-up of the Soviet bureaucracy and of new October revolutions in the aftermath of the war: this failure resulted from the inability to forge revolutionary parties. After

1950, Pabloism dominated the F.I.; only when the fruits of Pabloism were clear did a section of the F.I. pull back. In our opinion, the "orthodox" movement has still to face up to the *new* theoretical problems which rendered it susceptible to Pabloism in 1943-50 and gave rise to a ragged, partial split in 1952-54.

Inevitable Struggle

The fight against Pabloism is the specific historic form of a necessarily continual struggle against revisionism, which cannot be "finally" resolved within the framework of capitalism. Bernstein, Bukharin, and Pablo, for example, have been our antagonists in particular phases of this struggle, which is both necessary and inevitable, and cannot be "solved."

These are some of our views about Pabloism; they are not exhaustive, for they are shaped by the particular aspects of Pabloism which have loomed large in our own struggle against it.

We take issue with the notion that the present crisis of capitalism is so sharp and deep that Trotskyist revisionism is needed to tame the workers, in a way comparable to the degeneration of the Second and Third Internationals. Such an erroneous estimation would have as its point of departure an enormous overestimation of our present significance, and would accordingly be disorienting.

We had better concentrate upon what Lenin said concerning the various, ubiquitous crises which beset imperialism (a system essentially in crisis since before 1914); Lenin pointed out that *there is no impossible situation for the bourgeoisie, it is necessary to throw them out*. Otherwise, "crises" are all in a day's work for the mechanisms and agencies of imperialism in muddling through from one year to the next. Just now, in fact, their task is easier, after the terrible shattering of the Indonesian workers' movement; add to this the other reversals which expose the revisionists' dependence on petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic strata, like the softening of the USSR, the isolation of China, India brought to heel, Africa neatly stabilized, and Castro a captive of Russia and the U.S. The central lesson of these episodes is the necessity to build revolutionary working-class parties, i.e., our ability to intervene in struggle.

2. Anti-Pabloist Tactics

A French comrade put it well: “there is no family of Trotskyism.” There is only the correct program of revolutionary Marxism, which is not an umbrella. Nevertheless, there are now *four* organized international currents all claiming to be Trotskyist, and spoken of as “Trotskyist” in some conventional sense. This state of affairs must be resolved through splits and fusions. The reason for the present appearance of a “family” is that each of the four tendencies—“United Secretariat,” Pablo’s personal “Revolutionary Marxist Tendency,” Posadas’ “Fourth International,” and the International Committee—is in some countries the sole organized group claiming the banner of Trotskyism. Hence, they draw in all would-be Trotskyists in their areas and suppress polarization; there is no struggle and differentiation, winning over some and driving others to vacate their pretense as revolutionists and Trotskyists. Thus, when several Spartacist comrades visited Cuba, we found that the Trotskyist group there, part of the Posadas international, were in the main excellent comrades struggling with valor under difficult conditions. The speeches here of the Danish and Ceylonese comrades, representing left-wing sections of the United Secretariat, reflect such problems.

The partial break-up and gross exposure of the United Secretariat forces—the expulsion of Pablo, the Ceylonese betrayal, the SWP’s class-collaborationist line on the Vietnamese war, Mandel’s crawling before the Belgian Social-Democratic heritage—prove that the time has passed when the struggle against Pabloism could be waged on an international plane *within* a common organizational framework. And the particular experience of our groups in the United States, which were expelled merely for the views they held, with no right of appeal, demonstrates that the United Secretariat lies when it claims Trotskyist all-inclusiveness.

We Must Do Better

Up to now, we have not done very well, in our opinion, in smashing the Pabloites; the impact of events alone, no matter how favorable objectively or devastating to revisionist doctrines, will not do the job. In the U.S., the break-up of the SWP left wing over its five-year history has been a great gift to the revisionist leadership of the SWP.

At present, our struggle with the Pabloites must be preponderantly from outside their organizations; nevertheless, in many countries a period of united fronts and organizational penetration into revisionist groupings remains necessary in order to consummate the struggle for the

actual reconstruction of the F.I., culminating in a world congress to re-found it.

3. Theoretical Clarification

The experiences of the Algerian and Cuban struggles, each from its own side, are very important for the light they shed on the decisive distinction between the winning of national independence on a bourgeois basis, and revolutions of the Chinese sort, which lead to a real break from capitalism, yet confined within the limits of a bureaucratic ruling stratum.

Two decisive elements have been common to the whole series of upheavals under Stalinist-type leaderships, as in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, Vietnam: 1) *a civil war of the peasant-guerrilla variety*, which first wrenches the peasant movement from the immediate control of imperialism and substitutes a petty-bourgeois leadership; and then, if victorious, seizes the urban centers and on its own momentum smashes capitalist property relations, nationalizing industry under the newly consolidating Bonapartist leadership; 2) *the absence of the working class* as a contender for social power, in particular, the absence of its revolutionary vanguard: this permits an exceptionally independent role for the petty-bourgeois sections of society which are thus denied the polarization which occurred in the October Revolution, in which the most militant petty-bourgeois sections were drawn into the wake of the revolutionary working class.

Political Revolution

However it is apparent that supplemental political revolution is necessary to open the road to *socialist* development, or, in the earlier stages, as in Vietnam today, the *active* intervention of the working class to take hegemony of the national-social struggle. Only those such as the Pabloists who believe that (at least some) Stalinist bureaucracies (e.g., Yugoslavia or China or Cuba) can be a revolutionary socialist leadership need see in this understanding a denial of the proletarian basis for social revolution.

On the contrary, precisely, the petty-bourgeois peasantry under the most *favorable* historic circumstances conceivable could achieve no third road, neither capitalist, nor working class. Instead all that has come out of China and Cuba was a state of the same order as that issuing out of the political counter-revolution of Stalin in the Soviet Union, the degeneration of the October. That is why we are led to define states such as these as *deformed workers states*. And the experience since the Second World War, properly understood, offers not a basis for revisionist turning away from

the perspective and necessity of revolutionary working-class power, but rather it is a great vindication of Marxian theory and conclusions under new and not previously expected circumstances.

Weakness and Confusion

Many statements and positions of the I.C. show theoretical weakness or confusion on this question. Thus, the I.C. Statement on the fall of Ben Bella declared:

“Where the state takes a bonapartist form on behalf of a weak bourgeoisie, as in Algeria or Cuba, then the type of ‘revolt’ occurring on June 19-20 in Algiers is on the agenda.”

—*Newsletter*, 26 June 1965

While the nationalization in Algeria now amounts to some 15 per cent of the economy, the Cuban economy is, in essence, entirely nationalized; China probably has more vestiges of its bourgeoisie. If the Cuban bourgeoisie is indeed “weak,” as the I.C. affirms, one can only observe that it must be tired from its long swim to Miami, Florida.

The current I.C. resolution, “Rebuilding the Fourth International,” however, puts the matter very well:

“In the same way, the International and its parties are the key to the problem of the class struggle in the colonial countries. The petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders and their Stalinist collaborators restrict the struggle to the level of national liberation, or, at best, to a version of ‘socialism in one country,’ sustained by subordination to the co-existence policies of the Soviet bureaucracy. In this way, all the gains of the struggle of the workers and peasants, not only in the Arab world, India, South East Asia, etc., but also in *China and Cuba* [our emphasis: Spartacist], are confined within the limits of imperialist domination, or exposed to counter-revolution (the line-up against China, the Cuban missiles crisis, the Vietnam war, etc.)”

Here Cuba is plainly equated with China, not with Algeria.

The document offered by the French section of the I.C. several years ago on the Cuban revolution suffers, in our view, from one central weakness. It sees the Cuban revolution as analogous to the Spanish experience of the 1930’s. This analogy is not merely defective: it emphasizes precisely what is not common to the struggles in Spain and in Cuba, that is, the bona fide workers’ revolution in Spain which was smashed by the Stalinists.

Overcoming Bad Method

The Pabloites have been strengthened against us, in our opinion, by this simplistic reflex of the I.C., which must deny the possibility of a social transformation led by the petty-bourgeoisie, in order to defend the validity and necessity of

the revolutionary Marxist movement. This is a bad method: at bottom, it equates the deformed workers’ state with the road to socialism; it is the Pabloite error turned inside out, and a profound denial of the Trotskyist understanding that the bureaucratic ruling caste is an *obstacle* which must be overthrown by the workers if they are to move forward.

The theoretical analysis of Spartacist concerning the backward portions of the world strengthens, in our estimation, the programmatic positions which we hold in common with the comrades of the I.C. internationally.

4. Building U.S. Section

The principal aspect of our task which may be obscure to foreign comrades is the unique and critically and immediately important *Negro* question. Without a correct approach to the Negro young militants and workers we will be unable to translate into American conditions the rooting of our section among the masses.

We have fought hard to acquire a theoretical insight in the course of our struggle in the SWP against Black Nationalist schemes which disintegrate a revolutionary perspective—defending the position that the *Negroes in the U.S. are an oppressed color-caste concentrated in the main in the working class as a super-exploited layer*. And we have acquired a considerable experience for our small numbers and despite a composition which is still only about 10 per cent black. We have a nucleus in Harlem, New York City. We intervened in several ways in the Black Ghetto outbursts over the summers of 1964 and ’65, acquiring valuable experience.

[The balance of the remarks was not written out before delivery; it is given as reconstructed from the rough notes. The issue of propaganda and agitation was not significantly gone into in the report, but is in the Spartacist draft document on tasks assembled the night before the oral report was given, hence the relevant section of that draft is also quoted below.]

Our draft resolution before you states regarding our Southern work that, “Perhaps our most impressive achievement to date has been the building of several SL organizing committees in the deep South, including New Orleans. This is a modest enough step in absolute terms and gives us no more than a springboard for systematic work. What is impressive is that *no other* organization claiming to be revolutionary has any base at all in the deep South today.”

Black and White

The race question in the U.S. is different from that in England. In fact it is part way between the

situation in England and that in South Africa. Thus some 2 per cent of the British population is coloured; in South Africa over 2/3rds of the people are black. In the U.S. if some 20 per cent of the population is Negro and Spanish-speaking, then within the working class, given the overwhelming concentration of whites in the upper classes, the others comprise something like 25 or 30 per cent. What this means is that in England the intensity of exploitation is spread unevenly, but rather smoothly throughout an essentially homogenous working class. At the other extreme in South Africa, the white workers with ten times the income of the black, live in good part themselves off the blacks, thus imposing an almost insuperable barrier to common class actions (witness the European and Moslem workers' relations in Algeria). In the U.S. the qualitatively heavier burden within the class is borne by the black workers. In quiescent times they tend to be divided from the white workers as in the lower levels of class struggle such as are now prevalent. Therefore the **black youth** in America are the only counterparts today to the sort of militant white working class youth found in the British Young Socialists.

Uniting the Class

However, we are well aware that at a certain point in the class struggle the main detachments

of the workers, as such, i.e., black and white in common class organizations such as trade unions, become heavily involved. Every strike shows this. In preparation for the massive class struggles ahead we have begun to build fractions in certain accessible key sections of the working class. But today the winning over of young black militants is the short cut to acquiring proletarian cadres as well; virtually all such militants are part of the working class.

Finally, we know that under the specific conditions in the U.S. to build a genuinely revolutionary party will require the involvement in its ranks and leadership of a large proportion, perhaps a majority, of the most exploited and oppressed, the black workers.

A Fighting Propaganda Group

The Spartacist draft theses state: "The tactical aim of the SL in the next period is to build a sufficiently large propaganda group capable of agitational intervention in every social struggle in the U.S. as a necessary step in the building of the revolutionary party. For this intervention we seek an increase in our forces to at least tenfold. From our small force of around 100 we move toward our goal in three parallel lines of activity: splits and fusions with other groups, direct involvement in mass struggle, and the strengthening and education of our organization."



MEMO ON THE RHODESIAN CRISIS

17 May 1967

Written with Liz Gordon, this response to a letter from Edward Crawford of the British Trotskyist group Socialist Current was adopted in revised form by the Spartacist League/U.S. Political Bureau, 21 May 1967. It was reprinted in Spartacist League/Britain International Information Bulletin No. 21, March 2012.

Comrade Crawford (in his letter of 19 March 1967, appended) calls for military intervention in Rhodesia by the British government "to crush the brittle crust of white rule...", hoping for a mistake in calculation by the British bourgeoisie which would precipitate a black proletarian revolution. It would indeed be desirable for the bourgeoisie to lose their heads in such a manner, but this is not the basis for a campaign by the Marxists. To the extent that his line has **political** content (i.e., is not based simply on the hope of a breakdown in effective calculation of means and ends on the part of the British government), it must be reformist; if

it is not political, such a demand leads to cynical tactics—an example might be in the Spanish situation of 1935-36 a desire to provoke the generals' uprising to in turn unleash the revolution. There are people who hold such a view of tactics, but such schemes are profoundly destructive to proletarian consciousness and organization.

Comrade Crawford in part denies the analogy with the U.S. "Federal Troops to the South" slogan and in part seems to justify the Federal interventions. In fact, Federal troops in the South have been used in a number of ways, none of them justifiable from our point of view. In Little Rock,

Arkansas, in the school desegregation crisis, the reason for the intervention was that the Negroes were getting ready to explode in the face of wild provocation and the stupid Governor Faubus wouldn't lay off. Similarly, in Birmingham, Alabama, Federal troops were mobilized after the bombings. (Birmingham is a large and heavily industrialized town with a large black working class.) The use of Federal marshals at Ole Miss was not a mass issue but a simple authority clash between the State and Federal governments.

Comrade Crawford correctly notes that the demand raised by the state-capitalist tendency around "International Socialism" for intervention by the African states is wrong in view of the reactionary character of these regimes. But he then creates a flat contradiction by turning favorably to the demand for intervention by the *British* state, the imperialist puppet *master* of many of these reactionary African puppet states!

In general, demands on the bourgeois state in the area of direct power are dangerous, at bottom because such demands generally reduce to calls on the government of the exploiters and oppressors to fight the exploiter and oppressor on behalf of the exploited and oppressed. The difficulty lies in what happens when the government *does* move, i.e., it moves to maintain bourgeois order and hence to suppress any revolutionary surge.

In short, a Marxist never calls for demands which if the bourgeoisie obliges would be counter-revolutionary while still seeming to meet the very demand raised (like some of the U.S. troop deployments in the South). It is an illusion which we must oppose, not propagate, that the bourgeois government will alter its class character. And under situations of sharp struggle, if the illusion hasn't been shattered earlier, it will be shattered, but at the cost of the movement (e.g., UN intervention in the Congo, 1960; Indonesian massacres, 1965). This is different from the range of economic and social demands which, if some part were granted, encourages the winner to bigger and better organization—demands which if unmet are educational in showing the need to *replace* the existing capitalist structure and system in order to win the demands.

All this is remote from the core of the immediate question—namely, how to raise demands on the Labour Party, which is not a *simple* bourgeois party in power in Britain but rather the alleged party of the British working class. What demands, then, can be put to it which on the one side threaten it with exposure as a bourgeois tool, yet which do not in substance call upon the re-establishment of direct British imperial military

power in central Africa? There are such demands, but since the whole issue stands close to the question of British state power itself, they seem extreme because the situation has little of the usual elasticity of the tame parliamentary domestic game.

For example, Trotskyists could and should have demanded some version of the following at the time of the Smith government's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI):

That the Labour *Government* declare Zimbabwe independent and state its willingness to give recognition and economic aid to any government which is constituted on the One Man-One Vote principle.

That the Labour Government nationalize without compensation all British capital investment in Africa of those who resist a government so constituted or who aid the Smith regime.

That the Labour *Party* and trade unions raise military aid and offer volunteers to assist in the victory of an African workers revolution.

That the trade unions embargo economic aid to and trade with the Smith regime.

That the Labour Government facilitate the struggle of the British mass organizations by preventing export and passport difficulties, etc.

Note that the Labour Party-Trade Union bureaucracy in its *governmental role* is only called upon by these demands to play an essentially negative declarative role—i.e., using the position in government to keep the military arm of the British state machine five thousand miles away from Rhodesia, while permitting and encouraging the direct and independent action both of British working-class mass organizations and of African revolutionists.

In terms of direct action it is to the non-state organizations, the BLP and the unions, that demands are made, e.g., military aid, strikes, boycotts, arms raised, volunteer units recruited and trained, supplies transported. But it is *not* up to the British mass movement to specify the particular organizations and demands of the revolutionary black movement. That would be only to perpetuate imperial chauvinism in disguised form. The class struggle is international, but to win the right to mutually influence and shape others' struggle, militants must themselves be part of an international collectivity of class struggle—i.e., national vanguard sections of the Fourth International.

Perhaps it might be argued that since these kinds of demands are too extreme to make headway under current conditions, some less utopian, more practical, proposals must be advanced... but "more practical" necessarily means here more acceptable to the Labour defenders of the *status quo*. The Rhodesian question poses sharply the

issues of revolution and counter-revolution. If the Wilson Labour Government is the handmaiden of imperialism, then any “practicality” which projects it in a contrary way will only lead even more to reactionary consequences. A clamor from below for the kinds of demands we sketch, to the extent that it is strong, will push the situation in the *right direction*—inhibiting military intervention and encouraging mass action. How far it can go depends on many elements. The central difficulty in pressing a really sharp struggle lies in the inherent situation that on the scale of mounting transitional demands, the solutions we must necessarily pose are at the upper end of the scale. Hence the lack of prior preparation within the working class gives a bald appearance to such demands. Yet these *are* demands which on their merits should be easy to argue for among militants, with the difficulty being in the recognizably hard obstacles to their achievement—in the first place a resisting, bureaucratic, conservative leadership at the head of the Labour Party and the trade unions (thus focusing attention on the Wilson Government’s treacherous role). Put another way, a real fight to aid a black workers’ revolution in Rhodesia is a direct challenge to bourgeois state power in Britain and poses more-or-less clearly the issue of a British revolution too.

The Communist International in its heroic period gave comprehensive codification to the issues being raised, for example, in the “Thesis on Tactics”, of the Third Congress (1921):

“In place of the minimum program of the reformists and centrists, the Communist International mounts a struggle for the concrete needs of the proletariat, for a system of demands which taken together will disintegrate the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat and constitute stages in the struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, and in which each particular demand will express a need of the great masses, even if these masses are not consciously in favor of a dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Under the prevailing conditions perhaps only an essentially propagandistic character could have been given (in the press, demonstrations, partial actions, etc.) to aid in bringing down the Smith regime—but that struggle is the one to be mounted, not the raising of demands (i.e., Brit-

ish military intervention) which disorient a potentially victorious line and which could play into the hands of the ruling class which at a critical point might well intervene with force.

Since UDI the Black African individual militants and organizations have as a result of the Wilson government’s treacherous role lost many of their illusions regarding the British government. Thus a New Zealand emigre from the Smith regime, H.M. Tapela, wrote in his article (sent us by the N.Z. Trotskyists of the Socialist Labour Movement), “Rhodesia—A British Gimmick”:

“Armed intervention by Britain is now out of the question, unless a time comes when Africans put the Europeans on the defensive. The promise that Britain will send troops to restore law and order in Rhodesia will only apply if the Africans, instead of the Smith government, defy the Queen. Intervention could only come about as a protective measure for the Smith regime.”

He concludes that:

“In November 1965 when we Africans thought matters had been made clear-cut, we still lacked education. That education has been given by the inaction of the British and their collaboration with their kin in Rhodesia. One shudders to think of the consequences. A cloud is rising; it portends a storm. It is a storm which threatens the destruction of life and property; a storm which, nonetheless, is welcome, because it will purge Rhodesia. This storm is revolution.”

And the *Zimbabwe Review*, organ of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), now declares editorially (4 Feb. 1967):

“The entire population of Zimbabwe must be clear in its mind that no force from outside whatever will march into our country to deliver it from oppression. If any Zimbabwean harbours any such delusions, they must go once and for all.”

As internationalists, part of our job all along should have been to assist in presenting the reality of the British Labour Party from direct experience and 100 years of Marxism. Thereby we should give timely aid in destroying illusions among the African militants about any liberating role of British imperialist troops.

It is by reason of the line of thinking sketched above that we believe the position advanced in *Socialist Current* in favor of British military intervention in the Rhodesian crisis to be in serious error.



A COMMENT ON GEOFFREY WHITE'S RESIGNATION STATEMENT

29 July 1968

Attachment to SL/U.S. Political Bureau Minutes, 29 July 1968.

Ex-comrade White's resignation contains four main sections. The first argues that the history of the Trotskyist movement has been one of failure, at bottom indefensibly so. Second, White argues that as a result of these failures a set of formal little "rules" to maintain the movement's purity evolved which moreover served to reinforce the failure of our movement. His third point, which is given a length and emphasis comparable to the other sections, argues that leaving the Peace and Freedom Party typifies our futility. White devotes to the PFP about a quarter of his attention in his resignation, justifying his break from revolutionary Marxism. Fourth, he concludes that he has been moving in his present direction for a long time and the substance of his break can no longer be denied. He further notes, however, that he had resisted until now the logical conclusion of his drift, both because of his "considerable personal investment in the sectarian movement" and because whatever his distaste for our position on the Russian question he could see no valid alternative.

Regarding the first of White's points, that of the alleged failure of Trotskyism, the position he advances is either too much or too little. In a direct sense, Trotskyism would be a failure, and moreover decisively disproved, if somewhere the working class were to come to power without the Trotskyist revolutionary program and party, or the reverse, if the Trotskyists came to power but not the working class. The reasons for this should be obvious. The "rules" of Trotskyism were not worked up by the Trotskyists to explain away defeats and failures and to keep "pure". They are, or at least aim to be, nothing other than a codification of that experience the significance of which White completely overlooks, the Russian October Revolution, the great working-class revolution which *succeeded* and which, despite all vicissitudes, still endures and still represents, even in its present great deformity, an enormous threat to the bourgeois order. It is logically incumbent upon White, if he is not simply to abandon politics—which as a highly-politicized intellectual he is, in any case, unlikely to do—to show either that Trotskyism differs from the lessons of the October Revolution or that the revolution itself is without relevance. This leads to the other, broader, level of consideration, namely that if White is so sure that Trotskyism has failed, where are the

successful political practices to which he orients? What is his perspective toward social change? And what social change does he now want, anyhow? This latter point is raised by the ends and means linkage—the forces which effect social change determine its shape.

In short, if you don't know who has won or can win, how can you speak of other than a transient failure of Trotskyism, a failure which is but the ideological and organizational expression of the failure of the working class itself to threaten in a serious and prolonged way the bourgeois order in the past several decades? Or, to put it in reverse form, every time the proletariat has surged forward in an elementary way as a class at least to the point of embryonic soviets or the urgent felt need for soviets (Spain 1936, Italy 1943, Bolivia 1952, Hungary 1956, Belgium 1960, France 1968), then the atmosphere positively reeked of the main elements of the Trotskyist program, and only (only!) the lack of preparation of the vanguard and the brevity or abortiveness of the incidents prevented the emergence of a powerful revolutionary party—and that could only be a party of Trotskyism, the Marxism of today.

Everything else about Comrade White's resignation is anti-climactic to the above considerations. His argument that our initial historical failures led us to evolve elaborate, abstract "rules" of purity with which we render ourselves permanently impotent is defeated when White rather pathetically observes that perhaps these "rules" *are* necessary, considering the fate of the two "groups like ours", the POUM of Spain and the LSSP of Ceylon, which departed from the "rules" and ended up helping capitalists run their governments! To call the questions White raises "rules" is disingenuous—what he's talking about are not rules but *politics* specifically, what *kinds* of struggles the working class can undertake which if victorious will lead it to power, and what kinds will betray the working people and perpetuate capitalist imperialism. Comrade White has nothing historically to add or subtract. He merely regrets that "rules" exist and ignores their real origins in the Russian Revolution and the building of Lenin's Bolshevik party.

But for the present day, White has found a place where he hopes the "rules" don't apply—the Peace and Freedom Party. Faint hope that! What

has the Peace and Freedom Party discovered that differs from or goes beyond the Leon Blum Front Populaire or the Henry Wallace Progressive Party? The answer is: *less* than nothing. The PFP is a self-conscious mobilization of young intellectuals which *refuses* to even aspire to becoming a mobilizer of working-class masses, *even* in order to subordinate the workers to middle class ideology and aims. And *this* appears to be the *ad hoc* alternative to which White now goes as he leaves our modest, but only genuine embodiment in the U.S. today of revolutionary Marxism, the Spartacist League.

* * *

Receipt of White's resignation statement creates mixed feelings. Comrade White, for all his inner corrosion, was a mainstay of our tendency in the Bay Area and nationally. Comrade White was instrumental in holding together the Bay Area tendency at the time of the Healy-Wohlforth split from us in 1962, so that not a single member of the Bay Area tendency went over. In those years he played a valuable role in the development of our perspectives and our theoretical outlook. Later, he made some of the finest journalistic contributions in SPARTACIST. However, from the beginning of his relationship with the tendency, a skeptical quality and a careful, sanitary aloofness were not absent from his make-up. These debilitating features evolved and grew greater and more pervasive. By our 1966 Founding Conference, Comrade White argued, albeit without stubbornness and unsuccessfully, that we should oppose the possession and development of nuclear weapons by the Sino-Soviet bloc, a position which cannot in any practical way be squared with the defense of the deformed workers' states against imperialism. Probably the last real opportunity to deflect Comrade White from the course which led him out of the Trotskyist movement came with the anticipated reunification with Healy. White played a strong role at the Montreal Conference in 1965. But that possibility ended with the revelation of the illusory character of the Healy connection.

Locally, in the Bay Area, comrade White's organizational contributions were on balance ultimately decisively negative. His skepticism was not without deep impact, especially his view that perhaps the historic opportunities for proletarian revolution had been missed and humanity faced now only the prospect of nuclear holocaust. In our principal local spokesman and political leader, this quality naturally alienated would-be revolutionaries and militants who came in contact with the Bay Area local, effectively leading to

the recruitment of only one or two people in the area in a half decade! Moreover, the great Berkeley student strike of 1964, with many of whose militants White had close contact, was for us a lost opportunity. Comrade White felt strongly at the time that the Marxist movement—i.e. he—had nothing to tell the student radicals! Later, his loss of necessary organizational focus and hardness led the local to distribute a leaflet, at a demonstration where many radical-talking tendencies were present, containing the outrageous slogan: "Join the revolutionary organization of your choice"! Finally, as implied in his resignation, it was White who led our local into the Peace and Freedom Party, a step from which we extricated ourselves satisfactorily and without undue internal turmoil. Later, in *Spartacist-West*, our comrades acknowledged the error, but opponents, particularly the SWP, continue to exploit our misstep, the only departure from principle in our history, in a way which shows full well the SWP's sensitivity to their own departures and their eagerness to turn on us with "you're another". White may despair of our impact, but our opponents are not unaware of it by any means. (Parenthetically, we wonder what White thinks of the SWP's own "valiant" efforts to transcend the "rules" of Marxist principle. But that gets us into the whole question of the incompatibility of different species of opportunism, i.e., essentially the adaptation to different and often sharply, even bloodily, counterposed forces.)

So we miss White for what he was and what he might have been in helping to forge a revolutionary workers movement in this country. And we note that in his leave taking he was organizationally responsible. He agreed to a gradual withdrawal so as to minimize damage to the Bay Area local in which he played a dominant role until the end of his active period. But given what he had become, his formal departure becomes mainly a new opportunity for younger comrades to build on foundations he helped lay but then himself lacked the strength to help develop.

James Robertson

[based on notes of 29 July 1968]

Postscript

On helping proof-read White's resignation statement I was struck by his reference to the lack of "relevance to the objective world" of Trotskyist political rules. In particular his use of the word "relevance" excited my memory. So I checked back to confirm that nineteen years ago there was played out with a closely parallel content the exchange of opinion displayed today in White's "Resignation" and my "Comment." Only at that

time both contributions were literarily much superior, but each politically rather poorer (though more comprehensive).

I refer to “The Relevance of Trotskyism” by Henry Judd in the August 1949 *New Internationalist* and its reply “The Relevance of Marxism” by Albert Gates in the January-February 1950 *NI*. Judd’s denial of Trotskyism’s relevance and his random search under the pressures of anti-Stalinism and imperialism led him shortly to become (as Stanley Plastrik) a founder of *Dissent* magazine (ech!). Even with the large handicap of the bureaucratic-collectivist line on Russia, Gates made mincemeat of Judd and properly so. However this didn’t pre-

vent Gates (Glotzer), Shachtman’s long-time #2 man, from following his leader into the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation ten years later after a combination of the arid, unrewarding 1950’s and a profoundly wrong Russian position had combined to wreak their havoc on the Workers Party-Independent Socialist League.

Nineteen years ago Geoff White was a CP youth leader who had just graduated from Harvard to go on to struggle for nearly two decades as a communist. By his present lights, it’s a shame White couldn’t have read and accepted Judd back then and saved himself a lot of trouble.

J.R.



LETTER ON THE WOMAN QUESTION

18 February 1969

This letter to Bay Area organizer Chris K. was printed in SL Internal Bulletin No. 9, July 1969.

Dear Chris,

A thing that I didn’t take up with you in our phone call today in response to your letter was regarding the Women’s Liberation groups in which some of our comrades are active. We recently noticed with a great deal of interest a series on the Woman Question which appeared in the *Guardian* (issues of 18 Jan., 25 Jan., 1 Feb. and 8 Feb.). The third article of the series was very much the best. This series was by Beverly Jones, excerpted from “Towards a Female Liberation Movement” put out by the Women’s Liberation Distribution Center, Washington, D.C. I take this series to be typical or at least symptomatic of the present Women’s Liberation groups which seem generally associated with the New Left student milieu and which have been springing up around the country. In any case, the articles were, at a certain level, very perceptive indeed in explaining the mechanisms whereby young women—as students, girlfriends and young mothers—are oppressed in manifold, interacting ways. In effect the series centers on the specific problems of young, middle-class women around the radical movement and what they have to put up with.

However, while these particular problems are a good point of departure to draw in young women, the series of articles of which I speak and so far as I know the bulk of the radical women’s organizations (which have been doing some good, flamboyant work on the East Coast lately) fail to

emphasize sufficiently a key linkage in making the jump from the oppression of women to the need for social revolution. And I think that our concentration on this connection might make our comrades’ propaganda more concrete, persuasive and radical. The connection I have in mind is that of the *family*, which *throughout* a woman’s life gives definition to her oppressed state: as daughter, as wife, as mother. The family is a central target in the Marxist criticism of society. The program of communism includes its abolition (when society has reached such a point that the family could be replaced by social relations of a *superior* physical and emotional content—our aim is not to put everyone in a contemporary state orphanage). It is the family—with all the connotations of the transfer of property through the generations, the necessity to control sexual access to women to enshrine that a father passes on property to his son, etc., etc.—which generates all of the morality superstructure. In short, the family is the key social unit for the maintenance of capitalism: the worker’s family by which the labor force is reproduced, the capitalist’s by which his property (i.e., the congealed life blood of the workers) is transmitted to his sons.

Comradely,

Jim R.

P.S. While these thoughts have come to me freshly, I suspect they owe a lot to readings of Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and also the early Wilhelm Reich.

1970s

LETTER ON THE CHICANO QUESTION

10 July 1970

This letter to the Austin Local was an attachment to SL/U.S. Political Bureau Minutes, 27 July 1970.

New York City
10 July 1970

Dear Comrades Reuben, Leon & Nedy,

Thank you for your lengthy phone calls of last night. I found them, in sum, stimulating even if Leon did reduce me at one point to perhaps sounding like a cross between General Sherman and a Red Army commander.

Let me try to offer a couple of personal expansions on our general discussion in the last PB meeting regarding the “Chicano Question”.

1) The Chicanos are historically, culturally and in geographical extension a bona fide part of the Mexican nation, albeit partially assimilated into the Yanqui mainstream and partially estranged from their ancestral homeland. They are not a nation—they are part of the Mexican nation. Accordingly, “self-determination” must be seen in this context to have any validity. To do otherwise would slide in the direction of some utopian and reactionary fantasy, such as a mythical “neo-Aztec nation of the lower Rio Grande valley” which you mentioned.

2) Our discussion was most stimulating to me because it forced me to a re-recognition of what theoretically at bottom is not merely limiting or irrelevant but dead wrong with the SWPish call for “self-determination”—for-everyone approach (youth, old people, women, homophiles, fragments of the Indian nations and of course the Blacks). Since the U.S. is the greatest imperialist

power in the world it has not been, practically, since the Civil War that we have had to face concretely the proposition that the American nation has its own right too to national independence and that social struggles arising within it need to be fought out on its terrain.

In the domestic “Third World” fantasies this otherwise currently irrelevant democratic right is ignored. Thus unlike the case where the Mexican population in the U.S. is in the majority, or in Puerto Rico or even on the Navaho reservation and its vicinity, all the other “self-determinations” of non-nations would involve *driving out* local majority portions of a real nation—the Americans. The conduct of the Jews toward the Palestinian Arabs and the Mormons toward the Utah Indians shows the real, reactionary nature of such a schema. The aim of the victorious workers revolution is to go *beyond* the nation-state, not to revert to the sovereign micro-enclaves of feudal times.

In general, comrades, it would be most helpful in clarifying and perhaps eliminating misunderstandings or differences if when you don’t think you understand or agree with some position you would reduce to writing a series of specific pointed questions. That technique has served the Trotskyist movement very well in the past, especially when some new subject or new turn was being dealt with by the movement.

Comradely regards to all,
Jim

CHILEAN POPULAR FRONT

Published in Spartacist No. 19, November-December 1970.

The electoral victory of Dr. Salvador Allende’s Popular Front coalition in Chile poses in sharpest form the issue of revolution or counter-revolution. The Chilean crisis is a fully classic expression of reformism’s attempt to derail the felt needs of the working people for their own government to rule society in their own interests. The revolutionary duty of Marxists in Chile and

internationally should be utterly unambiguous. Above all, the experience of the Russian Revolution and of Trotsky’s critiques of the Spanish and French Popular Front governments of 1936 illuminate the objective of revolutionists in such a situation.

Dr. Allende’s candidacy, which gained a plurality on 4 Sept., was based on a coalition of reformist-

labor and liberal-bourgeois parties, including the pro-Moscow Communist Party, Allende's own somewhat more radical Socialist Party, the very right-wing Social Democrats, the rump of the liberal Radical Party, fragments of the Christian Democrats, etc. To gain confirmation by the Congress, Allende agreed to a series of constitutional amendments at the insistence of the dominant Christian Democrats. Most crucial among these were the prohibition of private militias and the stipulation that no police or military officers will be appointed who were not trained in the established academies.

With the maintenance of the foundations of the capitalist order thus assured, Congress elected Allende president on 24 October. He has now announced the division of spoils in his 15-man cabinet: the CP gets economic ministries, Allende's SP the key posts of internal security and foreign affairs, and a bourgeois Radical the ministry of national defense. This is reformism's answer to the Chilean masses' years of struggle and their desperate hopes that Allende's election would open up for them a new way of life, but they will not be held for long inside the Popular Front's bourgeois straightjacket.

It is the most elementary duty for revolutionary Marxists to irreconcilably oppose the Popular Front in the election and to place absolutely no confidence in it in power. Any "critical support" to the Allende coalition is class treason, paving the way for a bloody defeat for the Chilean working people when domestic reaction, abetted by international imperialism, is ready. The U.S. imperialists have been able to temporize for the moment—and not immediately try to mobilize a counter-revolutionary coup on the usual Latin American model—because they have softened the anticipated nationalization losses through massive profit-taking over several years.

Within reformist workers' parties there is a profound contradiction between their proletarian base and formal ideology and the class-collaborationist aims and personal appetites of their leaderships. This is why Marxists, when they are not themselves embodied in a mass working-class party, give reformist parties such "critical support"—against overt agents of capital—as will tend to regroup the proletarian base around a revolutionary program. But when these parties enter a coalition government with the parties of capitalism, any such "critical support" would be a betrayal because the coalition has suppressed the class contradiction in the bourgeoisie's favor. It is our job then to re-create the basis for struggle *within* such parties by demanding they *break* with

the coalition. This break must be the elementary precondition for even the most critical support.

The Left Views Chile

Chile's most extreme known formation, the Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionario, comprising Guevarists, semi-Trotskyists, etc., demonstrated conciliationism toward Allende as his campaign wore on and on 4 Sept. issued a call for the workers, students and peasants to support his victory, thus throwing their weight behind the popular illusions.

While the "revolutionary" Chinese Maoists have been very diplomatically noncommittal, for Gus Hall of the U.S. CP, "the elections in Chile are a revolutionary, democratic mandate of the people." He goes on, "Does this experience deny the theses of Debray [i.e. Guevara and Castro] and Mao? Yes it does." (*Daily World*, 17 Oct.) Not to be outdone in enthusiasm, Castro's *Granma* of 13 Sept. headlined Allende's election as "The Victory of People's Unity," thus willy-nilly sharing the same bed with Gus Hall and once again exposing as political charlatans those who preach confidence in the Cuban leadership.

Tragically, most of those formations claiming the heritage of Trotsky's Fourth International have taken the same road, in disorientation or conciliation to Popular Frontism. At its April 1969 World Congress the United Secretariat majority around Livio Maitan affirmed that the strategy for Latin America was "rural guerrilla warfare" with a peasant base and a petty-bourgeois (student) derived cadre, thus rendering themselves irrelevant in the face of urban-based upheavals in Latin America. How about the United Secretariat minority, grouped around the American Socialist Workers Party? Their spokesman, Joe Hansen, stood on apparent Trotskyist orthodoxy, seemingly rediscovering the need to build revolutionary workers' parties as the key to the Latin American revolution, but this was just a fig leaf to cover the SWP's descent into legalistic reformism. The first response of Hansen's *Intercontinental Press* (14 Sept.) was agnostic, concluding, "Undoubtedly Allende's program is more radical, on paper, than the program of the Popular Front of 1938. But it remains to be seen what his bourgeois allies, present and prospective, will allow him to put into practice."

Behind the SWP's bland know-nothingism was its operational position: critical support: "It would be a crime to whitewash the UP [Unidad Popular]. But failing to recognize the positive elements in it, condemning it in toto out of some sectarian dogmatism, would mean suicidal isolation." (*IP*, 5 Oct.)

To be sure, the SWP “knows better.” But after all the Allende candidacy was enormously popular among the Chilean masses, so these revisionists chose to feed the illusions which block the path to socialist revolution and expose the workers, in this situation of great social polarization, to the danger of victorious reaction and right-wing terror.

Healy’s Pabloism

The alleged anti-revisionists of Gerry Healy’s “Fourth International” stand only quantitatively to the left of the SWP; they are just more critical within the same framework. Healy’s *Workers Press* of 12 Sept. concludes, “There must be a preparation for class action to defend Allende’s victory and his election programs to meet this danger.” And the U.S. Workers League states: “There is only one road and that is the revolutionary road of the October Revolution.... As a step in this understanding the workers must hold Allende

to his promises...” (*Bulletin*, 21 Sept.)—invoking the October Revolution, they demand the masses should compel an essentially bourgeois government to achieve socialism!

Not surprisingly, during the 1917 February Revolution in Russia the vacillating resident Bolsheviks, including Stalin, came up with the very formula the WL has rediscovered: to support the provisional government “insofar as it struggles against reaction or counter-revolution.” Lenin telegraphed his protest from abroad: “Our tactic; absolute lack of confidence; no support to the new government; suspect Kerensky especially; arming of the proletariat the sole guarantee; ... no rapprochement with other parties.” All we could add today is to repeat Trotsky’s fundamental conclusion about our epoch that the time has never been more urgent for the building of the international party imbued with Leninist aims and Lenin’s determination.



LETTER TO THE IKD AND SPARTACUS-BL

14 March 1972

Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands and the Spartacus-BL split from the Gruppe Internationale Marxisten in 1969. At this time Spartacus-BL was a minority faction of the IKD. This letter, written with W. Moore, was printed in SL Internal Information Bulletin, whole No. 14, June 1972.

Germany

To the IKD and the Spartacus-BL:

Dear Comrades,

We are writing to inform you of our interim views following intensive discussion in our Political Bureau on the split in the Spartacus-KJO between the Bolfra-Komfra bloc and the IKD and its supporters at the 11-12 December national conference leading to the publication of the counterposed organs, *Spartacus-BL* and *Spartacus-KJO*.

We note that the Spartacus-BL carried an advertisement for our press in its Dec.-Jan. issue, No.25 and in February published a German reprint of our article from *Spartacist*, “Chinese Menshevism.” Similarly the IKD-supported Spartacus-KJO reprinted in its February issue, No.26, the first part of our article from *Workers Vanguard*, “The End of the Black Power Era.” We are of course appreciative for this publicizing of our press and circulation of our views among German militants, but this activity in the light of your unfortunate split makes it more urgent for us to arrive at a definitive political estimation of the split and of the

groupings which emerged from it. In any case we are concerned with the future of the revolutionary movement in Germany as a necessary aspect of our Marxist responsibility as internationalists committed to the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution. We also recognize that your split, like any serious division, has undoubtedly generated extreme heat and deep antagonism. This too makes it necessary for us to proceed in an open, careful, clear and above all political fashion, avoiding to the best of our ability any suggestion of maneuverism, false partisanship or any other evidence of the terrible destructive policy of playing one German organization against the other for some alleged advantage on our part.

Moreover, we do not doubt that for the most serious elements among you, the present split is but one of many splits and regroupments in the struggle to re-create a revolutionary vanguard party of the German workers. (Just think of the history of the Russian and Polish movements from the turn of the century through the Russian

revolution!) Hence among yourselves and between you and us, the most rigorous subordination of hostility and maneuver must prevail so that we will not poison our future struggles to the detriment of the revolutionary outcome.

II.

We would like to offer you our tentative and still partial estimation of the present split to the extent we have been able to understand it. We have arrived at an *interim* policy which is subject to change as we are still working on corrected translations of the main public texts from the split. And we will study the evolution of the emergent groups, hopefully benefited by our discussions with your organizations along the way.

We are under the impression that at your split conference two questions predominated, the lesser one being the partly political question of organizational relationships, specifically of the IKD to the Spartacus youth group. When our delegation of comrades Gordon, Nelson and Robertson visited Berlin last year for discussions with the IKD leadership and others in the IKD-Spartacus we noted then that the failure to develop the Leninist norm of youth-party relations was apparent and we argued that this question could well be a source of trouble. The IKD seemed to regard itself as a sort of special theoretical auxiliary to Spartacus which, while reflecting the real process of the crystallization of the more experienced and conscious Spartacus comrades, failed to take account of the necessary transformation of such a leading group into a democratic-centralist vanguard in relationship to the Spartacus youth organization. Hence as things stood should counterposed majorities develop within the Spartacus and the IKD respectively, no regulated mechanism for factional political struggle existed and any such difference could only be resolved by organizational negotiation, capitulation or split rather than the possibility, following debate and decision, of the disciplined subordination of the minority of the IKD-Spartacus movement—as a separately organized, but united whole—to the majority. We have attempted in the developing relationship of the SL with the Revolutionary Communist Youth to codify the experience of the Leninist period of the Third International in our jointly approved document regulating SL/RCY relations. This document has been translated into German and circulated among your comrades.

We understand that both Spartacus-IKD and BL justify some variant of “freedom of criticism” by which is apparently meant that dissidents are free to make public propaganda at variance with

that of the organization. If this is true it too is a departure from Leninism sure to breed numerous splits and to render the movement incapable of intervening as revolutionists in the class struggle.

We also understand that the KJO (Communist Youth Organization) orientation advanced by the IKD is central to your dispute and that involved in this question are major questions such as the character of the epoch, the validity of the Transitional Program and the revolutionary potential of the German working class as a whole. It is possible that present conditions in Germany justify the KJO as a tactic should it be that the apprentices are much more accessible to revolutionary propaganda and organization than the older workers just now. But as a strategic orientation the KJO systematically extended to its conclusions could only be a denial of Marxism and of a proletarian revolutionary perspective.

The orientation of revolutionary Marxists to the working class as such necessarily poses sharply the question of the SPD. In our view, the continuing validity of the Transitional Program in the epoch of imperialism (i.e., the *eve* of proletarian revolution and the *highest* stage of capitalism) provides the fundamentals, politically and methodologically, for determining an approach to the SPD once its class character is determined. The KJO position is related to the appraisal of the SPD in both an objective and subjective fashion. So far as we know both factions in your split characterize the SPD as a bourgeois technocratic party (akin to the U.S. Democratic Party). We consider this not merely wrong but that without a correct position on this question there cannot be a viable strategy for proletarian revolution in Germany. Only the low level of the class struggle in post-war Germany inhibits a manifest recognition that the SPD is a reformist (i.e., both bourgeois and proletarian) party which must at some point be destroyed. If the revolutionists ignore it, the SPD will employ its historically evolved authority among the workers to disrupt and defeat the next revolutionary onslaught. The SPD’s destruction must be sought at the appropriate junctures through intervention to sharpen inner differentiation to resolve, i.e., split it into its essential bourgeois and proletarian elements, the latter organized into or led by a Leninist party. Only then will the SPD have been reduced, if still existent, to an *external* obstacle to social revolution.

The attempt to identify the SPD as akin concretely to the U.S. Democrats is ludicrous: the Young Democrats consists overwhelmingly of lawyers and professional people, not apprentices, centrists, Maoists, etc.; the Democrats receive

sometime electoral endorsement from the distinctly separate top bodies of the trade union movement, labor leaders are in no way cadres of the Democratic Party and are but one of numerous pressure groups upon the Democrats; it is therefore grotesque and inconceivable to try to visualize the Democratic Party with factory factions running slates competing in shop steward elections. These are but a few empirical contrasts. Regarding the SPD, to put it most generally, only great historical events involving enormous mass participation can definitively transform mass organizations. The creation of the mass KPD out of the fusion with the Independents partly demolished the SPD but the incapacity of the KPD facing the rise of Nazism and the Stalinists' association with the victorious Russian army strengthened the role of the SPD within the German working class.

We recognize the Leninist-Trotskyist distinction between first determining the working class character of a political party and then settling the question of entry. Moreover, given the rigid bureaucratic structure of the SPD, lack of strong internal tendencies toward polarization, i.e., minimal current opportunity for intervention within it and the urgent other tasks of revolutionists, entry to assist in splitting the SPD does not appear to be justified as a current tactic. But at each point the Marxists must have a line toward the SPD. With the SPD in a governing coalition as at present, we should note that the SPD has suppressed its inner class contradiction by limiting its working program to that acceptable to its purely bourgeois ally. Hence we should tell the German working class voter that the SPD merits no support however critical until it breaks from its coalitionist practice, i.e., can in government become itself responsible for its conduct. Should the SPD campaign as the British Labour Party does on its own (except of course when the bourgeoisie really needs it as in the National Government of 1931 and during World War II) then our advocacy of electoral support should be along the lines of, e.g., "Brandt Out! SPD to Power!"

The SPD question possesses a certain subjective significance for both Spartacus-KJO and BL. The cadres of each are evidently very young, mainly student and essentially originated in the German New Left. The ability of comrades from such a milieu to come to grips with the realities of proletarian revolutionary struggle is an index of the decisiveness of their break from the swamp of petty-bourgeois anarchic, youth vanguardist and Third World fantasizing. Generally among groups springing from these origins the question

of evaluating the class character of deformed workers states as well as "deformed" workers parties is a litmus test of their grasp of Trotskyism.

III.

Taking all of the above into account, tentatively it would appear that Spartacus-BL stands closer to us, but given the rapid political mobility of the youthful German revolutionary left this appearance even if true is not necessarily definitive. Further, it is not now clear to us that the differences between the two German organizations are more than quantitative from our standpoint. Therefore as an interim policy on our part we propose in a fraternal fashion to continue seeking verbal and written discussions with each group, fully protecting any confidences of one group from the other. We hope to continue publishing fundamental SL documents in German and offering them equally and generally for distribution in Germany.

Surely our policy, which we find forced upon us by your split, must be deemed highly unsatisfactory by each of your groups to the extent either is concerned with the views of the SL. However we see no alternative to it at present other than an abstentionist anti-international withdrawal from concern about the German movement or the Pabloist organizational practices of surreptitious intrigue—quite in contradiction to our programmatic aspiration of struggling to rebuild the Fourth International, i.e., upon principled foundations.

To reiterate: Ours is an interim policy based upon either the unclarity in your split or present deficiencies in our understanding or both. We hope you will assist us with written materials, discussions with our representatives and if possible with your representatives here in the U.S. in order to overcome the ambiguity which we feel. Incidentally we have scheduled the Third National Conference of the SL over the Labor Day weekend of 2-4 Sept. 1972.

At such a point that developments in the German movement or our understanding of it leads to a qualitative differentiation between your groups in our eyes, our first act will be to openly and publicly declare our position and its political basis.

Fraternally,

For the Political Bureau, SL/US:

W. Moore (German representative, SL/US)

James Robertson (National Chairman, SL/US)

copies to: RCL (Britain), Samarakkody (Ceylon), Long (SL/NZ), Sharpe (French representative, SL/US), Central Committee, SL/US

A TALK ON THE LABOR PARTY QUESTION

5 November 1972

This slightly edited version of a presentation delivered at an internal youth educational was published as Young Communist Bulletin No. 3, 1976 and reprinted in a Spartacist pamphlet, On the United Front, January 1996.

This report is intended to be a presentation of a series of interlocked home truths and a comment on the search for deviations, of which in a hardened way we seem to have discovered only two. Its origins are that in the West Coast Labor Day Pre-Conference Discussion the issue of the Labor Party quite thoroughly dominated the discussion. A great deal of uncertainty, confusion and a very considerable spread of opinion on the Labor Party question presented themselves there, and we had to thrash them out.

At this point the slogan which I have been defending and want to defend here is the slogan "Dump the bureaucrats! For a Workers Party based on the trade unions." Another slogan which was debated and which presents an aspect of rank and file-ism, of syndicalism, would be the slogan "For a Labor Party without bureaucrats." Now that slogan lacks the contradictory tension of a struggle and suggests simply rank and file-ism and possibly, by implication, the development of an organized mass workers party counterposed to the trade unions: perhaps the political equivalent of the red unions of the CP's third period.

I gather that on the Coast there is perhaps a comrade who objects to the first part of the slogan, "Dump the bureaucrats," and just wants to have a slogan "For a Labor Party based on the trade unions." In New York there is a comrade who just wants to have the slogan "Dump the bureaucrats! For a Communist Party."

There is a great deal of confusion. The confusion centers along two separate axes, and that's why there's a great deal of confusion, or rather, complicated confusion. Furthermore, in the last debate in New York, I spent all my time on the decisions of the Third and Fourth Congresses. I'm going to evade that this time and simply point out that the Labor Party slogan is the current American version of the issue of the united front. It's posed in the absence of a massive political expression of reformism or Stalinism in the United States; rather, with the organization of industrial unions with a deeply committed pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy, it is toward them that the issue of proletarian unity and the process of communist triumph in struggle is centered on the Labor Party question. The axes are twofold....

There are two axes of confusion over the Labor Party. One is the importance of realizing that this is a propagandistic demand for us today *which has no relationship to what will happen in the future*. That is, today, the Workers League to the contrary notwithstanding, the idiots who think that Meany who does not like Negroes, homosexuals or abortion laws is therefore building a Labor Party in order to carry out these anti-capitalist demands—it's nonsense. There has to be a sense of proportion, which the Communist Party originally lost in 1924.

In the first place, the Labor Party is not the issue for propaganda; the workers government is. Now, we stumbled into this. If you read the early issues of *Workers' Action*, you will find out that the final, triumphant, ultimate statement of position in the *Workers' Action* program was for a Labor Party. Uh-uh. We are for a workers government, in the unions, in the plants and in our general education and approaching students with the conception of proletarian power. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a formulation which suffers certain problems. A popular understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that the workers are going to be put into concentration camps, like in Russia. If you talk of some kind of socialism, you get an image of happy Sweden maintaining its high alcoholism and suicide rates through victoriously staying out of two world wars. [Laughter] But what should be clear in *every* way, over every kind of issue, is that the working people need their own government.

But—how do you get a government? That implies a political party of the working people—a class party. And it is as a subordinate element of the achievement of a workers government, which is an algebraic expression, as the saying goes, for the concrete realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that they require a workers or a Labor Party, which in its concrete, arithmetical expression is a revolutionary Labor Party: a Bolshevik party.

That's a propaganda presentation.

Now what's really going to happen in this country? Who knows?... Only Lyn Marcus. [Laughter] I'll give you some variants.

One is: We have an unpolitical, extremely combative working class, with a bureaucracy that at

present and without the aid of a thousand YSAers, is incapable at any serious level of struggle of controlling this class. Part of the residue of the enormous class struggles in Europe is the presence of an extremely sophisticated, able, political bureaucracy in depth. Can you imagine the capacity of a George Meany to cope with an American general strike the way that the CP did in France in '68? It's impossible. Which is where Jack Barnes and his gang think they've got their opening.

So it's entirely possible now—as indicated in the fundamental premises of the Transformation Memo—now that American hegemony has been lost, reducing the United States to merely the most powerful (but very effective) of the capitalist/imperialists, and with the fundamental preconditions for severe social crisis laid down on the planet, that the American working class may be impelled into massive political actions without a party, without a revolutionary party, without any party at all, and overwhelm the bureaucracy. That will be in the best case a fruitful catastrophe, rather akin to the Paris Commune and the 1905 Revolution. It is not something, therefore, that we work for. But as a smaller propagandistic group, we'll do our job. If it comes to that, if we are unable to have the capacity as revolutionists to place ourselves at the head of insurgent masses, we will fight anyhow, even if we have to go through an experience as the Spartakusbund did in 1918/1919. The next time around it will be different, then.

That's a possibility—that's if the motion at the base in the class accelerates.

It is possible to go to the other extreme—given an orderly, stretched-out intensification of social crisis, the capacity of the growing communist movement to keep ahead of developments, a thing which had begun to suggest itself classically in 1934 in this country when three ostensibly communist organizations led three city-wide general strikes (in Toledo, San Francisco and in Minneapolis): the possibility that the communist party could simply grow in linear fashion.

The other possibility would be the realization of a Labor Party either of a revolutionary or of a reformist character. That is, under the accumulated mounting pressures of social struggle, the bureaucracy begins to be torn asunder through the pressure from below, from developing class antagonisms, and it becomes stretched. With a successful communist agitation at the same time, the Labor Party could be formed in what will be a very convulsive act.

What is behind so much of the conceptual garbage that the Workers League puts out is that the Labor Party is an easy thing. (By the way, there's

a book by Henry Pelling, *Origins of the Labor Party*, which is useful for guidelines.) If you study the history of the achievement of political class consciousness by *any* proletariat, you'll see that it is a convulsive, historically monumental act—sometimes compressed, sometimes stretched out—but always enormous in character, even if the outcome after the dust begins to settle is the restabilization of a pro-capitalist bureaucracy. The impact of ripping the mass of the working people away from capitalism—so that the assertion is: we need a society in which the working people govern, the productive property is nationalized—is enormous, and on top of this is laid the reformist and Stalinist labor skates. That will be a convulsive period in American history, substantially larger than that of the sit-down period from '35 to '37.

But what will happen bears no particular relationship to our present advocacy, which is a way to pose the question of working people becoming the government and developing the political instrument to achieve this, to link up that objective fundamental need with the present consciousness of the bulk of trade-union-conscious American workers. The attempts to telescope with “what ifs,” as though there is a particular relationship, a linear connection, between what we say today and what will happen in mass motion, is the source of a great deal of confusion and error.

I left open the question of the outcome, of the character of the Labor Party in the third case. In the Bay Area somebody said, “Ah, but how can there be a revolutionary Labor Party? Obviously by definition it's reformist.” And immediately there came to mind the examples of the transformations of the Italian and French mass Socialist Parties into Communist Parties and, more engagingly, because of the similarity in name and origins, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Majority) is commonly taken to be a revolutionary Labor Party. But that depends on the relationship of forces in the development between the revolutionists and the reformists who associate themselves with such an insurgent move on the political plane—approximately the same way that John L. Lewis and a section of the AFL bureaucracy did with the CIO industrial organizing in 1935.

So that's one kind of confusion.

The other axis of confusion is over the question of why advocate a Labor Party and what is the relationship between the advocacy of a Labor Party and its political character? Will it represent the general historic interests of the proletariat, i.e., be a revolutionary Labor Party, or will it represent special, partial, narrow, limited, aristocratic, chauvinist and nationalist appetites within

the proletariat, i.e., be a reformist Labor Party? And therefore, why advocate a Labor Party at all since it seems to have a kaleidoscopic character?

There is, of course, a perfectly good circumstance in which our present propagandist and limitedly agitational advocacy of a Labor Party would be abandoned. And that is if we began to see that a communist party began to be recognized by advanced sections of the proletariat, not even very large ones but significant layers, and had the capacity to struggle in a linear way, by bootstrap operation, to become the authentic and literal vanguard of the class. At that juncture we would probably see a section of the bureaucracy form a Labor Party very fast in an attempt to head this off. The progressive wing of the bureaucracy would counterpose the development of a Labor Party. And necessarily, from its birth, its essential purpose would be that of an anti-communist Labor Party. We would fight such a thing in every way. We would try to united-front it to death, we would denounce it to death, we would raid it to death, we would do everything we could to smash it in the egg at every step.

But that is a far cry from the present situation. It is literally not possible by qualitative orders of magnitude—not just one, but qualitative orders of magnitude—to advance at this juncture the Spartacist League as the answer to the felt mass problems of the proletariat. But those felt mass problems exist. And what does exist in a mass way is the trade-union movement. Therefore one can point out (and should!) that the trade-union movement, the economic organization of a section of the working class, has the responsibility to offer the political as well as the economic answers to the plight of the working people. And so it is an address made to that one institution that exists in the United States—the organized labor movement.

Now I've got a couple of other points to make in this connection. To go back to the workers government slogan, which is the purpose of the Labor Party agitation, we should be clear what is meant by a workers government. It is nothing other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. There have appeared some speculations or projections, either in a hypothetical way or at one point as an ephemeral possibility in history, that a workers government is not simply a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Interestingly enough, in the formulations of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, where there was a vagueness and an abstraction about the projection of the conditions under which a workers government would be achieved, both Hal Draper and Joe Hansen zeroed in on that

material—as they did on a phrase in the *Transitional Program*—in order to “prove” that from the British Labour Party government of 1945 to Ben Bella in Algeria to Fidel Castro’s Cuban government—all were workers governments.

The concrete possibilities that Trotsky posed in the *Transitional Program* were roughly of the following formulation: It is conceivable that under mass revolutionary pressure reformist elements might go much further in the direction of a workers government than they ever conceived they would at the outset. That was a “what if” question, a generalization on the following condition that took place in the Russian Revolution between February and October: The slogan of the Bolsheviks addressed to the Provisional Government—which was a coalition government of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, the minuscule Trudoviks of Kerensky and the Cadet Party, that is, the Constitutional Democrats, the effective liberal bourgeois party—was the slogan “Down with the ten capitalist ministers, form a government purely of the workers parties,” coupled of course with the social and political and economic demands that the Bolsheviks were raising. Posed in a “what if” way, the question is, what if under mass pressure the Cadets had been thrown out of the government? You would have a murky period at that point, something not very stable, in the context of what already is inherently a historical episode of a dual power situation between a bourgeois government and the existence of organized nationwide soviets. What that would represent is not a workers government separate and apart from the dictatorship of the proletariat, but an episode immediately on the way. But of course the centrists make much out of non-viable episodes possible in the histories of revolutions in order to try to construct a sort of third camp between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the administration of a bourgeois state by the reformists.

Now another question's been raised, just lately; a useful question has been posed by comrade Seymour's article on the Labor Party, I think, because it's not a clear-cut case and it shows some problems in actual application. And that's the experience of the Communist Party in 1923-24 with the Farmer-Labor Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and the general issue of the possibility of a bloc between the communists and, as Cannon put it, the progressive section of the labor movement. You know, apparently it is never too late to learn something, because after 25 years, while reading Seymour's piece, it suddenly occurred to me, Farmer-Labor Party—wait a minute, that's a *two-class party, we're opposed to a two-class party*,

what the hell are we doing in a two-class party situation? “One step forward....” Furthermore, the thing has got to be reformist because what kind of interests of both workers and farmers could be contained within a common program? The farmers produce their commodities, they sell them themselves, they’re interested in high prices, squeezing out the middlemen, getting to the export market directly, all this kind of stuff is the economic program of the farmers. Sometimes of course farmers can be pretty restless and make a lot of trouble. But those interests of the workers that you could possibly put together could only be extremely narrow, the circumscribed interests of the American working class, even if you just sat down and said, “Let’s cook up a Farmer-Labor Party.” Necessarily it would have to be episodic and limited in a reformist way because there are a lot of antagonisms between petty- and not so petty-bourgeois producers, which is what farmers are, and the proletariat.

And that’s the key to what was wrong in 1924 with the Communist bloc with the Chicago Federation of Labor. From the outset it was pre-ordained that the struggle was going to be for a *reformist* Labor Party, i.e., throwing in the farmers to boot. And it was on that basis that a bloc was constructed then: that the Communists would simulate a reformist party hoping to maneuver on the inside, courtesy of brother Pepper. It’s on that basis and probably from that experience that Shachtman wrote his excellent article in 1935, where he asked, “Who needs a second-class, fake, reformist, hidden Communist Party?”

Now we, for our part, should have no reason to be opposed to a bloc with a section of the labor movement, including the labor officialdom, providing that bloc goes in the direction we want it to go. But looking back to 1923, on what basis for heaven’s sake is this Chicago Federation of Labor going to give us what we want? That is, an agreement to struggle for a Labor Party together in the first place, and in the second place to struggle with each other over the character of its program and its cadres. On that basis we’ll make a bloc with people. If Meany says, “I’m for a Labor Party—you guys are for a Labor Party,” fine, we’ll all go and organize for a Labor Party and we’ll fight like hell to determine its program.

Yeah, we’d accept such a bloc and we’d fight—we’d seek such a bloc. The problem with a bloc is the nice old phrase of Bismarck that every alliance consists of two components—the horse and the rider. [Laughter] So that I do not know how we would realize the bloc because I’m afraid our

projected horse would bolt. And the Communist Party clearly was doing the donkey work—or proposing simulating doing the donkey work for the trade-union officialdom—except that they also wanted organizational control by the Communists plus a reformist program. This is not in aid of anything, and that’s the basic reason why they got such a mess out of it.

So that in reviewing the historical experience—we ain’t *ever* for a Farmer-Labor Party—we *oppose* it. But a Farmer-Labor Party—it’s not going to happen in America. An interesting point that James Burnham made in 1938: He said, “Comrades, the *Transitional Program* says that we should be for a workers and farmers government in the United States.” But he observed already then, I believe, that there were more dentists than farmers in the United States, and therefore why not a workers and dentists government? [Laughter] Comrade Gordon waxes irate with me because I find the formula of a workers and “x” government very useful while on national tour. You know, there’s a workers and students government if you’re speaking on a campus; you go out to the military base, it’s a workers and soldiers government, you know. And you gradually move through all sections of the population. I suppose in Berkeley a few years ago it would have been a workers and women’s government. The final achievement is one that boggled my *own* mind. The Argentine Pabloists came out a few years ago for a workers and people’s government. [Laughter]

Well, we’re for a workers and “x” government, all right; the problem with motley America is that “x” stands for a wide variety. But behind that is a truism: that the dictatorship of the proletariat will be centrally, but not simply or purely, proletarian. There is a wide layer of oppressed sections in American society—racially, ethnically, socially oppressed, ranging from old people to Latins, blacks, students, soldiers. This is quite real, it’s quite true, although a workers and people’s government is not exactly the formulation that one wants. But it senses something that’s particularly important: If one says a labor movement or a Labor Party right now, there is very good reason to see it right now in the most encrusted, aristocratic, racist, chauvinist, George Meany-like fashion. It’s extremely important and one of the reasons for the formulation “Dump the bureaucrats! For a Workers Party!” There’s no difference in conception between a “Workers Party based on the trade unions” and a “Labor Party based on the trade unions,” except that the terminology projects a somewhat different conception.

IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM

February 1973

Excerpts from a speech to the 9-11 February 1973 national conference of the West German Spartacus (Bolshevik-Leninist). The full text of the speech is printed in the German edition of Spartacist No. 1, Spring 1974. This excerpt is reprinted in the Spartacist pamphlet, Lenin and the Vanguard Party, 1978.

We see two parallel problems internationally among those who profess to be Trotskyist. One is not yours. That is the formal Bolshevism with all of the formal lessons properly assimilated, represented by such formations as the Spanish POUM, the French OCI, the Bolivian POR. The problem, and it is not a definitively closed question, is that while these comrades have mastered quite fully in a way that you have not the forms of a Bolshevik organization, they have minimized the content. They do not see the united front and all of its related phenomena—that is, entrism into other reformist workers formations, regroupment processes and the like—as the way in which, to quote Trotsky, “the proletarian base should be set against the bourgeois top.” Rather, they came to separate the united front from the party, expecting, for example in France, that the Socialist and Communist parties would somehow, by coming together organizationally, achieve revolutionary proletarian pasts. They cancel out the role of the Bolsheviks.

We see a somewhat different problem with your organization in particular, and that is a tendency to go back in form and political outlook to the Russian Social Democracy as it was around about 1903. To the extent that some of you do this in ignorance, it can be overcome through struggle. But those of you who deliberately ignore the experience of the October Revolution, the founding of the Communist International and all that came after—the first four congresses of the Comintern, the struggle of the Trotskyist Left Opposition—those of you who would turn your backs on this are already, in the egg, opportunist little Kautskys.

Any variant of the Kautskyist conception of the “party of the whole class” is a willfully non-revolutionary and ultimately counterrevolutionary position. The latest and fullest representative of this species of revisionists is Max Shachtman. The last major article that he ever wrote was entitled “American Communism: A Reexamination of the Past.” He finds the original sin of communism in the splits to the left from the Social Democracy that took place during and after World War I, creating a division in the political expression of the proletariat. He finds the cause of these splits in a change in the understanding of the role of reform-

mism, of opportunism, on the part of revolutionary socialists within the working-class movement.

Shachtman quotes Lenin very favorably through the period of about 1908. In particular, he observes that if the revolutionaries had only followed the rule of “freedom of criticism, unity in action,” the unity of the proletarian party could have been preserved. He argues that at that time Lenin had an understanding of opportunism as a transient, ephemeral, secondary aspect of the workers movement. In particular, he praises Lenin for advocating that in those local areas where the Bolsheviks were in the minority they should subordinate themselves to the Mensheviks and vote for the Cadet [Constitutional Democrats] party. (Where the Bolsheviks had the majority, Lenin held, they should either vote for social-democratic candidates or, if given no other choice, abstain.) Shachtman, because he had become a social democrat, does not go into the reason for the evolution in the views of the Bolshevik faction. He merely describes the change in the Leninist position as a kind of original sin.

What we are dealing with in the period from the founding of *Iskra* to the founding of the Bolshevik Party in 1912 is the transformation of the Bolshevik faction from a revolutionary social-democratic into an embryonic communist organization. The model for the Russian revolutionary social democrats in the early period was the German Social Democracy. In the determination of the Bolshevik wing to pursue a revolution against tsarism, their political practice ran ahead of their theoretical model. And, of course, their organizational practice lagged even further behind and was highly empirical under the clandestine conditions.

It was possible for Lenin during the period of the reunification of the Russian Social Democracy, 1905-1907, to draw conclusions about the discipline of a party of reformists and revolutionaries which would be rejected out of hand by any Leninist today. That does not make us smarter than Marx or Lenin, it merely means that we are able to face current political questions in the light of their experience. The truth is historically conditioned; that is, the outlook of the Communist movement of the first four congresses of the Communist

International rested upon a historic and successful upheaval of the revolutionary proletariat.

A comparable theoretical breakthrough and generalization accompanied this massive revolutionary achievement. It is as though the theoretical outlook of the proletarian vanguard in the period 1919-23 in the International stood atop a mountain. But since that time, from the period of the Trotskyist Left Opposition until his death and afterward, the proletariat has mainly witnessed defeats and the revolutionary vanguard has either been shrunk or its continuity in many countries broken. One cannot separate the ability to know the world from the ability to change it, and our capacity to change the world is on a very small scale compared to the heroic days of the Communist International.

One of the great achievements of the Bolsheviks was to recognize that a political split in the working class is the precondition for proletarian revolution. The Bolsheviks had achieved this by 4 August 1914, but they had not generalized it either theoretically or internationally. The German revolutionary left of the time paid with the loss of its leaders, Luxemburg and Liebknecht, and a lost revolution for its failure to have assimilated this lesson.

Workerism and “Freedom of Criticism”

We presented to you, comrades, in our written greetings to your conference, a certain definition of our understanding of the Leninist form of organization: “We state that the fundamental principle for communists is that one struggles among one’s comrades to gain a majority for one’s program, and that anyone who seeks to mobilize backward forces and alien class elements from outside a revolutionary Marxist organization in order to struggle for ascendancy inside that organization is no communist.” To depart from this conception would immediately lead to the organization of the backward sections of the class against the party, especially its majority. I’m speaking in connection with the slogan “freedom of criticism, unity of action” employed in the united Menshevik-Bolshevik party of 1906. In the long run it necessarily leads to dissolving the party back into the class as a whole.

In the United States, I am acquainted with a particular species of workerism, the semi-syndicalists such as the Ellens group (related to Lutte Ouvrière) and the Leninist Faction (LF) majority, who have a conception that the working class in its natural condition has a pure proletarian essence. Now there’s a very good book called *The Making of the English Working Class* by E.P.

Thompson, and in the opening paragraphs he makes the observation that the working class cannot be described as a class detached from capitalist society. It can only be seen in the context, not only of the economics, but of the social relations of society as a whole. There are backward sections of the working class. The workers who support the Social Democracy in most countries are relatively advanced, as is the case with the workers who support the Stalinist parties where they are mass parties.

In a working class such as that in the United States, large sections of the workers are very backward indeed. But they are backward from the standpoint of the historic interests represented by the proletarian vanguard. They are forward in terms of bourgeois ideas. Religion, alcoholism, male chauvinism and the most virulent forms of racism are predominant manifestations in the absence of class struggle and without the presence of a proletarian vanguard. The workerists refuse to see all this and instead see a pure, uncontaminated, isolated proletariat. At the same time they see the vanguard party as a mixture of radical workers and radical intellectuals who may not be so declassed.

The principal party internationally of the International Socialists (IS), the British organization of Tony Cliff, has lately become workerist. The IS, as a collection of the world’s most perfect centrists, avidly follow political fads. Until a few years ago they were very pro-Labour Party and called their newspaper the *Labour Worker*. Today they are very much opposed to the British Labour Party, denying that it has any working-class character, and now call their paper the *Socialist Worker*. This by way of a preliminary to a current view of Tony Cliff.

Wanting to unite with the soul of the workers (as against the ugly Labour Party, which he once worshipped), he has written an essay called “Trotsky on Substitutionism” [in the IS pamphlet *Party and Class*], from which I’d like to read you a quote:

“Since the revolutionary party cannot have interests apart from the class, all the party’s issues of policy are those of the class and they should therefore be thrashed out in the open in its presence. The freedom of discussion which exists in a factory meeting, which aims at unity of action after decisions are taken, should apply to the revolutionary party. This means that all discussions on basic issues of policy should be discussed in the light of day, in the open press. Let the mass of the workers take part in the discussion. Put pressure on the party, its apparatus, its leadership.”

It’s a little awkward to know what to say about

that. The idea that the whole class, in all its sectional, racial, national backwardness, is to be the jury to decide questions of revolutionary strategy is appalling. In a trade union, which is a kind of economic united front, or in a political united front it is of course necessary for all of the participants who act to offer freely their criticism. But the idea that workers who follow priests, workers who are Stalinists, workers who belong to social-democratic parties should put pressure on in order to determine the policy of the revolutionary Marxists is an idea that will maintain the power of the bourgeoisie until a thermonuclear bomb eliminates the question.

“Exceptions” to Democratic Centralism

In our greetings to your conference, we spoke of certain exceptional circumstances in connection with the application of democratic centralism among revolutionaries. Among the exceptional circumstances are when the party form does not centrally correspond with the revolutionary Marxist program. In the period at the end of and just after World War I, several large parties of the Socialist International broke apart, with big sections, often majorities, going over to the Third International. France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Italy and the United States come to mind. We also grabbed the left wing of the Polish PPS. In the period of this transition, there was just such a separation of party and program.

Another comparable circumstance would be where the revolutionists have entered in a reformist or centrist political formation. There, too, we would struggle for the maximum freedom of public discussion and the minimum unity in action. Still another exceptional circumstance would be when the division between the internal and external has become diffuse, as in truly mass parties, especially those in power. The third case comes under a document that I was just handed entitled “On the Principle of Democratic Centralism: Freedom of Criticism, Unity of Action.” Trotsky is quoted as writing, “The entire history of Bolshevism is one of the free struggle of tendencies and factions.” This is a perfectly true quotation, but it is misleading because everywhere in that period (as even Barbara Gregorich of the LF, who did research on it, admits) Trotsky spoke of *internal* freedom of discussion.

Here’s a quotation which makes that clear. In the Trotsky *Writings 1932-1933*, speaking of the Russian Oppositionists, he says: “They were subjected to persecution only for having criticised the policy of the leading faction within the limits of internal criticism that had constituted the vital

element of Bolshevik Party democracy.” Also in the paper that I was handed there’s another quotation taken from the Transitional Program. It says, “Ohne innere Demokratie gibt es keine revolutionäre Erziehung.” Now “ohne innere Demokratie” sounds to me like “without inner democracy.”

But the list of exceptional circumstances has not been exhausted. There was the projected split of Shachtman and Burnham from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1940. It cut the SWP in half on the eve of World War II. Many of the youth that followed Shachtman and Burnham believed that they were involved in no revisionism, but were only going to build a bigger, better, faster revolutionary party. Trotsky and Cannon, in an effort to secure a little time in the framework of formal unification, made very substantial concessions in an attempt to retain the minority. There was, of course, no stopping of the minority, but Trotsky’s majority made it very clear that these were episodic, special concessions in an attempt to give some of those in the minority a chance under easy organizational conditions to reconsider. Just as you might have wanted to make special concessions to the IKD when they walked out as a large minority. But even a special internal bulletin, much less the public presentation of differences, is not a stable or healthy condition of inner-party life.

I was in an organization which had such organizational guarantees as a permanent fixture. It was the Young Socialist League, the Shachtmanite youth group in 1954-57. The Shachtmanites had put many very democratic statements about “freedom of criticism” in their organizational rules in order to appeal to liberals who were afraid of totalitarian Bolshevism. Nobody ever used these rules until a left wing formed three years later. We then began to publish the left-wing bulletin—not only internal, but a public bulletin of our own. It could have had no other meaning, and was intended as a split bulletin. When the fight came to a showdown, they had to pass 22 amendments to their constitution. But of course these new restrictions were only for the troublesome Trotskyists. The right-wing social-democratic elements could continue to practice freedom of criticism.

This gets to the core of the question. Why, why, why do you want to take your differences outside your organization, to rally its enemies against your organization? Shachtman wanted to. The American radical liberals had turned very sharply against Russia after the Hitler-Stalin pact. That section of the SWP that was sensitive to this petty-bourgeois public opinion wanted to prove that they weren’t as bad as the other Trotskyists. And

in ordinary times that is always the way it is with those who want to take their troubles outside a revolutionary party.

In times of great revolutionary turmoil the mass of the working class may run ahead of a somewhat sluggish revolutionary party. Lenin faced this situation a couple of times between the February and the October revolutions. When he was faced with

conservative obstruction on the Central Committee, he threatened to take his case to the workers. This was not freedom of criticism within the party: it meant *split* and the creation of a second party, and Lenin knew it. To split is no crime, providing that there is sufficient political clarity and necessity to make a split. It is part of the living political process.



ADDITION TO *MARXIST BULLETIN* No. 8 PREFACE

8 August 1973

Adopted by SL/U.S. Political Bureau, 8 July 1973, and printed in the second edition of Marxist Bulletin No. 8, "Cuba and Marxist Theory," this document addresses the development of our position that Cuba became a deformed workers state with the nationalizations and liquidation of the bourgeoisie as a class in 1960.

With the passage of time, a slow drift in the appreciation of old events occurs in the Marxist movement, leading at certain points to sharp departures from what had been previously taken for granted. Sometimes what is in essence a higher and more comprehensive synthesis is arrived at with only incidental loss of particular detail known in an earlier period; and sometimes an essential grasp of reality is dissipated. Which predominates depends on considerations larger than and sometimes remote from the event under consideration.

Haston/Vern Thesis

Certainly the massive enthusing over Fidel Castro by those with pretensions to revolutionary Marxism has been today largely dispelled, or more generally, displaced. But the explanations, rationalizations and substitutes of all the centrist, revisionist and reformist currents have been no improvement. For example, miscellaneous leftist elements presently or recently in the Socialist Workers Party have lately rediscovered in old SWP bulletins the writings on Eastern Europe from the early 1950's of the Vern-Ryan tendency, a faction in Los Angeles long since dissolved into Max Shachtman's Independent Socialist League (itself long since dissolved into the Socialist Party/Social-Democratic Federation). Dennis Vern had in turn borrowed the core of his outlook from the British Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Party's majority faction led by Jock Haston, until the Hastonites liquidated essentially into right-wing Labourism. What is not necessarily appreciated today is that the Haston/Vern thesis—that wherever the Red

Army arrived at the end of World War II, by that fact that piece of land was a deformed workers state—was a felt liquidation of Trotskyism, not as logic would indicate to the Stalinists, weak in Britain and the U.S., but ultimately into the reformist reflections of one's own bourgeois order.

But Haston and Vern *did see* one aspect of the social transformation in Eastern Europe which was largely lost on the perplexed Trotskyist theoreticians of the time, such as Hansen and Germain-Mandel—namely that account must be taken of the existent armed force as an elementary consideration in seeking to understand what process is going on. But Haston and Vern stopped at only the beginning of wisdom. And they skewed that piece of wisdom besides. The given class character of the state until or unless overthrown certainly determines the direction of social development within the society which that state protects. However, in Eastern Europe the core of the state was a *Russian* army, agent of the *Russian* Stalinist degenerated workers state.

In the short run the Russian Stalinist leadership could and did exercise choice (choice not freely arrived at) as to the social outcome—hence the elementary error in the Haston/Vern syllogism "class character of the state equals domination of that class in the society" when the state (army) is Russian and the society is, for example, Austrian or Hungarian. The Russians evacuated the areas they controlled in Austria and Iran but directed the transformation of the bulk of Eastern Europe into social and political counterparts of the Soviet Union—i.e., *consolidation in the wake of Russian conquest*.

An exception was the particular but at the time not obviously noted case of Yugoslavia, whose social transformation was essentially internally arrived at. Despite the Tito-Stalin split the significance of Yugoslavia only became fully clear in the light of the Chinese and also the Cuban revolutions.

Wohlforth

The Yugoslav, Chinese and Cuban revolutions can in no way be explained in terms of a direct imposition of Russian rule—by anybody to the left of the John Birch Society, that is, with the exception of Tim Wohlforth of the Workers League/“International (Healyite) Committee.” And even Wohlforth’s tortured dogmas—that trivial parody of Marxism entitled “The Theory of Structural Assimilation” (a *Bulletin* publication of 1964)—manifestly collapsed with the author’s inability to incorporate Cuba in his schema. As Wohlforth noted in his preface:

“In the summer of 1961 I wrote a preliminary draft document on the nature of the Cuban state and the theoretical implications flowing therefrom [“Cuba and Marxist Theory” (reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* #8)—SL note]. The first discussions of this document immediately convinced me that I was utterly and totally on the wrong track. Like the SWP leadership itself, I was simply throwing together scraps of theory to ‘explain’ an impression of reality in Cuba and to justify a political conclusion—one of course far more critical of the Cuban leadership than that of the SWP majority. If I was to get to first base in understanding Cuba it became clear that I had to fit Cuba into a general theoretical understanding of postwar developments as a whole. Thus first I had to wrestle with the theoretical problems raised by East Europe, Yugoslavia and China before I could expect to get anywhere on more current developments. Ironically, the more I reached an understanding of these events the less I found them related to Cuba. So a document, which started out as an analysis of Cuba, does not even deal directly with that question. We are issuing an analysis of Cuba separately.”

Wohlforth’s “theory” boils down to the following: first, absorption of adjacent states into the Russian degenerated workers state; second, social transformation of the newly acquired region; third and finally, its release as a separate deformed workers state—all because of a “defensive expansionist” drive by the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy in response to the urgent threat from capitalist imperialism. Wohlforth even explained North Vietnam’s becoming a deformed workers state by his own version of the “domino theory”: first China was absorbed by Russia and regurgitated, then North Vietnam likewise by China.

But looking at his map Wohlforth noticed that Cuba is rather distant from Russia and an island to boot! Thus was Wohlforth left holding the position which the Workers League still, more or less shamefacedly, advances today—that the Cuban state led by Fidel Castro is capitalist. And this is presumably why the so prolific Wohlforth has left us still waiting in 1973 for the promised “separate analysis of Cuba.” (Come to think of it we haven’t noticed any recent reprinting of “The Theory of Structural Assimilation” either.)

* * *

In opposing the SWP Majority’s revisionism, our original tendency came into existence and fought for three main programmatic points in orienting to the Cuban revolution and its defense: insistence on the Permanent Revolution, i.e., the view that no essential task of the revolution could be achieved short of the victory and consolidation of a workers state; and, correspondingly, insistence on the struggle for hegemony of the working class in the revolution; together with the necessity for a conscious Trotskyist party as the proletarian vanguard to lead that struggle.

“Transitional State”?

As noted in our earlier preface, in 1961 Shane Mage—with the agreement of Wohlforth and with the disciplined support of others in our then common tendency—had advanced a politically principled but theoretically yet vague and indefensible position: that the Cuban state had no yet defined class character, that it was a “transitional state.” This viewpoint, together with the way it was imposed upon the tendency, was one of the early frictions in what finally resulted a year and a half later in the split of Wohlforth from what became the Spartacist tendency. Mage’s 1961 resolution on the Cuban question was brought, previously entirely uncirculated among the tendency, into one New York tendency meeting with the statement by Wohlforth that in any case it had to be submitted to the SWP internal bulletin the following morning. Since a possible majority of the tendency in New York and nationally considered that Cuba had already become a deformed workers state, many of us went along only out of a strong sense of tendency discipline demanded by the programmatic struggle in the SWP.

For the next immediate period the disputed question of what was *presently* the class character of the Cuban state—Mage’s “transitional state,” the bulk of the tendency’s “deformed workers state,” or (after leaving Mage’s position and a brief fling with the tendency majority’s view)

Wohlforth's "capitalist state"—tended to leave certain theoretical aspects in the shadows, in particular a precise analysis, chronologically specific, of the *earlier* periods of the Cuban revolution. These differing interpretations, while all conjuncturally consistent with our common programmatic basis, were nonetheless a source of tension within the tendency.

Then in November 1962 Wohlforth, abetted by A. Phillips and Gerry Healy, split from the tendency essentially over whether to seek a bloc with the SWP Majority to head off its threatened unification with the European Pabloists—a policy which Wohlforth/Healy sought to foist on the tendency in the guise of a debate on the nature of the SWP (see *Marxist Bulletin* #2). Our political struggle around the issues raised for the SWP's 1963 Convention and our unsuccessful fight against expulsion from the SWP (precipitated by Wohlforth's fabricated "revelations" about us to the Majority) preoccupied our tendency for a year.

In 1964 extensive oral discussion in the New York section of the tendency led to Mage's pretty much vacating his position and to an arrival by consensus at the following central proposition: Cuba became a deformed workers state with the pervasive nationalizations in the summer and fall of 1960, which liquidated the bourgeoisie as a class.

Since most of our argumentation was directed against the SWP majority, which saw Cuba as evolved from "a workers and peasants government" into a "healthy" workers state "though not yet possessing the forms of workers democracy" and led by "the unconscious Marxist, Fidel Castro" (the Joseph Hansen position), most of our verification centered upon the qualitatively deformed, i.e., Stalinist, character of the Cuban workers state: the compulsion for Castro to discover and declare that he was a "Marxist-Leninist" and for the Fidelistas to fuse with the pre-existing Cuban Stalinist party while purging it of its loyalty to the *Russian* bureaucracy; the existence of a powerful state apparatus of repression, and separate from the masses, as revealed in the massive (and quite justified) incarceration of suspect sections of Cuban society during the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion; the self-admitted bonapartist role of Fidel Castro personally in arriving at the crucial decisions in the missile crisis, a life or death matter for the whole Cuban people.

A Petty-Bourgeois Government

We took it as incontestable that the Cuban armed rebels who had originally come ashore from the Granma were in every way a *petty-*

bourgeois formation. Their militarily marginal struggle was the last straw for the Batista regime, which was hated by the masses, increasingly isolated from the upper layers of Cuban society and finally abandoned by Yankee imperialism. The rebel army which occupied Havana on 1 January 1959 continued as a politically heterogeneous petty-bourgeois formation possessing massive popular support.

Its initial coalition government with authentic liberal-bourgeois politicians took place in the context of a shattered old bourgeois state apparatus. In the course of the earlier guerrilla struggle—a species of civil war—the commanders of that rebel army had had their previous direct connections with oppositional bourgeois-liberal elements broken and had become episodically autonomous from their class (and in many cases biological) fathers, the Cuban bourgeoisie. After taking power, they were confronted by U.S. imperialism's clumsy and mounting attempts to bring them to heel through brute economic pressure upon Cuba without corresponding attempts by the contemptuous Eisenhower administration to create the conditions and connections to reknit the new rulers to the old social fabric in order to facilitate accommodation to the brutal demands of the imperialists.

No less crucial than the estrangement created by the civil war conditions between the petty-bourgeois guerrilla fighters and the bourgeois order was the absence of a class-conscious combative proletariat which would invariably have polarized these petty-bourgeois militants, drawing some to the workers' side and repelling others back into the arms of the bourgeois order. Hence the exceptional latitude available to this *petty-bourgeois government* in the face of the escalating tit-for-tat economic struggle with the American government in that period and under the enormous popular, patriotic upsurge of the undifferentiated Cuban masses.

Deformed Workers State

But when the end was reached with the economic liquidation of the Cuban bourgeoisie (far more systematic and complete than the Chinese Maoists have instituted to this day—even including nationalizing the street ice cream vendors), this petty-bourgeois government even under these most favorable conditions was unable to find a third way between labor and capital to characteristically organize a society, and by virtue of its newly acquired social position—holding a political monopoly at the head of a nationalized economy—was compelled to embrace that ersatz Marxism

which is the necessary ideological reflection of a Stalinist bureaucracy, however newly fledged.

To be sure, the existence of the Russian degenerated workers state presented the encouragement of a model and, more important, the material support which made the outcome a practicality. But in no way did the Russians or their domestic enthusiasts directly create the actual process within Cuba itself. The alliance with the Russians was an outcome of, not the precondition to, the formation of a deformed workers state in Cuba.

At no point was there a classless “transitional state” in Cuba. To repeat: in the intervening period between the shattering of the old capitalist Batista state, the compradors of American imperialism, and the consolidation of a deformed workers state, there was a petty-bourgeois government—not a class-neutral one—with the core of its power being the petty-bourgeois Rebel Army. This regime had temporarily become autonomous from the bourgeois order through the violent polarization of the guerilla struggle, moving through a period of great popular (not specifically proletarian) mass upsurge, but as yet not locked upon a nationalized economy. Moreover its existence episodically apart from the fundamental social classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—was made possible by the failure of the working class to itself pose a challenge to capitalist rule.

Hence this regime possessed the indeterminacy in outcome and tension of either the poten-

tial to regenerate and consolidate a capitalist state or for a section of that regime to lock on to the form of nationalized property and thus verify through a living process the validity of the earlier Trotskyist characterization that, viewed from a most general standpoint, the Russian Stalinist bureaucracy is in one of its central contradictory aspects—i.e., the transmission belt for the pressure of the world bourgeois order on a workers state—a petty-bourgeois formation. The decisive section of the Castroites could make the transition to the leadership of a deformed workers state because in the absence of the egalitarianism and proletarian democracy of a state directly won by the working people, they never had to transcend or fundamentally alter their own radical petty-bourgeois social appetites, but only to transform and redirect them. And parenthetically, in this is both the decisive significance and the necessity of the political revolution, approached from the Cuban experience, i.e., from a different aspect than that of the long, losing rearguard action that Trotsky fought in Russia in the 1920’s.

* * *

from Political Bureau Minutes No. 7, 8 July 1973:

“Motion: To adopt the political thrust of the addition to the preface to *Marxist Bulletin* #8. Passed

Extensions and corrections made, 8 August 1973.



DRAFT POSTSCRIPT FOR PREFACE ADDITION TO *MARXIST BULLETIN* No. 8

27 August 1973

This draft was printed in SL International Discussion Bulletin No. 2, March 1974.

[Analytical refinement in the light of summer camp, plenum and informal subsequent discussions: distinctions between “transitional state,” petty-bourgeois state, petty-bourgeois government.]

A state rests upon and struggles to defend a characteristic property form on behalf of the (thereby indicated) dominant class. In Cuba from January 1959 until fall 1961, the political-military power did not fit such settled, stable organization. There was a predominant armed force in that period, the rebel army; it was petty-bourgeois. Hence the class-neutral phrase “transitional state” is not only inapplicable but suggestive of fundamental revisionism on the class nature of

the state. A “petty-bourgeois state” in the Cuba of the 20th century world is a misnomer and a contradiction in terms. And the contradiction was in Cuba real and concrete. The armed force in question wavered and shifted on the social direction in which to point its guns. This petty-bourgeois force, faced with the only two practical and conceivable modes of societal organization—capitalist ownership and accumulation or nationalized and collective property—had to choose. And until that choice had been definitively resolved, the fundamentally contradictory government did not and could not function as a stable power. The ambivalence characteristic of

the Cuban rebel army had already been resolved in the cases of the Yugoslav partisans and of the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army *prior* to their ascension to power throughout their respective countries. The Joe Hansen/Livio Maitan/others belief that this was the essential configuration in a “cold,” “from above” development in Guinea or

Algeria or Egypt or Burma or Syria, etc., etc. is simply empirically false and more or less willfully confuses the process of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie as a class with the massive shifts in the ethnic or other locus of the continuation of bourgeois domestic rule within the framework of the imperialist world order.



LETTER TO COMRADE SAMARAKKODY

27 October 1973

This letter, written to Edmund Samarakkody, leader of the Revolutionary Workers Party in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), was printed in SL/U.S. International Discussion Bulletin No. 3, May 1974, “Exchange of Views Between the SL/U.S. and the RWP of Ceylon.”

New York

Dear Comrade Samarakkody,

We received your long article, “Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon,” earlier this week and have been studying it most attentively. Its handling for our public press is mainly a matter for the *Workers Vanguard* Editorial Board. As you noted, it would probably have to be printed in two or more parts in successive issues. It is also scheduled for formal consideration in two days by our Political Bureau in its aspect as an extensively worked out statement of concrete proletarian tactics in Ceylon by the Revolutionary Workers Party. Those comrades who have already had a chance to go over the document have found it a powerful application of revolutionary Marxism in the area that it centrally treats: concrete analysis and guidance of strategy and tactics in the political field in the contention between class struggle and class collaboration. It seems to us an able application of the line developed in the Communist International’s Third and Fourth Congresses and in the founding resolution of the Fourth International. If we have a reservation, it is in the implicit treatment of revolutionary perspectives as situated simply within the national terrain of the Ceylonese socialist revolution.

The main purpose of this letter is to assist the discussions with you of our international tendency representative who will be visiting you shortly. And that purpose intersects our enthusiasm over your “Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon” since the Marxist solidity of your document indicates that your tendency displays a decisive counterposition in domestic class politics to Pabloism, that adaptationism toward alien tendencies and class forces in the context of one’s own class struggle which led to such graphically catastrophic consequences

for Ceylonese Trotskyism (because the unique political weight of the party in Ceylon permitted the Pabloist line to go to its logical conclusion).

Need for Programmatic Delineation

I don’t know how familiar you are with the specific purpose of our tendency representative’s visit to you. Let me recapitulate. As a result of our work in Germany we encountered a grouping in Austria of several young comrades, the outgrowth of a left split of the youth group of the Austrian United Secretariat section of a couple of years ago. Common work and common discussion over the past nine months have revealed and developed an essential programmatic communality between the Spartacist tendency and the ÖBL (Austrian Bolshevik-Leninists) as the group is known. As the outgrowth of the Austrian comrades’ suggestion of a common statement to the erstwhile world Trotskyist movement in this time of great flux within it, we arrived at the following perspective, as formally decided on 30 July 1973 in PB #9: to seek to work up a general statement of revolutionary Marxist position employing the form used by Trotsky in the 1929-33 period to sort out from among the numerous Communist oppositional currents the International Left Opposition. Namely, we intended to present a series of concrete political positions on recent and current specific issues and events so that, taken all together, the key programmatic elements could be posed defining the principled basis for splits and fusions within the movement. It was our intention to canvass those currents we thought to be close to us with the draft document, and from out of the ensuing discussion to issue a common jointly signed declaration of those shown by the discussion to be in principled agreement.

But we attached one proviso. Such a declaration would have to have sufficient authority among the signatories so that it would not simply be dismissed. It seems to us obvious that an abortive formal declaration of international tendency would weaken, not strengthen, the desired development.

As we well know, the Spartacist tendency in the U.S. is still in essential national isolation. You are probably well aware of our attempt over the decade of our existence to employ all means at our disposal to break out of national isolation. In the past several years the organization in the U.S. has grown severalfold. And the tiny opening we had in New Zealand has evolved into a small but real and vigorous propaganda group in Australia. Our greatly increased human and material resources in the U.S. are being heavily deployed through the SL/U.S.'s international department to intersect the opportunities provided by the shattering of the International Committee and the deep faction fight in the United Secretariat. While the premature and artificial proclamation of our tendency as international in scope would not be as immediately fatal as the pursuit of federated combinations disguised in the manner of the U.Sec. and late IC, it would nonetheless be a deformation.

Indicative of our real weakness has been our present inability to carry out in their original form our intentions as sketched out above. One of our comrades produced a draft document which on consideration we believed to be a partial one, lacking in precision yet overlong. Another leading comrade produced virtually anew another draft and still felt defects remained. Upon consideration it appeared to us that we were trying to do too many not easily compatible things within the scope and style of a single document.

In addition to the central intention mentioned above, we wanted a document specifically aimed at the French OCI as part of our attempted intervention in their purported international discussion process; we felt a strong need to attack the pretensions of both wings of the U.Sec. fight—of Hansen, who fronts for the really wretched SWP, of Marxist orthodoxy, and of the IMG which until it suddenly collapsed into a call for a popular front in Britain (!) had been the most “revolutionary” element in the U.Sec. majority conglomeration. And finally, we wanted to single out for special attention points of evident or possible disagreement with tendencies or groups such as yourself who stand closest to us. And the whole process of drafting, discussion and adoption was to be completed in time for the (January 1974?) World Congress of the United Secretariat forces.

Finally, a number of comrades were hoping that the declaration would also be suitable for general popular propaganda.

Perhaps the earlier Shachtman or Mandel or Joe Hansen, viewed simply as literary technicians, would have the capacity to put together a draft meeting all these requirements. But we don't, and this is a symptom of the weakness that as an international tendency we must struggle to overcome, not just deny. Thus our major programmatic documents of comparable seriousness (but generally of simpler purpose) have characteristically taken perhaps a year to write, many months of painstaking and intensive effort. Therefore we must pursue our intentions in a more roundabout and piecemeal fashion. And this letter is a part of that.

Questions on Ceylonese Trotskyist History

After reviewing available material on the history of the Ceylonese Trotskyist movement, I find that the review only adds depth and somewhat more precision to our opinion expressed in my letter to one Manickam of 6 January 1972, a copy of which was sent you:

“The main point of our concern with the youth uprising impinges on our principal historical criticism of the Ceylonese Trotskyist movement—that its deep strain of petty-bourgeois impulse found expression in a relatively privileged Ceylonese nationalism rather than in struggle to win the proletariat in Ceylon (and *especially* the Tamil plantation workers) as a staging area for proletarian revolution on the Indian subcontinent as a whole.”

In attempting a critical review of the Ceylonese Trotskyist movement, I must keep to a certain level of abstraction, partly because some key elements are obscure but mainly because the Ceylonese milieu is manifestly so very different from that of the United States. For example one must assume that the Sinhalese/Tamil relationship and resulting chauvinist excrescences, while roughly comparable to black/white relations in the U.S. or to foreign labor in Europe, has its own specific characteristics within the limits of the obvious common economic elements. I assume that the striking conjuncture in what would appear to be the heroic period of Ceylonese Trotskyism, roughly 1942-47, is not an accident. In that period, with many leading elements of the Ceylonese movement working to build the Indian movement, the official resolutions of the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India (BLPI) show at least a strong formal commitment to the permanent revolution and therefore to revolutionary internationalism. Indeed

it may have even been an organizational exaggeration of this internationalism to have affiliated the Ceylonese left Trotskyists as the “Ceylon Unit” of the BLPI (as opposed to perhaps a more usual South Asian Bureau directing the work of separate sections). This was a wartime period, of course, of illegality slamming the door to parliamentary appetites, and of tumultuous struggles as the grip of British imperialism began to slip. It is highly suggestive that this was also the interval of a lengthy if evidently not very politically clear-cut split in Ceylonese Trotskyism, and that with the opening of a vista of “national independence” and parliamentarism a reunification took place. It would appear likely that this reunification was on at least implicitly a centrist basis. If this is so, one would already expect little help to the revolutionary wing from the International Secretariat given poor contact over great distance, not much real authority possessed by the recently reconstituted IS, and presumably an IS itself already beginning to be motivated by centrist appetites soon to be revealed by the impermissible conciliation to Yugoslav Stalinism and the generalized Pabloist “war-revolution” entrism *sui generis*. Thus unlike the possible analogous situation in which Trotsky fought it out with the Nin leadership of the Spanish Opposition so that even if their capitulation in Spain to form the POUM (with all its disastrous consequences to the Spanish Revolution and in world history) could not be prevented at least the Trotskyist movement internationally was able to preserve its revolutionary integrity, learn lessons and draw lines of demarcation which are applicable to this day, a generation later in the current recrystallization of the rather sizable “Trotskyist” currents in Spain. What would seem to require explanation in the 1950 Ceylonese reunification is the internal incapacity of the left Trotskyists to resist it in favor of their previously overtly principled course. From that point on, operating within the limitations of a merely national perspective and with a focus on the parliamentary arena, the LSSP appears to have been on a downhill slide from tacit reformism (the 1953 Hartal notwithstanding) through increasingly overt class collaborationism to formal betrayal and finally participation in the butchery of the 1971 youth uprising. This history projects a striking parallelism to that of the German Social Democrats, allowing for a certain rescrambling of sequence: a flawed unity between the Marxist left, the Eisenachers, the revisionist right, the Lassalleans (witness Marx’s concern over the Gotha Program), the heroic period during semi-legality under the Exceptional Laws followed by fixation on the Reichstag and the

explosive denouement on the 4th of August. This is a comparison of comparably significant forces. Two thousand SWP members in the United States have an infinitesimal social weight. One gathers that the LSSP had perhaps 500 members at the 1964 split. The difference is not particularly in the ratios of two thousand to two hundred million and five hundred to perhaps nine million. Rather the LSSP stood at the head of a section of the labor movement and was even at times the official parliamentary Opposition. The LSSP had something to sell out; the SWP has minimal market value to the bourgeoisie (although given the real character of the SWP’s practice in American political life one must conclude that the SWP is actually no less rotten with opportunism today than the LSSP was in 1964).

Two questions emerge from this brief and somewhat impressionistic review of the history of the Ceylonese movement. One is historical: how genuinely revolutionary was the BLPI (Ceylon Unit)—i.e., was its formal Trotskyist orthodoxy based on consistent and assimilated programmatic outlook with a struggle to find reflection of this program in the work and composition of the party? Perhaps so—even with imperfections—if the ensuing reunification had come about as the result of big defeat, perhaps collapse, of a struggle to build a powerful adjacent movement in India. But it seems likely that the Ceylon Unit’s formal correctness was based *essentially* on the radicalizing external circumstances imposed upon it.

The other question is not historical, but affects the perspectives of the world movement today: to what extent has that section of the Ceylonese Trotskyist movement (evidently found nowhere else except in you personally and the RWP) which opposed the drift to the 1964 betrayal, split over it, and then unlike all the other splitters actually sought to transcend the “old” “good” LSSP, actually done so? That the RWP has done so to a degree is clear but this is a qualitative matter and dependent upon both clear formal program and living practice (and parenthetically the same question by which you must judge us). Certainly in the field of domestic class politics your split from the LSSP(R) and the evolution of the RSP (now RWP) appear fundamentally complete.

Problems of Building an International Movement

The intervention of both the United Secretariat and the Healy IC into Ceylon certainly facilitated an understanding of the political reality of these formations beyond their sometimes

fine words. Applying the criteria you employ in your "Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon" to the practice of the French OCI and the American SWP in their native countries should lead you unambiguously to the same kinds of conclusions and characterizations that we draw. However, these are essentially negative conclusions about the present character of the erstwhile Trotskyist movement. We have little tested idea of what you believe should be the character of the Fourth International and the kind of steps and mode of organization in the struggle for the rebirth of the FI. Certainly we do not believe that you favor the Pabloist organizational highhandedness and manipulation, handmaiden of a liquidationist line. If Pabloite international manipulations have mainly been in the direction of promiscuous and destructive interventions into national sections, in Ceylon, as you have noted, the revisionism of the International Secretariat (later United Secretariat) has been at the other extreme—seeking to retain the nominal allegiance of the LSSP (and later the LSSP-R) by turning a blind eye to Ceylonese opportunism, i.e., by the failure to undertake political intervention mandated by principle. While this concrete experience by the Ceylonese movement would naturally lead you to reject that sort of crypto-federalism which, for example, J.P. Cannon revealed in the 1953 factional struggle, we do not know what operative conclusions you have drawn regarding international democratic centralism, in light of its abuse in the hands of those whose real program no longer justifies such an organizational form. And it is not easy to test this out between us in the period immediately ahead since even at the most optimistic, success in programmatically cohering a real tendency possessing the real and viable components in at least several states would lead to only the most primitive, if real, international democratic centralism as we envision it.

We do have recourse to examination of past experience. The International Left Opposition, later International Communist League, later Fourth International, in Trotsky's time suffered not only from a terrible dearth of material resources but from the objectively imposed problem of a decisive separation between an overwhelmingly politically dominant center of Leon Trotsky and his secretariat wherever they happened to be and the nominal organizational "center" in Paris, always weak even organizationally, and sometimes for any practical purpose non-existent, especially following the GPU's evident murders of Klement and Sedov. The greatest amount of experience for our movement is of course to be found in the

Communist International of the first four Congresses. The first and second Internationals, eclectic national conglomerations that they were, are mainly valuable, from the standpoint of our international self-organization, in the negative. Curiously enough the original League of Communists has more direct bearing on the problem of our international organization. Engels, writing I think about the early Second International, disparaged this initial, semi-clandestine, narrowly vanguardist forerunner as having been happily superseded by the international association of mass parties. But history was to show that the real embodiment on a mass basis of the League of Communists was to recur in the Communist International. The main contradiction militating against a genuine international collective has been either the effective subordination of the International to the massive national authority, e.g., of the Russian Bolsheviks as a directing center or earlier the German Social Democrats as an authoritative model (so that the big political struggles within the workers movement tend to be fought out within the framework of only the dominant national section or party, with the balance of the world movement reduced to mere onlookers or at best auxiliaries), or else, at the other extreme, the lack of sufficient authority within the international movement so as to minimize fights and splits within the framework of fidelity to program.

All of our problems anticipated over the next period stem from being in the latter condition. We have several advantages over our forebears in the Marxist movement, however. We do not automatically stand on their shoulders inheriting their experience, but the struggle to assimilate it is open to us. And providing that the material means can be maintained, e.g., the vast technological advances of our time are available to us: the overseas telephone, jet aircraft and the Xerox machine. I think that the very improved technical functioning of the miserably centrist U.Sec. as revealed in the present international factional struggle is traceable to the new technical elements, so that they have been able to have large, frequent and representative IEC meetings. But these elements depend on a relatively great deal of money. The SL/U.S. is fortunately situated in this respect, at least during the present period of prosperity, because the North American industrial production workers have earnings such that if they are childless and communists a significant share of their income is available to the movement. We are aware of the extra responsibility toward the world movement which this places upon us. Of course the uneven financial capacity of the different sections of the

world movement offers one more opportunity for abuse. In the early 1960's Healy's political banditry was evidenced when he promoted money out of our then common American tendency with Wohlforth, ostensibly for purposes in the world movement (a trip to Japan), but ended up using it in his domestic English operation. More serious is the political blackmail involved in the reported \$2500 a month subsidy which the SWP pays the U.Sec. The SWP currently employs its financial weight to undercut the struggle of more radical elements against it, to resist encroachments on its North American domain and to maintain the U.Sec. as the unprincipled, federated conglomeration it is.

Organizational Heritage of Pabloism

There is another consideration in the development of common international functioning which we did not envision at the outset of our tendency and only slowly, through concrete experience, came to glimpse its dimensions. We did not with our background in the then SWP anticipate the deep ravages that Pabloism had made in the moral fiber of at least the European movement. Based on our experiences with the SLL (Gerry Healy certainly appears to be one of the arch-practitioners in this school), the OCI and recent left splits from the U.Sec. in Germany and England (IKD, Spartacus-BL, RCL) we can say generally that at least in Europe not only the Pabloists but also those who were touched by Pabloism or have (partly) broken with it operate with a pervasive cynicism and an automatic assumption of disloyalty and intrigue on the part of all those whom they have contact with, so that formal political protestation is naturally taken to be a facade. This Pabloist heritage, fundamentally alien to revolutionary Marxism and degrading of proletarian consciousness, by its nature does not appear in written program and propaganda, which is why we had to experience it through direct contact and attempts at common work. It is of course not an independent factor but essentially a product of isolation from living working-class struggle, and is one of the organizational implements of liquidationism. But it has served to inhibit our work in Europe and deflect possible political convergences.

This pervasive organizational chicanery is only the smaller part of the necessity for serious Marxists not to be content with accepting from a distance an organization's written word about its political views and practice. The SLL's 1961 resolution "World Prospect for Socialism" was, in accordance with our political criteria, an outstandingly good document. We were in the early 1960's essentially innocent of the knowledge of the Healy

group's long and checkered career, so that the element of political banditry there took us by surprise. In 1970 we momentarily entertained hopes about the English RCL grouplet on the basis of the fair words in their resolution on the history of the Fourth International written by Stephenson, but direct discussion and observation on the part of an SL delegation revealed that this was but a face shown to the outside world and that domestically the RCL entertained vast illusions about the class-inclusive character of the British Labour Party, seeing it not in essence as a social-democratic party but as a kind of semi-soviet whose reformist leadership could perhaps be displaced. At the time of our 1970 discussions we knew nothing about Karalasingham, and thus could not draw the profound conclusions about the RCL's own fundamental weakness toward reformism when the RCL disparaged Samarakkody in Ceylon, printed Karlo's material in their international bulletin and offered him up to us as a healthy element! One can learn. You will recall that about two years ago we received from M. Manickam in Ceylon a series of letters expressing total and enthusiastic agreement with the SL/U.S. and most urgently soliciting a reciprocal statement of political support. As you know we temporized until a comrade could visit Ceylon. The "Manickam group" proved to be at the best politically illusory. As you know regarding the IKD-KJO/Spartacus-BL split in Germany we took nothing on faith; nor have we with the tiny ÖBL whose leader spent some weeks in this country observing, discussing and working with us, and we in turn have had German-speaking comrades in Vienna several times and only now have we begun to undertake joint work in Germany. We have of course also worked out and adopted an explicit joint statement of close programmatic parallelism as the formal basis for our common intervention in the German movement.

One aspect of our direct experience between groups leads us to place a considerable premium on dealing with comrades with long years in the movement and organizations with sustained political records. One must not seek to draw conclusions only from formal program combined with contact in the present moment. A long and verified history permitting the test of events is also invaluable. You possess this latter in abundance, which is one reason why we feel free to write you fully and with our guard down. As Rosmer noted in his book *Moscow in Lenin's Time*, a grave weakness of the Communist International in its first revolutionary years was the unavoidable reliance of so many of its sections upon new, untried elements who were incapable or worse, the twenty-

one points and glowing enthusiasm to the contrary notwithstanding.

If we have acquired some limited experience, mainly negative, in attempting contact and work in the international movement toward the crystallization of a programmatic international tendency committed to struggle for the rebirth of the Fourth International, we must believe that we have by no means exhausted the experience of running into new kinds of unexpected problems and circumstances. This continuous struggle to reconquer what was the stock-in-trade of the early Communist International has marked every step of our way in almost every interrelated field; domestically toward the black question, the history of the communist women's movement and particularly in communist trade-union work, and the political issues of popular front, united front and labor party, we have had to overcome misconceptions and fill in hiatuses. Characteristically the confrontation has been produced by our program as a generality intersecting the necessity at specific times for concrete answers. To feel a present sense of completion would be to descend into sterile orthodoxy (Comrade Cannon's old "we have a finished program"), a harbinger of degeneration.

The Permanent Revolution in Ceylon

The perspective of a Ceylonese socialist revolution must necessarily have a very large international side. Comrade Cannon's "The Coming American Revolution"—even for the highly industrially developed and then enormously powerful U.S., occupying the bulk of a great continental land mass and without neighbors of significant military threat—with its exclusive preoccupation with the American revolution, virtually ignoring the international context, smacks of an impressionistic American exceptionalism. At another extreme, our New Zealand comrades have been virtually unable to imagine a socialist revolution—taken in isolation—for that distant island which is yet so heavily linked into the world market and only by historical happenstance politically separate from Australia.

Ceylon is a small semi-colonial country heavily dependent upon producing commodities for the world market and closely adjacent to its giant neighboring Indian subcontinent, to which it is evidently linked by ethnic, cultural and linguistic ties not qualitatively more distant than those found in different regions of the subcontinent itself. Thus for Ceylon the second of the main guidelines of the permanent revolution acquires exceptional importance. If only the proletariat can consistently lead the peasantry and the

urban poor in the struggle to achieve democratic demands inextricably passing over to socialist ones, and in the teeth of what must ultimately be the combined opposition of the imperialists, landlords and domestic capitalists—and noting that this revolution can therefore have no democratic "stage" separate from the struggle for proletarian socialist aims—then concretely for Ceylon the second condition (i.e., of international development) acquires exceptional and most immediate importance. The issue of the international extension of the Ceylonese socialist revolution is not only a question of its ultimate long-term economic viability but of its most immediate short-term politico-military existence. Moreover, while revolutions mature and are fought out within the framework of each existing state power, those objective conditions which would precipitate revolutionary crisis would in all likelihood exist, if with different tempo, elsewhere on the subcontinent. Given the special circumstances which sections of the Ceylonese masses enjoy relative to the subcontinent as a whole—the relative economic well-being and cultural level (literacy, political experience)—a general revolutionary crisis in the region could well be precipitated earlier and more fully in Ceylon, turning it into the staging area for a general subcontinental or South Asian proletarian revolution.

Thus it would seem that the question of the Tamil minority in Ceylon is of triple importance. First the immigrant-descended Tamil laborers on the plantations producing for the world market are the primary creators of value and are by that fact alone central to a proletarian revolutionary perspective, or as Lerski in his wretched book *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon* quotes you from a lecture in 1964 to the effect that the estate labor population must be the "epicentre of Ceylon's revolution." Second, the struggle by the Leninist vanguard against Sinhalese chauvinism among the laboring masses of the dominant ethnic majority can be no less a pre-condition for successful revolution than the struggle against Great Russian chauvinism was for the Bolsheviks. Third, for the sake of the extension of the revolution, the laboring population of at least South India may well take the treatment of the Indian-derived Tamils as the key test as to the genuineness of Ceylonese revolutionary intentions.

But after the 1950 LSSP reunification we have seen virtually no recognition of these considerations so seemingly distant from day-to-day life in Ceylon but so crucial for a serious revolutionary perspective. Instead we note as the alternative consummated by the LSSP the succession of: a

national horizon, a parliamentary focus, conciliation to “anti-imperialist” Sinhalese communalist chauvinism, class collaboration, overt betrayal, complicity in counter-revolutionary butchery. For revolutionists, a principled class-struggle domestic line would be an intolerable contradiction in the absence of an energetically pursued internationalist policy reflected internally in the question of the Tamil plantation proletariat and the struggle against Sinhalese chauvinism, necessarily the prime cause of communalism.

“Progressive” and Class Criteria

It is not clear from “Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon” that the SL and the RWP precisely agree in understanding “a popular front,” “a government of a reformist workers party or parties” and “a workers and peasants government.” Furthermore in some of these cases tactical orientation within a principled framework would vary depending on whether the revolutionists had only a small propagandist existence or had themselves become a mass party. In our view, a popular front is but a contemporary expression of the old social-democratic coalitionism simply extended to include the Stalinists. The importance of the inclusion of even the most modest non-proletarian political formation (“left liberal” in the West, “anti-imperialist” in the East) is to act as a guarantor of the multi-class program of such a governmental combination and as an alibi by which the erstwhile “labor” or “socialist” or “communist” parties can explain to their own followers the refusal to follow their nominal programs. And such reformist leaders are correct, in their way. The contradiction implicit in such parties between subordination to the interests of the capitalist system and these parties’ articulation of the interests of the working people is thereby suppressed. It is conceivable for example that if a Labour-Liberal coalition should become the government in Britain it might have a more radical program than the post-World War II Labour governments. But it would be a government *formally* as well as in content explicitly locked within the capitalist framework. Demands upon such a coalition to carry out its common electoral program *could not* be in the interests of the workers. And similarly for the German Free Democratic-SPD government, the Allende Popular Unity government, the left Radical-SP-CP Union of the Left electoral coalition in France. Where revolutionists and reformists are of comparable size, we would simply fight it out with the reformists, not excluding no-contest agreements along the way but in no case suggesting that a government of purely reformist workers parties would constitute a “work-

ers government” or that there was any basis for a common parliamentary bloc with us. Should such reformists become the government, and also in a pre-election period if we are qualitatively weaker than they, as a tactic to expose and split the reformists (i.e., resolve the reformist parties into their counterposed class components) it would be in order to demand of the reformists that they carry out the working-class and socialist elements in their formal programs.

In the colonial world the struggle against imperialism reflects the felt oppression of the laboring masses as coming from outside the nation itself. Hence “national bourgeois” formations, including the very radical petty-bourgeois ones ranging over to the Russian Social-Revolutionaries or the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, can strive to play the kind of mass leadership role not seen in Western Europe since 1848. In this they simulate the present role there of the (trade-union, social-democratic, Stalinist) labor bureaucracies. But mass plebeian or even proletarian base notwithstanding, such nationalist political formations are *external* to the working class, unlike the labor bureaucracies which are the internalized mechanism of capitalist mass control. Concretely the difference is shown in that such parties as the SLFP or the Argentine Peronistas or the Bolivian MNR or the Palestine Liberation movement or the Algerian FLN or the Chinese KMT or the Pilsudski PPS could—and some have—turn savagely to attack their peasant/worker base, and continue existing and perhaps ruling unchanged. But the German Social Democrats or the British Labour Party or even the thrice wretched Canadian NDP can have no existence without the maintenance of their trade-union base. Communists might make specific, episodic, concrete fighting agreements in action with radical nationalist formations. For example if the nationalists denounced the British base at Trincomalee, the communists would in no case extend parliamentary support, however critical, for a nationalist-sponsored bill to negotiate the removal of the British colonial presence. But should militant nationalists seek to storm the base, a fighting agreement, in the context of our continuing relentless criticism, might be in order. Such tactics serve to expose the organic class incapacity of even the most left nationalists to be the ultimate champions of the masses’ aspirations, and simultaneously serve to win over a section of subjectively revolutionary militants, if present, to the proletarian vanguard. But any entry into or making a political bloc, parliamentary or extra-parliamentary, with a formation like the SLFP or the JVP would not be different *in fundamental*

class subordination from undertaking the popular front or from projecting the Stalinists' 1920's version, the two class party.

As propaganda, the call for a workers and peasants government had better involve, as Julian Marchlewski (Karski) noted at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, nothing other than a popular agitational formulation for the dictatorship of the proletariat. And in any case, to reduce the slogan to the small change of parliamentary combinations can only conceal a reformist appetite.

This touches on a weakness in the Fourth Congress discussions, where many comrades tried to visualize with a false concreteness the achievement of a workers government implicitly within the framework of a level of struggle that had not definitively flowed outside the parliamentary framework. In particular, the comrades then discussed the example of Germany, which is most pertinent because in life, in a few years, in the face of the menace of the rising Nazi party under conditions of grave social crisis, when the issue of the workers government had to be faced in reality, Trotsky could only speak in terms of a KPD-SPD united front, and with the clear implication of its embodiment in the development of soviets. This is one of the crucial elements for even relatively concrete propagandizing for the workers government. For example, in the terribly unstable France of 1946, and with the bourgeoisie seeking to recreate the formal framework of government, to raise the call for a CP-SFIO-CGT government posed head-on the call to transcend the parliamentary framework, for how does the CGT—the great united mass labor union of the time—participate in a parliamentary government?

These abstract definitions and formulae of course can only be animated by a genuine revolutionary determination which is only revealed by the totality of program and in continuing practice, especially at the most crucial junctures. In the U.S. both Hal Draper of the then ISL of Shachtman and more lately Joe Hansen of the SWP, both writing as centrist ideologues, managed to find (possibly independently of one another) the identical formulations from the Communist International's Fourth Congress and from the Transitional Program in order to justify the revisionist courses of their organizations. (They wrote respectively, Draper in *Labor Action* of October and November 1953, on the British Labour government as a "workers government" and, Hansen in his July 1960 document, on the Castro regime as a "workers government.") And this will always be the case regarding formulations which are designed to

take account of the complexities of situations in order to facilitate the victory of the revolutionary vanguard. The LSSP at least since the June 1950 reunification must have been a morass of such literary abuse and deception, with the meanings of terms subtly shifted while the party was being prepared for the 1964 entry into the government. To have approached the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in November 1951 for a no-contest agreement on the grounds of that party's verbal radicalism was, from the standpoint of the permanent revolution and the concrete perspective of proletarian revolution on the island, already a crime. The key agitation of the SLFP was, of course, "Sinhala Only." From the standpoint of the Tamil plantation workers it is impossible to see the SLFP as the kind of "lesser evil" with which revolutionists would sign no-contest agreements in order to get a larger number of themselves, along with a larger number of the lesser evils, into the Parliament. The Healyites' hue and cry over the 1964 Ceylonese betrayal is a little late. When the LSSP announced "general support of the government" following the July 1960 elections which the SLFP won, this was already a definitive capitulation, identical in content to Stalin's March 1917 policy of conditional support to the Provisional Government "insofar as...."

Recognition of the significance of the 1960 LSSP orientation to the Sri Lanka Freedom Party is not solely a matter of hindsight. The world movement, and the SWP in particular, knew it at the time, and as you doubtless know the SWP leadership took those minimal steps then to keep their skirts clean, but no more than that.

Something should be said about the April 1971 uprising of Sinhalese youth organized by the JVP. Mainly negative observations come to mind. That such an uprising, evidently conspiratorially prepared over a period of time, could come as an abrupt surprise to all sections of established Ceylonese political life would appear as an indictment of both the socially remote and artificial character of the parliamentary milieu and the fixation of all previously-established political elements upon it. The succession of post-British governments pursued policies of economic stagnation and dissipation of economic wealth through consumption subsidies to the masses, until the resulting squeeze led to a shift from bread to the circus of virulent anti-Tamil chauvinism. Thus it was left to an extremist and genuinely petty-bourgeois wing of Sinhalese popular frontism to attempt, however wrongheadedly and tragically, some real social change.

Notable too was the massive multinational foreign military aid and political intervention

the Bandaranaike government invoked. This is not only a matter which shamefully exposes the claims of the SLFP as defenders of national independence. (So the government claimed the JVP uprising was the work of foreign spies. Indeed! They were fortunate to throw out the North Korean diplomats in time, before North Korea too might have sent aid to the government. Otherwise what would they have been left with for the origins of the “foreign spies”—Guatemala?) It is also, and more sinisterly, a matter of real concern to proletarian revolutionists, foreshadowing what can be expected at certain junctures. And this intervention argues very strongly again for the urgency of the struggle to internationalize a Ceylonese socialist revolution.

Nationalism and the Class Line

We appear to have had some differences on the series of Arab-Israeli conflicts in the Near East, although all that the SL has to go on in this regard is your “A Critique of the United Secretariat Resolution on the Arab-Israel Conflict” as published by the SWP in an International Information Bulletin of April 1968. What is most important for a viable international Marxist movement is agreement on the criteria by which it seeks to judge events. We see the driving force for Israeli aggressiveness as essentially located within that state itself and expressed in its virulent Zionism—i.e., a nationalist drive not different in kind from that felt by the ruling circles in Cairo and Damascus. Thus the central aim of the Israelis is not to conquer Arabs in order to exploit them, but to acquire more Lebensraum for the Hebrew nation. Indeed the recent acquisition of a million Arabs, while profitable for some sections of the Israeli ruling class, poses a considerable contradiction to Israeli nationalism (the aim of a “Jewish homeland”) and a threat to its perspectives. The Israelis are today a client state solely of the American imperialists, but not the sole Near Eastern client of the Americans (others include Jordan and Iran). Israeli aims have continued to be autonomous, as they were for example in 1956 when Israel blocked with the British and French colonialists over the Suez Crisis (in that conflict we gave military support to the Egyptians, of course). The Israelis could conceivably become simple puppets of the Americans, but that is not the case now, as can be clearly seen by the differences in relationship of the Golda Meir government vis-a-vis its own people and Washington as against, say, the Thieu regime in South Vietnam. Moreover the Americans, like the Russians, can count noses and have been very heavily arming the Iranian government, with an eye to

the latter’s “protection” of the main Near Eastern oil-producing areas on the Persian Gulf.

The one legitimate national aspiration which figures in the Near East situation found an independent expression at only one point: in 1970 Jordan’s King Hussein in sharp military conflict smashed what might have been an independent Palestinian national liberationary formation. We of course were most urgently for the military victory of the Palestinian rebels in Jordan, as their struggle was the only one since the first Israeli victory in 1948 which gave promise of beginning to break the reactionary Near Eastern deadlock. Before 1970 the erstwhile and competing fairly radical-sounding petty-bourgeois Palestinian organizations had not transcended the status of tools of the competing Iraqi, Syrian and Egyptian regimes. Since then they have been much less. If Marxists give military support to a side in a war, we are in favor of the outcome of the victory of that side. We can draw no other conclusion than that in the 1967 and 1973 wars, an Arab states’ victory would have led to (1) a reversal of the terms of oppression, this time aimed against the Israeli population, and (2) an ensuing sharp struggle, possibly military, between Egypt and Syria to see whose “Palestine” it would be. Only the proletariat in power in one or more of the neighboring Arab states would have, in the most elementary sense, the capacity to conduct a progressive war against the Israeli Zionist state.

The point has sometimes been made by the revisionists of the SWP that all other considerations are immaterial because Israel is a settler colony and therefore presumably richly deserves the same fate, for example, as the million Europeans that used to be in Algeria and that presumably should be visited upon the three million Europeans of South Africa. This is but irrelevant demagoguery. At one point or another, all peoples are settlers and colonists. Race wars and forced population transfers are invariably a reactionary and, as the Bihari Moslems can testify, generally a socially tragic solution.

The SL is strongly committed to its positions over the 1956, 1967 and 1973 clashes. We see the latter two as similar in kind not to Japanese imperialism’s struggle to conquer China in the 1930’s, but of the same kind as the succession of Indian-Pakistani clashes. We are less firmly assured of our prevailing position on the 1948-49 Palestinian events. It is all very well and true to argue that the Zionist manipulation leading to the arrival of a million Jews into Palestine to join a comparable number already there at the end of the Second World War should not have taken place. But they

were driven out of their homes in Europe and the Zionists wilfully assisted Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt in foreclosing other alternatives. It seems to us that involved in the initial conflict was the right of that Hebrew nation to exist. Under its nationalist (Zionist) leadership it of course gave the most reactionary possible twist to that right. The Palestinian Arab masses were betrayed on all sides. Only with the realization of a proletarian revolutionary perspective for the Arab East is national "justice" for *both* Arabs and Jews in Palestine conceivable. This position leads to prior opposition to the U.N.-voted partition, in favor of a bi-national state; then, faced with the fact of partition and the assault of the reactionary foreign Arab armies, to military support, and following their repulse, a necessity to struggle to the point of civil war by proletarian forces against the Zionist expansionist follow-up of the Arab defeat—i.e., a policy analogous to that of Marx in the Franco-Prussian War.

It should also not be forgotten that the 1948-49 events were instigated by the withdrawing British, who deliberately carried out the same kind of policy of divide and hopefully continue to rule from a distance that they carried out in the Indian subcontinent, and for what it's worth, that the key Arab military force at the time was not a force expressing even the chauvinist aspirations of an adjacent bourgeois-nationalist state but the royalist Arab Legion, pride of the British and led by General Glubb Pasha.

Perspectives

Finally, for your information we would like to discuss briefly some of the main domestic perspectives of the SL, and in more detail our present international activity.

The membership of the SL and its programmatic and democratic-centralist youth affiliate, the RCY, drifts upward toward three hundred now, with a notable continuing evidently heavily homogenized growth through regroupment from Maoist, revisionist and left-social-democratic origins, as well as direct recruitment. We are confronted by two urgent tasks. Our main struggle over the next period must be to develop additional links with the masses through the instrumentality of developing and testing in struggle communist fractions in plants and industries, on college campuses and elsewhere. (It must be kept in mind that at least for the white and youthful sections of the working people, there is a very large overlap and shift in role of the ten million or so college students, their predominantly petty-bourgeois character notwithstanding, with the youth employed as industrial workers—a situation strikingly different

from the rigidly separated European university and working-class youth.) A reversal has begun to take place in America. The rebellious student movement of the 1960's is gone—without the mass of students reconciling to the status quo. While insurgent militancy among the workers has not significantly broken through at any point, a pronounced molecular process is taking place (despite the manifest shamelessness and felt menace of the Nixon government, the cynical post-Vietnam War mood and the grinding inflation, the last two years have even witnessed a subsidence in effective strikes thanks to the trade-union bureaucracy). However, the steadily growing receptivity for example of the workers to the overtly communist press, taken together with the developing objective conditions, indicates that this situation is in for a very sharp reversal, and one which will have major impact on other sections of society, tending to pull the younger generation of blacks out of mock-nationalist apathy and to pull behind it a section of the students. The other thing that we must do in order to acquire the necessary rudiments toward becoming a revolutionary party in this country is the winning over and development as communist cadres of qualitatively more than the small number of young black militants presently in the SL/RCY, as well as undertaking a similar successful effort among the by no means insignificant Spanish-speaking population in the U.S. We seem to have the essential prerequisites for these tasks. Our cadres, while much too newly fledged (tripling our size in three years), appear homogeneous and dedicated and are acquiring competence. Our material resources, barring a sharp economic downturn leading to major unemployment in our ranks, are adequate. The bi-weekly *Workers Vanguard* appears to have been essentially stabilized at its frequency and our struggle to increase its modest circulation base (8000 an issue) meets with success. As for its political content, we can only agree with a long-time former opponent who told us recently that he likes *WV* "not so much because it's the best Marxist paper in the country but because it's the only one!"

In our work as the SL/U.S. we are goaded by the recognition that—with our numbers which are both modest yet large on the scale of most Trotskyist national groupings and with the challenge that the U.S. affords—history will not forgive us if we default.

The main present activities of our international department are the following. Keeping in mind that Paris is overwhelmingly the center of ostensible world Trotskyism—with perhaps fifteen thousand comrades organized into the *Ligue Communiste*,

the Lutte Ouvrière group and the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste, together with their auxiliaries—we have developed a permanent station of several comrades in Paris to circulate, for informational and propaganda purposes, our *Spartacist* [édition française]. We have painfully pursued for some years the effort to draw the extremely resistant and equivocal OCI into formal discussions with us. They are centrists, the best of the not very good French organizations. From the unevenness of their political responses, they appear to have unresolved internal contradictions, and considering that they possess the most numerous and experienced cadre anywhere in the world claiming to be Trotskyist, we cannot simply dismiss them. However, with the publication in *Spartacist* [édition française] #4 of our 15 January 1973 letter to the OCI's international agency, the OCRFI, it appears that our relations with the OCI may be coming to a head. After evading for ten months replying to our request for admission to their international discussion process, the OCI now feels the pressure of our criticism in Paris itself. Especially given the OCI's latest efforts to flirt with the SWP (!) we are not sanguine as to the outcome, but we do not prejudge the question in view of the conflicting tensions within the OCI.

We have written above of the little fraternal Austrian group. Our projected joint work with them for Germany takes place under objectively hopeful conditions. The splits to the left of several hundred young comrades from the German Pabloists having led to groupings following every conceivable wrong road, we now can present our views in the context of considerable organizational disappointment and disintegration tending to make the German comrades receptive to considering our views. The Israeli "Vanguard" group appears to have fractured three ways. We gather that its founding leader has stayed with the OCI; a majority of its members have gone over to Healy; and several appear to be coming our way.

All other SL/U.S. international work is on a lesser level. We have extensive contact with London organizations but no obvious prospects for winning tendency supporters. We are poking around in India but under severe imposed restrictions. We know something of the Swedish movement; many Japanese comrades read our press but the situation there is deeply obscure to us; we have as much contact in Latin America as the miserable repression permits. We also have a certain amount of contact with nationals from several thoroughly authoritarian countries. We are developing a readership for our paper in Canada.

Our fraternal Australian section is of course

another matter entirely. There are a dozen aggressive SL comrades there who have very recently sent forces from Melbourne to Sydney, their new center. Their activity is essentially self-sustained and has already begun to have an impact upon the Australian radical movement nationally. However, we are left with only contact in New Zealand.

Our intention guiding this international work, which absorbs a large amount of the attention of leading cadres, is most immediately to develop and test apparent programmatic agreement internationally, a sufficiently lengthy and difficult process. With the best subjective good will and revolutionary integrity on the part of the organizations involved, there is still nothing easy or automatic in arriving at the mutual assurance that words say what they mean and the speakers mean what they say. If this were not so, the codification for a bona fide international Trotskyist tendency assimilating the experience of the movement since the death of Trotsky could perhaps be reduced to a single sheet of paper containing, for example, the programmatic points agreed to by the SL/U.S. and the ÖBL as the condition for our common work in Germany, together with the statement of principle of international organization which we abortively hammered out with Healy, much to his discomfort, in October 1965 in Montreal.

The struggle for the rebirth of the Fourth International means the construction of viable national sections of a democratic centralist international tendency. As Trotsky stressed in the foreign Introduction to *Permanent Revolution*, national sections of a living international party cannot be constructed from afar as the replication of some "leading section," but must have an organic development within the context of their own class struggle. National sections select their own leadership and must retain flexibility in the application of communist tactics to their own national terrain. The development of the international authority of the tendency entails the dialectical interaction of principled leadership based on the authentic Trotskyist program and the development of the authority of the national sections within the class struggles of their own countries. Moreover the interaction is not frozen—the formal authority of international leadership cannot outrun its real, evolving capacity.

If we are successful over the next period, our work must be consummated by an international conference of leading comrades. A conference which, if real and fruitful (and hopefully the first of many, held not too infrequently) would among other things lead to the conversion of the *Spartacist* magazine into an organ of the international

tendency with an editorial board international in scope. Along the way this process gives us the chance to intervene most effectively into the political life of revisionist organizations and to most effectively achieve international impact for such significant work as we undertake in domestic class struggles. It will have to be out of the intersection of the upheaval of the masses and the regroupment of the revolutionary Marxists internationally that the Trotskyist Fourth International will be reborn.

In closing this long letter to you, Comrade Samarakkody, its purpose, together with that of our young international representative who we hope will shortly be discussing with you, is to pose and seek in a preliminary way to resolve the question of whether or not there is the principled basis and practical possibility of our coming together to commonly carry out this struggle for the Fourth International. We have a deep and abiding respect for your long decades as a Trotskyist leader in South Asia and above all for your struggle to extricate an authentic revolutionary Marxist movement from the morass that was the LSSP. We must believe that you have at your fingertips experience and insight of which we are but dimly aware. This is the significance we attach to the comment and suggestion in your letter to us of 21 September 1972 that our article "...Genesis of Pabloism' brings out important aspects of the degeneration of the 4th International. It should be followed up. I think we should aim at a full balance sheet of the 4th International movement. This involves considerable research. I have myself done some work in this regard. Only I do not think I have all the material." Our article represented the maximum of our present understanding and capacity, yet we believe it to be only partial, but in ways which are not obvious to us. Because we have so little conti-

nunity with the struggle of our political forebears, we are particularly made aware of its vital importance in the forging of a renewed world revolutionary party. If we feel a threat to the collaboration with you which is so powerfully indicated, it lies in the following comparison. When the Third International was conclusively finished as a revolutionary force and Trotsky set about to build a Fourth, there were a number of outstanding Communist leaders who emerged uncorrupted from the Stalinized Comintern. Sneevliet, Rosmer, Chen Tu-hsiu, Andres Nin (Christian Rakovsky was a special case) come to mind. But even in concert with a great leader of the stature of L.D. Trotsky (and history has permitted no Trotskys among us today), these comrades were unable to find the road to, or unable to persist in, the highest level of communist struggle under the new and sharply altered conditions. They fell away. But Trotsky himself, Peng, Cannon, and others, did mount a renewed struggle. Today it falls to you to do the same by transcending the thirty years of Ceylonese "Trotskyism" (and on the island itself, to fashion the RWP as an instrument of real Bolshevism). If you do so, you will be for world Trotskyism, as well, an invaluable link assisting and guiding the young generation of Trotskyist revolutionaries. And the whole preceding experience of the Ceylonese movement will not have been in vain.

Comradely,

James Robertson,

For the Political Bureau, SL/U.S.

P.S. We are sending you with this letter or shortly under separate cover all of the specific documents referred to herein which you may not yet have.

cc: representative to Ceylon

SL/Australia-New Zealand

ÖBL

SL/U.S.-Paris office



LETTER TO A TRADE UNION MILITANT

7 May 1974

This letter to Gerry Clark, written with Liz Gordon, addresses revolutionary work in trade unions. It was printed in SL Internal Discussion Bulletin whole No. 23, August 1974.

[This letter while still in slightly amorphous draft form became the political property of the organization as a whole as a result of the following circumstances: it was originally a dictation draft; several deletions and additions together with a good

many proposed reformulations by both Gordon and Robertson were written into the draft. It was set aside for some weeks unfinished and with possible changes unresolved. Then it was taken to the West Coast to show comrade Clark and photocopies

were made there by other comrades. Consequently despite some loss of precision and a little repetitiveness it is now being printed without any new changes, with the retention of the material suggested for deletion and with the inclusion of previously proposed additions; only specific alternative formulations are resolved one way or the other.

—J.R., 10 August 1974]

Dear Comrade Clark,

Thank you for the copy of your letter of 24 April. I know that the question of applying for SL membership is taken very seriously by you and that you take this step only after very considerable reflection. Your abrupt expulsion on fictitious grounds by the SWP was surely a bit disorienting in the short run. As your letter makes clear, you have a substantial number of particular differences in policy, interpretation and historical estimations from those hitherto arrived at by the Spartacist League. But one thing is very clear to me: the sharp contradistinction between your own views and the somewhat similar but entirely opportunist, cynical and above all maneuverist views that Gregorich/Passen threw our way in their “unity” discussions with us. Unlike these latter elements, you have shown a demonstrated consistency in the development of your positions as well as a corresponding organizational responsibility and discipline. I.e., whatever our differences, you have shown principled seriousness and determination to act as a revolutionist. It is in the light of this appreciation that I offer the following comments on some of the views and opinions expressed in your letter.

I think you have missed the main drift in the historical evolution of the Spartacist League. You see us as having early locked ourselves behind a defensive sectarian wall and standing now before the possibility of breaking through this barrier of our own making. While it is not easy to discuss concrete examples of what you might mean by sectarian, because trade-union policy aside you do not yourself cite such cases, I think that the course of the SL’s experience has actually moved—and especially in the last few years—in a way which you might find to be of *increasing* sectarianism. (An additional complication not easy to measure even as to direction, much less magnitude, may be the extent to which your understanding of the SL is colored by essentially local impressions.)

If you look at the beginnings of our activity in almost any field (trade-union, black, antiwar, youth, women, international) I think you will see a combination of a highly empirical, tentative, conciliatory and ahistorical quality, although within the framework of whatever our programmatic

development was at the time. It has generally only been through the resulting dialectic of interaction in the milieu with program, and the resulting extension of program, that a more tested, comprehensive and historically founded policy has emerged. Our years-long work, for example, in the SSEU was marked and marred from the outset by an excess of honest unionism, so that in truth in the whole period of the SSEU’s existence as an independent union, our few but very active comrades there performed invaluable service, not least by means of the literally hundreds of leaflets our caucus produced for the membership, as trail blazers in establishing and defending practices of solid union democracy and fighting the union leadership’s conciliations of the employer. A very experienced trade unionist later won to the SL from another industry well described the break that he had to make in his own functioning as “not being a trade unionist in the party but a communist in the labor movement.” For a period of more than five years our comrades in the SSEU, even though in Spartacist when they went into the union, were, willy-nilly and despite good intentions and serious efforts, never able *in practice* to break through to communist functioning. We helped build and defend that union; others, notably PL and WL, raked in the recruits.

Our experience in maritime overlapped that in the SSEU and continues on today. In good part as a result of the recognized weakness in SSEU, our work in maritime has been strengthened. Our maritime fraction comrades are known as the communists in their union, good and serious trade-union militants but above all communists. In maritime our fraction has continued to strengthen itself and will not be easily outflanked. This did not happen automatically or easily. Our initiating fraction was involved in a good deal of struggle within the party to go qualitatively beyond militant and radical trade unionism. (You should examine the first half-dozen issues of *Workers’ Action*.) The Leninist approach is the exact opposite of that which we used to get from the Wobblies, who saw the revolutionists at the point of production as everything and the conniving petty-bourgeois party bureaucrats situated in some distant petty-bourgeois city as at best irrelevant, generally disruptive of the class struggle and frequently downright treacherous.

With the qualitative enlargement of our forces a few years ago we not only undertook a qualitative increase in our union implantation but have proceeded in a far more systematic way. Vital to the prosecution of this activity has been our theoretical-historical struggle—notably

undertaken by our Trade Union Director—to recapture and critically assimilate the real experience of the CP in the 1920’s, particularly the TUEL, and later of the American Trotskyists. You will find the tracks of this struggle spread through the issues of *Workers Vanguard*.

It is of course always easy to bend the stick too far in the other direction. However one must always distinguish between a principled and an opportunist approach. Within the framework of a principled approach one must seek to be as clear, simple, persuasive and intelligent as possible. Thus for example in our party press we have had to learn that in the main Midwestern industrial centers, to call for a *communist* program in the trade unions is downright misleading in conveying the understanding that we intend, as compared to calling for a *class-struggle* program in the labor movement. Just imagine what “communist” might mean to militant but religious and East European-descended workers! Likewise, barring only overriding security considerations, we certainly encourage caucuses influenced by us to propagate that part of the Trotskyist program, which is found in a full and contemporary expression of the demands set forth in the Transitional Program. But it would be a weakness on our part to give equal emphasis to all of these demands equally at all times. To do this would obliterate the necessary distinction between agitation and propaganda. This consideration however is quite different from for example the CSL’s opportunist appetite to hide parts of the Trotskyist program which it formally professes. Moreover we must always be aware that in any case one cannot say everything that communists must say to the rest of the workers from within the framework of the trade unions themselves. Hence our party press must seek to compensate for the partial gag imposed on all of our comrades within the trade unions.

You note, “I have been told by the SL that I cannot carry out a revolutionary line in the unions without *first* joining the SL. I disagree!” Providing one accepts the necessary intermediate links in a chain of reasoning, which I do, I however agree with the statement; otherwise I wouldn’t either. But as far as I can tell, you also do accept those intermediate links. If the SL is uniquely in this country the essential embodiment of revolutionary program, and if one knows this, and if one is not debarred by compelling and principled personal reasons from functioning in the SL, then one would reasonably have to believe that not to be in the SL would be to appear to deny that the building of a Leninist vanguard party is a necessary element in a revolutionary line for the labor

movement. I.e., one would have to be some kind of syndicalist or not-very-left centrist.

Further, I believe there is another objection to the possibility of independent militant trade unionism, a barrier which is practical and quantitative rather than conceptual but will become equally decisive in practice and over time. The trade-union movement is not a passive vessel for the infusion of communist ideas. Like any milieu, and perhaps more so than most, the trade-union movement exerts its own deforming influence upon communist consciousness. The pressures toward opportunist reconciliation with reformist business unionism, which finds a powerful bulwark in the materially self-interested bureaucracy, are powerful while at the same time union activists are prey to the narrowness and parochialism which are inherent in any milieu and which must be counterbalanced by the pressure of a vanguard representing, and reflecting in its own experience, the historical experience of other sections of the international working class.

Despite the admitted fragility of our union implantation, we have been made to feel these pressures very concretely in our work. Our tendency in its collectivity has had to struggle continually against them in the process of developing and concretizing a program for the labor movement. The brief discussion here of our accumulated experience in SSEU and maritime serves to underscore the fact that our unionist comrades—many of them already committed revolutionists at the time of their implantation, and possessing among them a not inconsiderable accumulation of experience in the Marxist movement as well as personal capacity—have required careful party guidance not only in transcending the business unionist framework but in developing the concrete programmatic stands and tactical judgment relevant to their particular industries. For us it has not been only in theory but in fact that, just as the party requires the participation of active union militants, not only in bringing its program to the working people but in developing that program, so our labor activists have required not merely supervision but a process of internal party struggle in carrying forward their work. Likewise the party press must serve not simply as a commentary upon our industrial work, or a means for propagandizing it among other sectors of the working people, but as a parallel driving force and tool of intervention. Separated by choice or by chance from party direction—and as Leninists we are not ashamed to use such a term to describe the influence of the party as a whole on the interventionist work of our comrades in any

arena of struggle—an individual union activist, whatever his personal capacity and subjective revolutionary commitment—cannot expect to carry forward a revolutionary work.

You write that “Where the difference arises I believe is over *how* to carry out this line. I don’t believe it is necessary to raise your full program on every leaflet. Nor is it necessary to present your full program everytime you speak at a rally or union meeting...if we try to dish it [the revolutionary program] out *all at once, in every case, at all times...*” Comrade Clark, if this is the difference you think you have with the SL, we might all agree that you have merely misunderstood our approach through the understandable unfamiliarity of a non-member with our concrete practice. However, a comrade such as yourself with a considerable history in the Marxist movement, who is clearly a careful and sympathetic reader of *Workers Vanguard*, and who moreover has some familiarity with the work of SL comrades in your local area, should not really put forward such an impression of SL trade-union work. Clearly you are not acquainted, since it was scarcely reflected in our public press, with the concrete daily work of the SSEU fraction—for instance the painstaking and detailed exposés of the real provisions of the proposed SSEU merger plan, in literally dozens of leaflets to the membership. But you are certainly aware of the NMU Militant-Solidarity Committee’s campaign for union rights for Group 2’s, or the vigorous work of the CWA MAC caucus in fighting for union democracy and the defeat of the red clause (centered on the struggle to form a principled united front of all formations in the union opposed to the red clause, whatever their programmatic differences on other issues). You have seen reprinted in *WV* perhaps a dozen “single-issue” resolutions of militants in the UAW over such matters as the deportation of Haitian workers, defense of the Farmworkers, strikes against layoffs, etc. In your own local area you should be familiar with the anti-blacklist campaign in longshore and the intervention of the SL itself in picketing Chilean ships. How can you maintain that the SL-supported trade-union militants raise their “full program on every leaflet” or present it “everytime [they] speak at a rally or union meeting”? Perhaps your formulations are a case of pedagogical overstatement; but perhaps also you are uneasy with the ways and times in which we do raise our full program, or seek to tie together aspects of it, or concretize it with demands such as hot-cargoes scab products or union organization across international boundaries. We wonder if you might be uneasy with aspects of our union work but find it difficult to generalize

your reservations into a critique, recognizing possibly opportunist implications akin to workerism in any clear counterposed policy.

Turning to the trade-union security question, you assert that our “policy on union security is much too restricted....” noting that the resulting effect is exactly the reverse of what Harry Turner attributes to us. He asserts that our union work is undertaken to impress students. You have observed rightly that our party trade unionists are not available to impress much of anybody in their own localities. Now this is too bad. Other things being roughly equal, we would be very happy to impress contacts or other militants in any field of work or milieu with our active workers from any other arena. But in general the price of using our active trade unionists as public members is too high. By now there are a number of plants which used to have young CP, or IS, or CSL, or WL, or PL, or RU, or OL fractions along with SL fractions. (However, the RSL and even more the Spark group have much more cautious or even “clandestine” practices than we do.) The tendency in such places after a year or two is for there to be only SL fractions, and those not without incidental loss along the way.

Our prognosis in the next period is for heavy industrial class action. Yet unlike so many tendencies which have gone workerist, we also struggle to extend our student-centered RCY, as a fertile source of recruitment. We continuously seek and test out ways to involve our union supporters in more general political work, not least of all to counteract the effects of absorption in one milieu (and especially one in which they cannot generally present their full political profile for security reasons), but always within the framework that we will not seriously jeopardize our trade-union base. We hope that your undervaluing, in our opinion, of the dangers of trade-union victimization of reds does not flow from an idealization of the union movement, the product of the anti-communist witchhunt, as inordinately democratic or relatively free of the bourgeois ideology which views reds as dangerous alien elements.

I think that if you will look at the development at various times of other of our activities, you will see that we have undergone broadly parallel experiences in most of the fields of our endeavors—i.e., an evolution which you might find to be of increasing rather than decreasing “sectarianism.” A brief look at our activities around the periodical *Women & Revolution*, and at the periodical itself, would be instructive. As you will see from its early issues, *W&R* when initiated reflected only a partial separation of our supporters from some of the

pressures of the feminist-dominated women's liberation movement, especially over organizational aspects such as "consciousness-raising" and the so-called "tactic" of male exclusionism. In a truly dialectical process of interaction between internal party critics of our comrades' intervention with the involved comrades, who themselves felt inadequacies in their work—a process which involved protracted and seriously undertaken, although not factional, intra-party struggle—we developed our program, propaganda and not least of all the organizational aspects of this work. Centrally important in the "rectification" of the *W&R* was the painstaking historical investigation of the Leninist historical precedents for work around the woman question—which over the question of "an independent women's movement" confirmed our wildest "sectarian" impulses!—which gave us for the first time a solid historical foundation for our previously eclectic undertaking (and which parenthetically unearthed the previously almost entirely unknown organizational aspects of the Communist International's struggle against bourgeois feminism, a precedent which is now the accepted stock-in-trade of every anti-Pabloist individual and grouping).

There are a couple of specific suggestions that you offer which I believe must be flatly contradicted. You state "many of its [SL's] activities during the early years were carried out simply to 'make the record'." What? Where? When? Life is too short and the work too hard for us to willingly waste our time in such a fashion. Of all the things that we did in the early years, the activity for which we received the most criticism as useless and senseless was the production of elements of our documentary history in the form of "Marxist Bulletins." But we knew that this was a vital activity, and so it proved. *None* of the numerous regroupments which we have experienced took place without the closest scrutiny of this material by those with whom we were fusing; nor would we have it any other way. This "making the record" has been, as we knew it would have to be, a key element in the struggle to maintain and strengthen a politically homogeneous tendency with comrades from the most diverse political backgrounds. It has also proven essential in the development of international collaborators seeking to assimilate critically our history from a vantage point of parallel experience at great distance.

You also state "Today it is admitted by the SL that the 1968 split almost destroyed the organization." I wonder how you acquired this impression. The 1968 split was the foundation of our present strength. Immediately after the split we coined

an aphorism: "Ellens said our membership was half social-democratic; Turner said our leadership lacked collectivity. By the time the fight with them was over we had a hardened Bolshevik membership and a fighting collective leadership." That was our "admission" then and now.

The cliquist defections of Cunningham et al. actually did more damage to our self-confidence. And this leads us straight to the question of our spasmodic press over most of the years of our existence. From 1964 through 1968 with the actual forces that we had, and which were willing or able to be situated in a common center, aggravating and miserable though the situation was as I well recollect, the plain truth that we faced in terms of priorities as a still partially amorphous one-mini-section international was that there was no other possibility for our public press. Even though for example if we had been able to space out our *Spartacists* and copious substantial leaflets we probably produced the equivalent of an 8-page monthly in that period, we canvassed unceasingly for an editor, competent and sealed off from other responsibilities. We even tried Lyn and Carol Marcus for a couple of issues—Ms. Marcus having been Managing Editor of Wohlforth's *Bulletin* the year before. In 1968 we snatched at Cunningham, a prolific if ill-disciplined writer and literate political comrade from the environs of the University of Iowa. The personal root of his subsequent deepening disgruntlement lay clearly in his frustrating inability to actually function as *Spartacist* editor. With the change in the objective situation and the strengthening of the quality, though not yet the quantity, of SL membership, a regular and more frequent periodical came to be recognized as vital and achievable. We seized on Cunningham's friend Benjamin despite his glaring weaknesses and the all-round sense of transience which he generated. And indeed the pounding which production of a monthly gave Benjamin, Cunningham's bitterness in failure and the new ever-heavier rhythm of work in the SL threw them into a deep secret estrangement, the top of the iceberg being their expressed nostalgia for the good old days when not so much happened.

In the spring of 1961 I was on national tour for the YSA and met briefly with Wohlforth in Chicago. We discussed the prospects for our then-common tendency. We agreed that in any case we didn't want to split without a good hundred supporters. I observed then, and Wohlforth agreed, that a good part of the reason for the ephemeral character of most little Trotskyist groups newly cohered of young people lay in their false and effectively liquidationist priorities of public face

over cadre-building. Over and over they would pour all their energy and money into a few issues of a publication, get no echoes and disperse. I had in mind particularly a 20-year-effort to create a Mexican section. I stated that if we had the forces and finances for only one functionary it had better be a national secretary, not an editor. But we also agreed that with something on the order of 100 comrades coming out of the SWP we would not have to face that hard choice. But 2½ years later the RT was ejected (due in no small measure to the efforts of the Wohlforthites) with only a nominal 35 or so supporters, and of our three leading comrades both White and Mage were already visibly and by their own admission pretty damaged.

Looking back upon that period of desperate struggle to preserve the existence of the revolutionary Trotskyist tendency, with terribly limited material resources and with barely any cadre and some nominally leading elements visibly demoralized by the devastating effects of *successive* frame-up and expulsion (first by Healy, then Dobbs) and the resulting disorientation, isolation and organizational weakness such that endemic disgruntlement or panacea mongering was so easy as to be almost automatic for inexperienced or soft individuals. The striking feature in retrospect is our perseverance in the attempt to break out of our limitations; to transcend national isolation first through our orientation toward the IC and then through efforts to enter into discussions with other tendencies; to push the rightist and passive Bay Area organization into some semblance of activity around the campus radicalization and “Free Speech Movement”; to squeeze another year or two out of demoralized leading elements and our few trade-union militants; to struggle in an exemplary fashion (in our propaganda and through rent-strike work and the Harlem Organizing Committee) to fill the vacuum left by the SWP’s capitulation to nationalism in the black movement; to win by regroupment and recruitment some fresh forces.

Our most damaging failure in the early period was in fact our failure to orient speedily and fully towards the thousands of radicalized petty-bourgeois youth in SDS. It was partially owing to this failure that the polarization of SDS and the impulse on the part of many of its radical students to orient toward the working class that Progressive Labor was able to win hegemony over a section of SDS on the basis of a crude and deformed but subjectively sincere attempt to pose a working-class line.

You state that the SL “tailed after” PL and that we characterized it as “unconscious Trotsky-

ism.” You go on to draw the parallel, “Remember the SWP did the same thing to justify tailing after Castro.” If this were true, Comrade Clark, you and I should form a faction to root out the capitulatory and liquidationist elements sponsoring such a policy! But there was no such policy as you project. The principal characterization that I recollect we made of PL in those periods that it was emphasizing the class struggle was “Trotskyism with a pre-frontal lobotomy.” Now the sometime idiot Trotskyism imputed to Milt Rosen was not exactly the same thing as Castro’s alleged “unconscious Marxism”!

Your impression, if it is not merely formalism in drawing the supposed parallelism between our policy toward PL and that of the SWP toward Castroism, may result in part from the SWP leadership’s constant insistence on the Stalinism of PL as a way of side-stepping the implications of the fact that PL in those years stood in its main thrust clearly to the left of the SWP; let us not forget the righteous indignation of the NPAC marshals as they forcibly ousted our comrades along with the PLers, incanting epithets about Stalin and the assassination of Trotsky, in defense of an anti-war policy which, even aside from the organizational exclusion, was archetypically Stalinist: overt class-collaboration with the “progressive” antiwar bourgeoisie. The SWP’s facile characterization of groups like PL and the Panthers as simply “ultra-leftist” was a convenient evasion of the responsibility of authentic Trotskyists to expose and combat their concomitant opportunism.

In any case, whatever the roots of your impression, it overlooks the content of our political intervention into SDS. The *purpose* of the SWP’s (Joseph Hansen) characterization of Castro as an “unconscious Marxist” was to justify tailing the Cuban leadership; the purpose of our characterization of PL was to seek to shock their militants into examination of the content of the Trotskyist bugaboo and the implications of their own partial and contradictory class-struggle programmatic positions. The watchword of our intervention, as reflected in a headline in our press, was “SDS: Toward Stalinism or Trotskyism?” The mechanisms of this intervention included the production of the early mimeographed *RMC Newsletter* (forerunner to the present *Young Spartacus* as our SDS caucus was the forerunner to the RCY)—a hard political weapon devoted primarily to exposing PL and its operation in SDS for political rightism and front-groupism as well as for ultra-left excrescences. Looking at your SL/SWP “tailism” analogy and extending it as it should be extended, can you imagine the SWP in

its Fair Play for Cuba waging a vigorous campaign for the defense of the persecuted Cuban (Posadasite) Trotskyists? Or introducing resolutions for the concrete implementation of the institutions of workers democracy through soviets? Or in a word fighting for the political revolution in Cuba? Yet a corresponding hard and principled political thrust was consistently the motivation and practice of our SDS intervention which you term “tailism” on the basis of our deliberately highly insulting characterization of PL.

I suppose a good example of how we “tailed” after PL was in 1964 when both we and the Wohlforthites were publicly giving critical support to the SWP’s electoral campaign and both orienting to PL. We passed out leaflets directed to the PL members explaining why they should change their abstentionist policy and vote SWP. We caught the Wohlforthites, in particular Fred Mueller of their PC, hanging around a PL local club passing out PL leaflets calling for boycotting the elections. When we confronted Wohlforth on this behavior we were told this was one more evidence of our tactical inflexibility, i.e., our sectarianism. Several years later when PL tried to crash and smash an SMC conference in Boston, we mobilized our more robust members to help repel PL’s physical assault (the SWP even had to give public acknowledgment of our aid). You will find a long report on the incident and a scathing denunciation of PL’s Stalinist gangsterism within the left movement on the front page of our entrust organ in SDS, the *RMC Newsletter* (some months later at an SDS national conference held in Chicago, we nominated our comrades for SDS offices as a means of obtaining additional floor time in nominating speeches, presenting as one comrade’s credentials his physical defense of workers democracy against this example of PL hooliganism!). At about the same time, the *Bulletin*, then in its pro-Red Guard phase, defended a PL attack on SWP electioneers in San Francisco, stating that the SWP “counter-revolutionary scabs on the Chinese Revolution” had gotten what they deserved.

Now these are some particulars. Behind them lay our general guideline. We see a fundamental

contradiction in those formally Stalinist organizations and tendencies around the world which simultaneously advance a “one-stage” conception of proletarian revolution yet seek to support this position from the standpoint of Stalin, Mao, etc., and we believe that such organizations are prone to a regroupment process of polarization, especially if we can assist in making bare such a decisive contradiction. (Parenthetically, the evolution of the CWC provided retrospective confirmation of this analysis.)

It is genuinely not clear to me what you should do about applying for SL membership. But I think that the decision lies basically with you. You have been a serious comrade of proven responsibility. Your particular views evidently fall within the SL Statement of Principles. Evidently you can accept and carry out in a disciplined fashion the program and present policies and decisions of the SL. We are not some kind of bureaucratic formation which picks and chooses wantonly or with secret criteria. Nor would we seek to pressure prospective members into forswearing the political views which they are known to hold, which would destroy their credibility should they undertake in the future to defend these positions or estimations within the organization; it goes without saying that you would not undertake such political abasement, which would sterilize your future as an articulate and experienced comrade playing a role in our internal life.

Therefore, if in your own estimation membership would require your going to war with much of the rest of the organization, it would really not be worth it on anybody’s part, as you noted. But if you believe that the organization might be modified in ways which you believe beneficial and necessary by essentially incidental struggle, pressure and example rather than by the final conflict, then you should join. In short to give an epigrammatic telescoping: “In our Father’s House are many mansions; but remember Zack!”

Comradely,
Jim Robertson (with corrections and
additions by Liz Gordon)



Toward the Rebirth of the Fourth International!

DECLARATION FOR THE ORGANIZING OF AN INTERNATIONAL TROTSKYIST TENDENCY

July 1974

Following acceptance by the SL/U.S. Political Bureau and Spartacist League/Australia and New Zealand Central Committee, this declaration was adopted by the European summer camp of the international Spartacist tendency in July 1974. It was published in Spartacist No. 23, Spring 1977.

1. The Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand and the Spartacist League of the United States declare themselves to be the nucleus for the early crystallization of an international Trotskyist tendency based upon the 1966 Declaration of Principles and dedicated to the rebirth of the Fourth International.

2. In a half dozen other countries parties, groups and committees have expressed their general or specific sympathy or support for the international Spartacist tendency, as have scattered supporters or sympathizers from a number of additional countries. Among these groups and individuals are comrades, in both Europe and Asia, possessing many years or even decades of experience as cadres of the Trotskyist movement.

3. The Revolutionary Internationalist Tendency, a small Marxist wing of the "United Secretariat," centered on the United States and with supporters in Australia and elsewhere, has seen its spokesmen expelled from their national sections and parties for seeking to express their views within the United Secretariat, that deeply factionally divided and unprincipled conglomeration of reformists and revisionists, latter-day Kautskys, Bukharins and Pablos. If the main contenders in the "United Secretariat" are united in their common and not-so-veiled class collaborationist appetites, they are deeply divided between the electoralism and placid neo-populism of, e.g., the American Socialist Workers Party and the guerrilla-terrorist enthusing of, e.g., the French ex-Ligue Communiste. These differences reflect far more the differing national milieus and resulting opportunist appetites than they do any questions of principle. The recently concluded "Tenth World Congress" of the United Secretariat refused to hear or even acknowledge the appeal of RIT comrades against their expulsion. The RIT forces are now making common cause with the Spartacist tendency. They are but a vanguard of those who will struggle out of the revisionist swamp and toward revolutionary Marxism. Already in France an oppositional Central Committee member of the former Ligue

Communiste has broken from the Front Communiste Révolutionnaire (recently formed by *Rouge*) in solidarity with the views of the RIT.

4. In Germany senior elements from the centrist and now fragmented left split from the United Secretariat in 1969 are being won to the Spartacist tendency. They are regrouping around the publication *Kommunistische Korrespondenz*. In Germany three inextricable tasks are posed for Leninists: to programmatically win over subjectively revolutionary elements from among the thousands of young left social democrats, centrists, revisionists and Maoists; to fuse together intellectual and proletarian elements, above all through the development and struggle of communist industrial fractions; to inwardly assimilate some thirty years of Marxist experience and analysis from which the long break in continuity has left the new generation of German revolutionary Marxists still partially isolated.

5. In Austria, Israel, Canada and elsewhere similar splits, followed by revolutionary regroupment and growth, are occurring. In Austria the initial nucleus came from youth of the United Secretariat section. The "Vanguard" group of Israel is the last still united section of the old "International Committee" which split in 1971 between the British Socialist Labour League's wing led by Gerry Healy (with which the American Workers League of Wohlforth is still united despite friction) and the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste led by Pierre Lambert which subsequently lost most of its international support—i.e., with the Bolivian Partido Obrero Revolucionario of G. Lora and the European groupings around the Hungarian, Varga, both breaking away. If the "Vanguard" group amid this welter of disintegration is still unable to choose between the counterposed claims of Healy and Lambert, it did produce and promptly expel a principled and valiant counter-tendency to both. In Canada youth from the Revolutionary Marxist Group's Red Circles are being drawn to Trotskyism. Everywhere unprincipled formations are subjected to the hammer

blows of sharpened capitalist crisis and upsurge in the class struggle.

6. In Ceylon where the historical consequences of Pabloist revisionism have been most fully revealed, only the Revolutionary Workers Party, led by the veteran Trotskyist, Edmund Samarakkody, has emerged with integrity from the welter of betrayals perpetrated by the old LSSP and which were aided and abetted by the United Secretariat, its unspeakable agent on the island, Bala Tampoe, and the craven Healyite "International Committee." The RWP has been compelled to seek to generalize the revolutionary Marxist program anew from Marxist class-struggle principles.

7. The Spartacist tendency is now actively working for the immediate convening of an international conference to politically and geographically extend the tendency and to further formalize and consolidate it. The tendency organizing nucleus will seek to work in the closest collaboration with sympathizing groups, particularly in continuing and assuring a broadly-based and full written and verbal discussion process leading to this international conference.

In the pre-conference interim the tendency organizing nucleus assumes political and organizational responsibility for the prior international resolutions, declarations, open letters and agreements for common work of its present constituent groups. These documents notably include: "Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International," 14 June 1963; Statement to the 3rd Conference of the International Committee, 6 April 1966; Letter to the OCRFI and French OCI, 15 January 1973; Letter to Samarakkody, 27 October 1973; the historical analyses: "Genesis of Pabloism," "Development of the Spartacist League [of New Zealand]," and "The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon"; and the agreements endorsed at the interim international conference held in Germany in January 1974, printed in *Workers Vanguard* No. 39, 1 March 1974.

8. Both the present "United Secretariat" and the former "International Committee" despite their respective pretensions "to be" the Fourth International, as a necessary condition for their fake "unities," have chronically mocked the principles of internationalism and of Bolshevik democratic centralism as their different national groups or nationally-based factions have gone their own way—ultimately in response to the pressures of their own ruling classes. Thus until the English and French components of the ex-"International Committee" blew apart, the International Committee operated explicitly on the proposition that "the only method of arriving at decisions that remains possible at present is the principle of unanimity"

(decision at the 1966 London International Committee Conference). Since then the Healyites have substituted the naked Gauleiter/Führer principle as their mockery of democratic centralism. The other, OCI-led wing of the ex-IC retained the contradiction of launching the Organizing Committee for Reconstruction of the Fourth International which was supposed to initiate political discussion on the basis of the 1938 Transitional Program, while simultaneously seeking to build new national sections. Both such hypothetical sections and the Organizing Committee itself therefore labored under a basic ambiguity from the outset, but the Organizing Committee's disintegration into sharply counterposed elements all of whom swear by the 1938 Program, has left its practice stillborn. Today, following the just concluded "Tenth Congress" of the United Secretariat, its American supporters, being themselves in the Minority internationally, threaten their own national minority, the Internationalist Tendency (which belongs to the international Majority), by declaring:

"The Socialist Workers Party proclaims its fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International but is prevented by reactionary legislation from affiliating to it. All political activities of members of the SWP are decided upon by the democratically elected national leadership bodies of the SWP and by the local and branch units of the party. Unconditional acceptance of the authority of these SWP bodies is a prerequisite of membership. **There are no other bodies whose decisions are binding on the SWP or its members.**" [our emphasis]

—SWP *Internal Information Bulletin* No. 4, April 1974, from Introductory Note, 17 April 1974

9. This apparently naked assertion of national independence by or toward organizations in the United States is not unique and has a specific history. Thus the American Healyite publicist, Wohlforth, declares in his pamphlet, "Revisionism in Crisis":

"With the passing of the Voorhis Act in 1940 the SWP was barred from membership in the Fourth International by law. Ever since that time the SWP has not been able to be an affiliate of the Fourth International. So today its relationship to the United Secretariat is one of political solidarity just as the Workers' League stands in political solidarity with the International Committee."

The "Voorhis Act" passed by the American Congress in 1940 has been used as a convenient excuse for revisionists to more openly display their concrete anti-internationalism than is convenient for their co-thinkers elsewhere.

This act, while ostensibly aimed centrally at domestic military conspiracies directed by foreign powers, was actually intended, as was the

overlapping “Smith Act,” to harass the American Communist Party, then supporting the Hitler-Stalin Pact. A key provision states: “An organization is subject to foreign control if...its policies or any of them are determined by or at the suggestion of...an international political organization” (political activity being defined as that aimed at the forcible control or overthrow of the government). Such organizations were to be subject to such massive and repetitive “registration” requirements as to paralyze them, quite aside from the impermissible nature of many of the disclosures demanded. Thus it was similar to the later “Communist Control Act” which was successfully fought by the American CP. But the “Voorhis Act” with its patently unconstitutional and contradictory provisions has never been used by the government—only the revisionists.

10. Today the United Secretariat Majority makes loud cries in favor of *international* unity and discipline, i.e., against the SWP’s views and conduct, but it was not always so. When the forerunner of the Spartacist League tried to appeal its expulsion from the SWP to the United Secretariat, Pierre Frank wrote for the United Secretariat on 28 May 1965 that:

“In reply to your letter of May 18 we call your attention first of all to the fact that the Fourth International has no organizational connection with the Socialist Workers party and consequently has no jurisdiction in a problem such as you raise: namely, the application of democratic centralism as it affects the organization either as a whole or in individual instances.”

After Frank gave the Spartacists his answer, Healy publicly expressed sympathy for the Spartacists’ plight, charging in his *Newsletter* of 16 June 1965 that Frank “ducks behind a legal formula for cover.” But when Healy’s own ox was gored by the SWP’s publication of the embarrassing pamphlet “Healy ‘Reconstructs’ the Fourth International,” Healy’s SLL threatened violence and/or legal action (“Political Committee Statement,” 20 August 1966 *Newsletter*) against any who circulated the pamphlet in his England. Shortly he used both—the Tate affair! Healy claimed as the basis for his threats the self-same fear of the Voorhis Act on behalf of Wohlforth and the Spartacists. But the *Spartacist* then replied:

“We for our part reject the SLL’s solicitousness on our behalf. The Voorhis Act is a *paper tiger*—never used against anyone and patently unconstitutional. For the Justice Department to start proceedings against a small group like ours or the smaller and less threatening [Wohlforthite] ACFI would make the government a laughing stock, and Healy knows this. He is aware that for years the SWP has hidden

behind this very act to defend its own federalist idea of an International.”

—*Spartacist* No. 7, September-October 1966

11. More currently, however, as in the United Secretariat Majority’s “Again and Always, the Question of the International” (by Alain Krivine and the self-same Pierre Frank, 10 June 1971, SWP *International Information Bulletin* No. 5, July 1971) they attack the public formulation by Jack Barnes, SWP National Secretary, that “the principal condition for international organization” is “collaboration between leaderships...in every country.” To this idea Krivine and Frank counterpose “the International, a world party based on democratic centralism.” And later the Majority Tendency (in *IIDB* Volume X, No. 20, October 1973) notes that the Minority, in flagrant contradiction to Barnes’ and Hansen’s previously expressed views, declares, “we will do our utmost to construct a strong [international] center,” and the Majority concludes that “actual practice leaves no doubt: the [Minority] faction would be for a ‘strong center’ if it were able to have a majority in it.” And most recently the same United Secretariat Majority asserts that behind the acts of the SWP-based Minority “lies a federalist conception of the International which contradicts the statutes and the line adopted by the [Tenth] World Congress” (17 March 1974, *IIDB* Volume XI, No. 5, April 1974). The United Secretariat Majority ought to know. They made this accusation in commenting on a Tenth Congress joint Minority-Majority agreement so flagrant in mutually amnestying every sort of indiscipline, public attack and disavowal, organizational chicanery, walkout and expulsion that the Majority also had to offer the feeble disclaimer that these “compromises adopted at this World Congress should in no way be taken as precedents” and that “the exceptional character of these measures is demonstrated, moreover, by the unanimous adoption of our new statutes” (which formally contradict the real practice!). Yes indeed, for opportunists and revisionists basic organizational principles are not of centralized, comradely, even-handed and consistent practice but just boil down to the simple matter of whose ox is gored. This is *the* organizational aspect of Pabloism.

If today the United Secretariat promises to back up its own friends in the SWP should action be taken against them, the point to be made is not the United Secretariat’s dishonesty and hypocrisy per se, but rather the shattering of the United Secretariat’s pretensions (like those of the International Committee) to be the Fourth International. They both trim their avowed organizational principles

through expediency for petty advantage just as *and because* they do the same with their political principles and program.

12. The international Spartacist tendency is just that, a tendency in the process of consolidation. But from its international outset it declares its continuing fidelity already tested for a decade in national confines to Marxist-Leninist principle and Trotskyist program—Revolutionary, Internationalist and Proletarian.

The struggle for the rebirth of the Fourth International promises to be difficult, long, and, above all, uneven. But it is an indispensable and central task facing those who would win proletarian power and thus open the road to the achievement of socialism for humanity. The struggle begun by L.D. Trotsky in 1929 to constitute an International Left Opposition must be studied. Both despite and because of the differing objective and subjective particulars and with ultimately common basis then and now there is much to be learned especially as to the testing and selection of cadres in the course of the vicissitudes of social and internal struggles.

The giant figure of Trotsky attracted around itself all sorts of personally and programmatically unstable elements repelled by the degenerating

Comintern. This led, together with demoralization from the succession of working-class defeats culminating in the Second World War, to a prolonged and not always successful sorting out process. It is a small compensation for the lack of a Trotsky that the Spartacist tendency has little extraneous, symbolic drawing power at the outset. But a decade of largely localized experience shows no lack of weak or accidental elements drawn temporarily to the tendency. The only real test is in hard-driving, all-sided involvement in living class struggle.

As L.D. Trotsky noted in “At the Fresh Grave of Kote Tsintsadze,” 7 January 1931:

“It took altogether extraordinary conditions like czarism, illegality, prison, and deportation, many years of struggle against the Mensheviks, and especially the experience of three revolutions to produce fighters like Kote Tsintsadze....

“The Communist parties in the West have not yet brought up fighters of Tsintsadze’s type. This is their besetting weakness, determined by historical reasons but nonetheless a weakness. The Left Opposition in the Western countries is not an exception in this respect and it must well take note of it.”

Central Committee, SL/ANZ
Central Committee, SL/U.S.



JAMES P. CANNON MEMORIAL

27 August 1974

James P. Cannon, expelled from the U.S. Communist Party in 1928, was a founder of American Trotskyism. He was the principal leader of the SWP for over three decades. This speech was printed in Spartacist No. 38-39, Summer 1986.

We have had a bittersweet response to Jim Cannon for a long time, and so when he died we had a false—but real—feeling of loss. The loss took place a long time ago, but it was still incorporated in the living body of the man that is no more. I don’t have any thesis to propound tonight but I will argue that he does belong to us, not to the SWP. And he obviously knew pretty well long before he died, not that he belonged to us, but that he did *not* belong to the SWP.

What I want to present to you tonight is what the historians call oral history. I was told these things by senior comrades of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Workers Party (WP) who were in a position to know directly the various observations, anecdotes and characterizations. There is an inevitable slippage in the absence

of documentation. But I believe it to be true. I believe it to be true not only in general, but precisely.

There is always a problem of generations in their understanding. I was raised in the WP (at the age of most of you) with the proposition that Jim Cannon was a supreme cliquist, the meanest tiger in the bureaucratic jungle (and the phrase “bureaucratic jungle” is a standard phrase from the Shachtmanite movement). Then I joined the SWP and found that it was inconceivable from every aspect that Cannon could have been a cliquist. He was a hard and lonely man. And I wondered why.

Here’s an anecdote. Bill Farrell, who was the organizer in San Francisco during the Shachtman fight, had occasion as a seaman to do an important

courier mission. He came thousands of miles under a very difficult period, walked into comrade Cannon's office and said: Here's the stuff. Cannon said: All right, thank you, go. No backslapping, no glass of whiskey, no nothing. Cannon was an aloof man.

Art Sharon, who was the first SWP member of the United Secretariat, a very senior guy, always used to say, "James Perfidious Cannon." And Sharon was a hard Cannonite! He was an old bosun turned construction site chief.

And I wondered why. You'll find a clue in some of Cannon's writings. The Cannon faction in the Communist Party (CP) was not the *Cannon* faction, it was not the Cannon/Shachtman faction; it was the Cannon/*Dunne* faction. Dunne (William Dunne, Bill Dunne) stood a little less in stature than Cannon but was a strong independent leader, a figure of the American CP in the 1920s. They were very close collaborators: Cannon being the political leader, Dunne being the trade unionist. They were very close personally. Bill and Margaret Dunne and Jim and Rose Cannon shared an apartment in New York (they call them "communes" today I think but the reason was the same: cheap rent). They were very close. There were also a lot of other Dunne boys, about five of them. But Bill Dunne had the misfortune to be on Comintern assignment in Outer Mongolia when the Trotskyist split came in the United States. So he stayed with the CP. That was Cannon's last best friend so far as I know. He didn't have any other friends after that; he became personally entirely family-oriented.

Cannon had been through a lot of political battles already. As I trust all of you know, he'd been an ardent young Wobbly—looked to Vincent St. John—in the best revolutionary syndicalist section of the IWW. Then he went through all the factional brawls in the CP and wasn't destroyed. I just don't think he made any more friends after that. I think he probably felt that political friendships were too impermanent, and he stuck with his family.

The idea of this guy as a cliquist is absurd! In fact, the human dimension of the founding cadre of American Trotskyism was added by Martin Abern. Martin Abern was not a cliquist in the way that we know the word "cliquist." He happened to be a very warm, sympathetic human being, an effective organizer, and deeply repelled by the cold, aloof Cannon. You want some of the testimony? The SWP's *Education for Socialists* series published "The Abern Clique" in which Joseph Hansen, a young Abernite, recounts how he was won over by this cold, aloof, impersonal

James P. Cannon on the basis of the *issues*. I think that Cannon, out of personal hurt, bent the stick the other way and genuinely was not accessible in understanding the personal side of politics, the personal needs of comrades. So those needs, which we all carry, tended to become the monopoly of the Abern/Shachtman group. The warmth and geniality of the Abern/Shachtman group were not artificial; they actually did service a part of the needs of the membership. This in turn assisted in laying the basis for a certain *dual power* situation in the American Trotskyist movement for ten years.

So why do we talk about Cannon? Comrade Cannon for a number of decades in his prime evidently had "merely" one capacity, which has been sneered at, in a fundamental article by Shachtman which I'll get to later, and extravagantly by all kinds of mice like Tim Wohlforth and every sort of wiseacre (Wohlforth by his own modest admission is the first American Marxist). All that comrade Cannon could do—and it was not a personal capacity but was evolved out of his times and out of his battles—was to be the successful strategist and leader of a proletarian revolution in North America! That was what he was. That was his strength and that's why we memorialize him now.

I don't know much about his early history. Let me talk a bit about his wife. Rose Karsner was a very strong individual and seems to fit the stereotype of the hidden history of women. You will hardly find a documentary track of her record. She was a pretty tough cookie and played a major role: there was obviously always a significant political collaborative relationship between Rose Karsner and Jim Cannon. It was manifestly there.

Near the end I saw it myself. It was the last time I ever saw Cannon, and Rose had come in from listening to that horrible woman who wrote something about how Shakespeare was a Marxist: Annette Rubenstein. Rubenstein was on tour and Rose drew the assignment to go. She came back while I was sitting there talking with old Jim. She walked in, a sprightly little creature, kind of like a sparrow, and said "Garbage! Disgusting! Stalinist!" Just laid it all over the old man.

They did not come together when they were young. Rose Karsner had been David Karsner's wife. He was an early biographer of Debs. They had had at least one child. She came to work in the International Labor Defense (ILD) that Cannon was running, and rapidly became assistant director. I do know that when Cannon was out of town she reported to the PolCom on behalf of the ILD.

About Cannon's kids. One of them died quite miserably and tragically. This is a piece of party history that will sound very strange in terms of the SWP of today—like an act of idiot adventurism. Those who say that the SWP during the period of the Second World War was not trying to be internationalist ought to think on this. The SWP knew that the Russian political revolution was very important.

We had many party seamen in those days; some went on the Murmansk run. Comrade Bill is old enough to know what that meant—whole convoys were dispersed and you lasted 30 seconds in the water. Take a look at that book *Maritime* by Frederick J. Lang (Frank Lovell) and you'll see how many seaman comrades were lost in the war. One of them was Cannon's kid [son-in-law Edward Parker].

I knew a party comrade [Barney Cohen] (he was in the U.S. Navy) out of the Boston branch. Murmansk convoys were made up on the East Coast, final assembly was in Boston. Then they would make the big jump, around North Cape (where they'd die) and then to Murmansk in north Russia. Finally the branch insurrected as the convoy was assembling—they went in and pulled all of the party comrades off that convoy (which of course was shot to pieces). That insurrection taught the party leadership something: that this was a mechanical thing that was using up the party members.

I want to talk about a couple of myths or rumors about Cannon. They say he drank... (I got an awful lot of this in the Shachtmanite organization, believe me.) Well he drank all right. But he wasn't an alcoholic, he was a drunkard. He'd go off the wagon once in a while on a big bender. Rose used to track him all across the country. She was really worried when he left town. He'd make promises; she'd try to monitor him. She exercised a lot of control and tried to suppress it. I don't know about the earlier drinking, but one of the last bouts he ever had (and he quit long before he died) was I think in about 1955. He hit San Francisco on one of the last tours he ever made. They had stashed him in a hotel but the old boy got loose, and he laid one on. They found him, and the organizer (a nice woman, Frances James, a Weissite) was really angry. They started pouring coffee into him, denouncing him, saying they were going to phone New York and have his ass before the National Committee. How could he do such a thing? Well, they got him pretty sobered up (they thought) and brought him into the meeting. The SWP had little affectations in those days, so they had Nora Roberts and a couple of other

little girls running around collecting money from the audience. Cannon gave what was apparently a magnificent speech, and the baskets of money came forward. And he started taking the money and throwing the bills all over the stage!

Rose found out about it, of course, and I think that was the last time he ever broke loose on tour. Seriously. And you see what I mean about anecdotes. This story is testified to by four or five comrades that were present at that incident, but it's still oral history. It really happened (that's why I'm taking the trouble to tell it to you) but I don't think one can put this in an obituary. I guess Cannon was under a lot of pressure and that this was a safety valve.

By the way, Rose was a militant socialist feminist of the 1910s and 1920s. "Feminist" meant something else then—among other things was that marriage was an abomination: it was bowing down and putting on chains before a man and before the state. So Rose would never marry, and she and Cannon were never married until they got very old and were told that if they were to get Social Security in retirement they'd have to get married. They were in their sixties when they went through the legal ceremony—and then, to her utter disgust—they found out that an affidavit instead of this odious act would have done it! But I have to regretfully report to you that they died as man and wife.

The main source—virtually the only source that I know of—for all anti-Cannon material comes out of an article that Max Shachtman wrote in the January-February 1954 issue of *New Internationalist* ("25 Years of American Trotskyism"—Part I of a two-part appraisal). In order to set Cannon up for the attack, Shachtman had to acknowledge as a precondition that Cannon was *the finest communist politician ever produced in this country*. Having explained the importance of the target, Max then went to work on demolishing the target. And everything that Wohlforth and others have written against Cannon is drawn straight out of that article! Nobody wants to acknowledge that, because the author and the circumstances aren't too creditable.

Shachtman only wrote part one, carrying the story through 1940, and we waited for a long time but he never could write part two. The reason was that it was already pretty late and he was getting ready to liquidate the Independent Socialist League (ISL) and to acknowledge that there was no systematic and principled basis for a centrism that stood between the revolutionary Marxism of Trotsky and the social democracy. He'd arrived at that conclusion, so he just could not write a history going beyond 1940. But he tried to do

the job on Cannon—did a pretty good job, too, everybody has borrowed from it.

But there is a problem here and I want to talk about it a little bit. Most of life is contradictory and equivocal. It's not written in black and white but in shades of grey—which at the same time possess *qualitative* decisiveness. And it's that combination—that everything is in shades of grey and at the same time behind the shades of grey lie fundamental truth and falsity—which is one of the hardest things in historical interpretation. It is necessary to grasp this in order to arrive at the answer of what to do today.

It is unfortunate that there are not many more of the historical materials of Russian Menshevism available, so that the comrades could be treated to just how plausible, how often correct, how sensible, the Mensheviks were (on many occasions) as against the Bolsheviks. What we have handed down to us instead is a version of “revealed truth” as from the Bible: Lenin said such and such, Martov said such and such; obviously Lenin was right and Martov was wrong. That *is* the fundamental truth. But if you had been there then, comrades, it would not have been so obvious, and over particulars Martov would have been right! And Trotsky, then a Menshevik, would have been right on certain key political questions too. That is the problem of historical interpretation: it is not a religious act, to find an essential purity which because it is essential must therefore be total. If the comrades learn nothing else from their reading and their study, they should learn that. Because when faction fights break out around us, there's going to be so much truth on both sides that if you resort to either accepting secondary grounds as your basic determinant of action, or if you resort to the ultimate philistinism: “Well, there's truth on both sides, and where there's smoke there's fire”—then you had better give up and start trying to sell used cars.

So there's a problem with contradictory, equivocal phenomena, and Cannon was contradictory. Cannon had an abiding failure. He became the principal individual authority responsible for the world Trotskyist movement in August 1940 and basically didn't do anything about it (though the SWP was internationalist and willing to commit energy, lives). I think the reason was pretty simple: Cannon felt he was not good enough to be a world leader of the Marxist movement, and he was right.

He had just come back from France. We secured a particularly rare internal SWP bulletin containing Cannon's report on his trip to France in 1939. The trip, it is clear, was a catastrophe. Cannon didn't know French; the French leaders ignored

him. He saw that the situation was going utterly to hell. He had at his fingertips a *mass* of experience in how to function—nobody would listen. Cannon spent six months in France while Shachtman, Burnham and Abern were doing the job back home. The trip was a failure: Cannon found that he could not work internationally. That was in 1939—then came the big fight in '40.

And then suddenly he was supposed to be the principal political leader, moreover under conditions in which the world, as a result of the Second World War, was desperately segmented. So he backed away from the role, temporized during the war. As soon as Michel Pablo, Pierre Frank and Ernest Mandel came along and claimed they knew how to do it—claimed they had the language capacity, the knowledge, the science, the savoir-faire (poor old Jim; he's just an ex-train worker from the Midwest)—Cannon said all right, these guys will do it. They don't have any experience; they don't know anything; they're arrogant. (There's a phrase that the fancy sociologists in colleges like to use—and when I had to fight Shachtmanite right-wingers I learned plenty of these sociological jargon/mystification words—called “hubris.” And among other qualities good and bad, Pablo sure had hubris!)

So Cannon backed off, and we're stuck with the job. He stuck us with it doubly. Because he was a lot better than we are—and when I say “he” I mean not only Cannon personally but the immediate working crew that made up the “Cannon regime” (horrible word: for 20 years every Shachtmanite thrilled with horror at the image of the jackbooted, anti-intellectual, vicious Cannon regime).

Well there was a Cannon regime, and they were doing the best they could. But they didn't accept the international challenge, and yet it is an obligation. Yes, if you know that you don't know anything, go patiently, quietly, perseveringly; struggle with the greatest patience and attention for international collaborators. We have to go that way, not back off and wait in national isolation for somebody else to come forward and say, “I can do it,” and then we say, “all right; we'll give you our authority.” We have to persist; we have to intervene.

That was Cannon's abiding failure. And then he did it to us a second time, in the 1952-53 period. The party got all geared up in 1945-46: it was growing like crazy; it survived the Smith Act convictions; recruited a thousand workers, black and white—the first black Trotskyist cadre—hundreds of white steel workers, auto workers both black and white. And so they said, “Whoopee,” and Cannon wrote *The Coming American Revolution*. It was an affirmation of the power of the

proletariat, but already it had faults—I'll give you three right off the bat: it ignored racial divisiveness; it ignored the existence of the Communist Party; and it ignored the rest of the world outside the United States! Allowing only for these three criticisms, it was really great. Really. That's called an equivocal position. Ardent SWPers sworn to protect their heritage no matter what will say it was a perfect set of theses; if you run into somebody who says Cannon never did nothing right they'll say it was an abomination.

It had a strength: it was an affirmation of the power of the proletariat in America. That stands out, like a beacon. At the same time it was badly politically flawed, and the reaction which would have come anyhow was perhaps intensified by the weaknesses in the document. "Cannon promised us this and that, and now we're losing all our members and we're getting cynical; we've got to find a shortcut, and besides the Stalinists do exist"—you got the phenomenon of American Pabloism, which is not exactly the same thing as European Pabloism.

Cannon was a good faction fighter. I recommend to you comrades to go and read either Theodore Draper's *American Communism and Soviet Russia* or Cannon's *The First Ten Years of American Communism* on the faction Cannon put together in 1923-1924. He got six thousand Finnish farmers, two internecine warring factions of the Jewish Federation, more mutually hostile trade unionists, disgruntled elements in the other factions—and he put it all together and made it go. Well, he did the same thing in 1952-53, and it was a catastrophic mistake. The Cochranites attacked on two fronts: they attacked Trotskyism as a political program *and* they attacked the existence of an independent SWP organization. We had about a hundred young comrades under Murry and Myra Weiss, mainly in Los Angeles, in the party at the time. And they still had some spunk and steam. So the Cannon/Weiss faction was formed of those who wanted to defend the party *program*. Go and read what Murry Weiss wrote in the *Militant* in the summer of 1953 on the East German uprising: Hurray, the proletariat raises its fist. The need now is for a Leninist party to consummate the political revolution and lay the foundation for the revolution against capitalist imperialism! Very good, very correct. You can also read what the Cochranites had to say: Hurray, the Russian bureaucracy is liberalizing itself. In the same paper, sometimes on facing pages.

But the Cochranites also proposed to liquidate the independent party *organization*, which meant to attack the wages and pensions of Farrell

Dobbs, Tom Kerry, Hansen, and a bunch of other fellows who were perfectly content to let the European Pabloites do anything they wanted, or to pursue any political line in this country, as long as it was going to be pursued from the organizational framework of the SWP. (And this isn't just a venal question of needing operations which the party would pay for, pensions and the like. The organization was their whole life.) They had become politically blunted but were not prepared to organizationally liquidate.

So the political revisionism and organizational liquidationism of the American Pabloites brought together in response a common faction, which was a *bloc* inside the SWP, of Cannon and Dobbs. The deal was made to get rid of the Cochranites and restore the prior peace in the party. That was wrong. Cannon said at the end of the fight that he had feared he might have to start all over again with a hundred kids. Oh how I wish he *had* started again with just the Cannon/Weiss faction; he would have done our job for us. (The Weissites of course were destroyed in the course of the ensuing clique wars.) So that's the second thing Cannon did to us.

It took Dobbs 25 years to get rid of Cannon! It wasn't until 1965 that finally they got the old man off the National Committee—kicked him upstairs to emeritus (consultative) status. Then with the greatest of satisfaction Dobbs called Carl Feingold into his office—Carl Feingold (currently of the International Socialists) being the personal representative and spy of old Jim and in the center—and said: Carl, you're a member of the National Committee and the Political Committee; get out of here, I never want to see you again—because Cannon was off the Committee.

But by then Dobbs was a very shaky old man; he aged faster than Jim did. I traveled a bit with Dobbs in 1960 and he'd gone grey in the face; he was tired, exhausted, couldn't cut it. But that goes into the later history of the SWP and how they finally ended up with Barnes (having tried some of the more feeble-minded party leaders of my acquaintance in the middle of the 1960s).

So Dobbs never got satisfaction—he never really got to be the party leader. For 25 years they kept him in the wings; Cannon would keep going out to L.A. saying: This is it; I give up; I understand, younger men must take over—and then something would happen and Cannon would get on the phone again. So I don't think Dobbs had a very happy life.

Dobbs was never a political leader. That raises an interesting point, by the way, about the kind of leader that Cannon was. He was a political leader

not a trade unionist. If you read the Shachtman stuff you'll think he was a trade unionist; he wasn't. He was the *communist* political leader that the party trade unionists had confidence in and looked to—so long as they wanted, themselves, to be communists. That was the core of his link with the Dunne boys and the rest of that gang in Minneapolis, and Tom Kerry, and the ones that were deep into the Sailors Union of the Pacific out on the West Coast, and Bert Cochran and the gang that was working in the UAW. Trade unionists—those were the ones. And they trusted him; they looked to Cannon because they thought he was trying to build a workers party. (And they weren't too sure about Max—he made too many jokes.)

In that connection, one of the particularly malicious things that Shachtman did to Cannon in that article was to suggest that part of being a trade unionist, as everybody knows, is to be an idiot, a goon and inarticulate. Suggesting that Cannon was “just” a trade unionist was a way of saying that Cannon couldn't think or write; you'll find a big section about how Cannon never wrote anything. But Cannon was a very good journalist. They made a kind of prize collection which you should read; it's called *Notebook of an Agitator*, and if you want to see the kind of stuff that *Workers Vanguard* ought to be trying to get, that stuff is it. It's very clear. It's the hardest thing in the world, comrades, to write correctly and simply, because to write correctly tends to involve complex sentences with complex words. Cannon was also, in his polemical material, an extremely precise and effective political writer—very powerful. He tried to retain a popular quality about his writing.

But if I had to describe Cannon as anything, he was in his life, until he became a very old man, a Leninist. Leninism meant something precious for him. To us it is “received doctrine” and that's what I was attacking a little bit: there's a weakness in received doctrine, namely it's just received doctrine. But comrade Cannon had struggled with all the problems that Leninism answered. As a young man he was a syndicalist and he had to fight the questions of maximalism/minimalism, possibilism/impossibilism, parliamentarianism/anti-parliamentarianism—all these questions. For him, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder* was a revelation, because it showed him how you could be both *right* and *smart* at the same time. Leninism bridged that gap.

When Cannon embraced Leninism it was as a brand new thing; out of the peculiar alchemy of the combined developments in tsarist Russia there came this doctrine that answered the impasses of the workers movement in the west.

That was the contemporary meaning of Leninism for that generation. Cannon had been a syndicalist and not a parliamentarian. I think it was Trotsky who said that when we founded the communist movement the best we got came from the syndicalists. Because you see, there was a choice: the social democrats would rather be smart than right, and the syndicalists would rather have been right than smart. There's a gut question there, and the Communist International got more mileage out of those who came over from the syndicalist movement than from the social democracy.

If Cannon was a cold aloof guy he was also obviously fundamentally very sentimental. Have you read what Cannon has written on Martin Abern? Cannon said: Martin Abern has spent ten years struggling against the Cannon regime. But they'd also had a long time together in the 1920s. In 1949 Martin Abern died and Cannon turned up drunk and crying at his funeral. Cannon came because he'd known him for too many decades. Marty Abern was not a bad man, and he was not a calculating cliquist. I really don't see that, and you won't either if you read the material. I think he tended to put personal relations above political ones and to be deeply committed to personal relations. Of course, that makes the most terrible, desperate, effective kind of cliquist—you know, the one who really believes in it, who's not just a cynical maneuverer, but who really subordinates political to personal considerations.

Now if there's anything that has been a significant historical acquisition for the Spartacist League it is getting the Communist League of America (CLA) bulletins for the first five years. It had been for a long time clear to me that I could never try to finish the history of American Trotskyism without looking into the Cannon vs. Shachtman fight of the early 1930s—the first big wracking fight. Even the documents that are now available to you all, namely Trotsky's letters that appear in the Collected Works series, that they're now bringing out, were completely unknown when I was a young comrade. Now we've got the bulletins.

If you read that stuff, in an inchoate way, without a clear programmatic basis, it was a prefiguring, an anticipation, of the 1940 fight. They fought like hell, and Trotsky said: Stop it! You're killing yourselves; it's not clear what is going on. Then what happened was *Shachtman went over. Just* Shachtman. The Shachtmanite faction remained in opposition: Glotzer (Gates), Abern, the youth. And there was a dual power situation, but so long as the Shachtman/Cannon regime held, Shachtman was able to neutralize his ex-supporters. There was another deal that was made too: The

hardest of the Cannonites was Hugo Oehler. He didn't buy the deal and went out. So the party ran under conditions which I cannot imagine how Cannon put up with, the tension of always buying time, of always dickering, of always negotiating. Finally in 1939 the fundamental programmatic issues, under the pressure of the war and anti-Communism, seized each faction. And it blew up. It was stunning to find out that the American Trotskyist movement in the 1930s—in a sense, at the top—never really existed. It was always an uneasy truce.

That's why one should go and read documents. Not just mindlessly, but in order to answer the questions which more broad historical considerations should raise.

One likes to make one's personal reminiscences too. This was the finest communist that America has produced, and he died. I had four contacts with him. He sent me a letter one time. It was the only letter he ever sent a member of the YSA.

By the way, there's a point: our faction in the SWP were never soreheads. We liked the party leadership fine. Tom Kerry, Farrell Dobbs, Joe Hansen, Jim Cannon, George Weissman, the rest of the gang—there were a lot of things wrong; we were pretty clear-eyed about them. But there were a lot of things right about them too. Our faction worked in the SWP. We made a political choice and we knew what it meant. Wohlforth didn't make it in the SWP, you better know that. They didn't like him, didn't trust him.

So I got this letter from Cannon. It was a nice letter. It asked me to bring his personal greetings to a professor at Brown University, a historian of the American Federation of Labor, who he said did something much more important in his youth: he was a fine Wobbly and we worked together and I wonder if you would tell him, give him my personal greetings. I thought that was a *very* nice commission.

Got to know Cannon pretty well in 1958 I guess. The SWP was giving me the red carpet treatment. It was nice to get the red carpet treatment. So there was a West Coast summer camp and by "accident" we shared common quarters with Jim and Rose Cannon. So I had a long chance to talk with the old man. And it was good. He thought he was going blind then. He had cataracts and was about to have an operation which they might botch. So he was furiously, desperately sitting there with his pipe and strong tea (because he was on the wagon by then) reading, for what he thought might be the last time in his life. What book? *The Revolution Betrayed*. He was trying to commit it to memory, the whole book. I liked him. I don't think he liked

me. He thought I was a wiseass smart student. But I liked him.

And then just after we had a YSA Convention up in Detroit over New Year's, we came back driving and we went out to the desert to see Cannon to make a personal report. He already had the "real" report from that little rat, Feingold, who was at the Convention too. We got to see Cannon in the desert and that was very useful, because in the WP/ISL we had always heard the myth: Cannon's stepchildren are very rich and Cannon lives out in the Southern California desert in a marble palace. Alas, he lived in a little bitty motel room. And the reason he lived out in the desert was, his wife had a case of arrested TB and had to have a very dry, warm climate. There they were cooped up in the winter period under these extremely meager, crowded conditions. So if you ever run into the myth of Cannon's marble palace—I was there. We're living better right now.

And the last time I ever saw him, we were in opposition and it was a kind of formal meeting. I was coming through on tour in L.A. for the youth org. At the same time I knew my throat had been cut, Cannon knew my throat had been cut; only Wohlforth didn't know that his throat had been cut. So I went and made the formal meeting with comrade Cannon. We agreed mutually without saying anything not to talk about the active political questions. And I sat around and had three or four hours with him, chatting. (That's when Rose came in halfway through, having gone to see this awful Annette Rubenstein.) Just for what it's worth, those are my personal reminiscences of comrade Cannon, and they have no bearing on the politics and the main course of his career because I only knew him at the very end.

I said that I thought he didn't like the SWP very much and here's the reason why. In 1965 I had a talk with the Seattle leadership of the SWP—the Fraserites—who had just been thrown out or quit, and they mentioned that Cannon had broken loose in the West Coast summer camp and before two hundred people he denounced black nationalism in favor of class unity. Now, he did it from the *right*. It wasn't very good. At that point some members of the SWP were playing with—it sounds so funny today—something called the "Triple Revolution": poverty's been abolished, war's been abolished, racism's been abolished by new technology. Now there's been this triple revolution, what are we going to do next? Doesn't that sound absurd today? But it's a fancy idea and Cannon was kind of drawn into it.

But he was also violently an anti-nationalist of all sorts. Go and look in his *The First Ten Years*

of *American Communism*, his article called “The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement” and you’ll see that he thought there was only one thing: a proletarian revolution. And so the combination of his quietism as a very old man and his fundamental instinct for a class solution... he blew up and denounced the party line in front of two hundred people. Jack Barnes, coming through Seattle, said: Well, we may have to take disciplinary action against Jim Cannon. He can’t get away with this sort of thing. But by then he was truly quite old; there was no question of any other kind of struggle. The SWP was what he had to cling to, and he chose to ride it down to the end. At the same time he was old, he was feeble, and his wife had died—and she meant a lot to him. So I think probably Cannon was glad to die. There wasn’t much left for him. He was used up.

So there you have it. And the problem is that the story is a pretty common human story—namely, that he went from being a revolutionist to being an acquiescent supporter, lending his authority to a party that had become counterrevolutionary (and that’s the meaning of the SWP). And that’s kind of sad. Yet in balance it is our task, not to

ignore the last ten years, but to pay a great deal of attention to the first fifty years too.

I’ll give you an example. George Plekhanov was the founder of Russian Marxism, a brilliant propagandist—not theoretician, he wasn’t that good—but a brilliant propagandist. He wrote the books that trained the generation of Lenin. He tried several times to go over from Menshevism to Bolshevism, and kept falling back. He played a despicable role in the First World War in defense of tsarism. At the end he died in 1919 and he never lifted a finger against the Russian Revolution. He said: The Russian workers have made a terrible mistake but it is their choice and I will not oppose them on behalf of the bourgeoisie. A *contradictory* figure. But anybody who thinks that we should erase a George Plekhanov, or a Jim Cannon, from the heritage of Marxism only has a Wohlforthite theological conception (not even a real one: see, there is theology, which represents simply fundamental oversimplification). It’s a falsification as well as a theological viewpoint. And that’s all really that I have to say. I suppose it comes down to this: that when finally life was extinguished in the old man’s body, I felt a little bit more an orphan.



RAPE AND BOURGEOIS JUSTICE

February 1975

This article, published in Young Spartacus No. 29, February 1975, was written with Susan Adams under the pseudonyms Matt Thompson and Sarah Arnold.

Considerable publicity has surrounded the recent court case of Inez Garcia, a woman from Soledad, California, who fatally shot Miguel Jimenez, the man she claims held her to the ground while a second man raped her. The shooting occurred about a half hour after the alleged rape; the rape itself was said to have followed a violent quarrel.

Inez Garcia was brought to trial and convicted of second degree murder, while no charges were even brought against the accused rapist. The judge was the same Stanley Lawson who had two political black prisoners brought into his courtroom shackled and then pulled a gun on them when they pounded their chains on a table in protest.

Garcia has stated her conviction that the shooting was fully justified: “my conscience is clear for having fought and killed at least one of the two men who violated my honor” (*San Francisco Bay*

Guardian, 15 August 1974). While socialists will certainly come to the defense of a woman who is charged and prosecuted for defending herself from a rapist, the Inez Garcia case remains clouded with unresolved unclarities: allegations that involvement in a narcotics ring and shady connections with Soledad’s small-town underworld were motivations for the killing, conflicting testimony about the alleged rape itself and evidence of Garcia’s emotional disturbance.

Disinterested in or blurring over these unresolved questions, many feminists, radicals and liberals are simply championing Inez Garcia as a symbol of all rape victims, a martyr for the cause of women’s liberation and an embattled heroine. “Viva Inez.... She is Fighting for Us All,” cries the masthead of Inez Garcia Defense Committee leaflets. Despite profuse verbal militancy glorifying the shooting of Jimenez, the feminists’

response to the Inez Garcia case has seldom gone beyond knee-jerk liberalism. One feminist journal presented Inez Garcia with a cloying sentimentality that evoked precisely the sexist Barbie-doll stereotype of women:

“Her [Garcia’s] relationship with her Berkeley sisters [in the Inez Garcia Defense Committee] has been as an equal. It is, for example, her Cuban style recipe which was used for the enormously successful dinner-dance benefit [!]. A real person [!!], Inez expressed pleasure at her publicity photographs [!], one of which catches her in a rare smile.”

—Plexus, September 1974

When confronted with such an outrageous administration of capitalist “justice,” this trend of liberal opinion has no solution for dealing with problematic cases like that of Inez Garcia other than replacing the prevailing stereotypes of the rape victim with a new set of stereotypes as a means of sheltering the victims of rape.

Regarding the contradictions of capitalist “justice,” this liberal response to the case of Inez Garcia today recalls, ironically, the liberal campaign waged fifteen years ago to prevent the execution of the accused rapist Caryl Chessman. Arrested in 1948, Chessman was accused of being the “Red-Light Bandit” who prowled Los Angeles area lovers’ lanes, robbing couples and then forcing the women to perform fellatio on him at gun point. Under the then-existing California law, the state could secure the death penalty only by prosecuting Chessman for kidnapping under the “Little Lindberg” law. After years of court battles, Chessman became a *cause célèbre* in a left-liberal campaign for the end of capital punishment. Under capitalist “justice,” the real crime allegedly committed by Chessman—rape—was not a factor in either the prosecution’s drive for the death penalty or the liberals’ campaign in support of Chessman against capital punishment.

The Inez Garcia case has received considerable attention largely as a result of the campaign of many feminists and some prominent liberals who are proposing various measures to guarantee a more equitable administration of justice in rape cases. But can such remedies be found that do not become ensnared in the contradictions of capitalist society and its justice? What is rape, and how will the proposed measures promising a more equitable administration of justice under capitalism intersect sex, race, class and violence in this society?

Feminist Logic: “All Sex Is Rape”

Rape is manifestly a crime which embodies all of the sexual myths, fantasies and stereotypes

of this violent, deeply racist class society. When refracted through the prism of the feminist world view, however, rape simply becomes an extreme expression of “normal” heterosexual relations in a patriarchal society:

“Rape is not a special isolated act. It is not an aberration, a deviation from the norms of sexual and social behavior in this country. Rape is simply at the end of the continuum of male-aggressive, female-passive patterns, and an arbitrary line has been drawn to mark it off from the rest of such relationships.... most men in our country are potential rapists.”

—A. Medea and K. Thompson, *Against Rape*

Another analysis elaborates an analogous chivalry-rape dualism:

“If a male society rewards aggressive, domineering sexual behavior, it contains within itself a sexual schizophrenia. For the masculine man is also expected to prove his mettle as a protector of women.... In the system of chivalry, men protect women against men. This is not unlike the protection relationships which the mafia established with small businesses in the early part of this century. Indeed, chivalry is an age-old protection racket which depends for its existence on rape.”

—Susan Griffin in *Ramparts*, September 1971

Griffin “confirms” this theory by noting that Sir Thomas Malory—the author of the classic tale of chivalry, *La Morte d’Arthur*—is known to have been a rapist. Like most feminists, Griffin concludes by asserting a collective guilt of all men for rape.

What Is Rape?

It is certainly possible to regard human sexual behavior as expressing itself along a broad continuum, even though the psychology and sociology of sexual relations are murky and complex. Rape uniquely involves an act the circumstances of which determine whether it is a crime or voluntary sexual intercourse. Therefore, ambiguities about consensuality do and must occur.

Rape transforms what is normally a pleasurable intimacy and consensual activity for sexual gratification into an experience of fear, degrading submission, brutality and often injury for the victim and into an overt expression of hostility and aggression for the rapist. Between the actuality of rape and the sex act *per se* there are differences. These differences may be considered as discontinuities in the continuum of sexual relations. It is precisely the feminists who make the value judgment that there are no discontinuities, no differences in kind, between mutually pleasurable, consensual sexual intercourse and a victimization and violation filled with terror and degradation.

There does exist the phenomenon of completely

consensual sexual intercourse, even though the consensuality might be shaped by sexist attitudes or neuroses. Sex becomes something less than fully consensual when economic coercion is involved. However, this economic coercion is expressed through a complex set of social relations, and it is often extremely difficult to determine points where a discontinuity occurs; for example, to analyze sexual transactions with respect to the consensual/coercive relationships in the nuclear family and prostitution.

Sex was clearly less than fully consensual for those bourgeois mothers who roamed the streets of inflation-ridden Germany in 1923 peddling the bodies of their daughters in return for food and a warm night's lodging for the two of them. Men took advantage of the dire distress of these women as an opportunity for their own sexual gratification. The particular circumstances made such sexual relations different from both "duty" sex in marriage and forcible rape.

Rape and Dispensation

An even greater discontinuity is evident in wartime mass rape. While brutalized soldiers rape helpless female civilians in large measure for sexual satisfaction, there is usually also a dispensation for the crime. Soldiers are often given a license to rape and encouraged to view the women of the conquered nation (usually of a different racial or ethnic origin) as something less than human.

For example, during the Second World War Japanese troops were continually being told by their officers that Chinese women were longing for "virile" Japanese males, because they had become tired of their "flabby" Chinese men. This undoubtedly was seen as a dispensation by the Japanese soldiers, who committed brutal mass rape in each city they entered.

Such wartime dispensation to rape is described in a passage from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*:

"...my cell mates...were three honest, openhearted soldiers.... Still damp from the battle of the day before, yesterday they had gotten drunk, and on the outskirts of the village broke into a bath where they had noticed two raunchy broads going to bathe. The girls, half-dressed, managed to get away all right from the soldiers' staggering, drunken legs. But one of them, it turned out, was the property of the army Chief of Counterintelligence, no less.

"Yes! For three weeks the war had been going on inside Germany, and all of us knew very well that if the girls were German they could be raped and then shot. This was almost a combat distinction.

Had they been Polish girls or our own displaced Russian girls, they could have been chased naked around the garden and slapped on the behind—an amusement, no more. But just because this one was the 'campaign wife' of the Chief of Counterintelligence...these warriors...were waiting for a court-martial...."

The anti-communist renegade Solzhenitsyn, darling of the "Free World" liberals, thus justifies the mass rape by the Red Army across Germany in WWII, expressing petulant outrage only at the fact that some women were so "lucky" as to have military protection from rape and death.

The Vittorio de Sica film *Two Women* is a masterful portrayal of the brutality and dispensation of such wartime rape. In the film an Italian mother (Sophia Loren) and her virginal daughter, fleeing the advancing battle front of World War II Italy, take refuge in a deserted church. They are discovered by a group of soldiers who quickly surround them, separate them from each other, brutally rape them and then leave them lying unconscious drenched in semen. The sexual competitiveness of males in a sexist society, expressed in sexual jealousy and possessiveness, is suppressed during such gang rapes precisely because the victim is so degraded that she can be regarded as something less than human by the rapists.

Rape as a Political Crime

In situations of war, racial or communal conflict there are numerous instances where revenge for casualties taken and atrocities inflicted or where a straightforward drive to subdue the conquered people is the primary motivation for mass rape. The act of rape then becomes a mode for a political crime. For example, during the holocaust of communal violence that erupted with the partition of India in 1947, rape became a means of inflicting a punishment considered worse than death. The Indian novelist Khushwant Singh has described the atrocities:

"They [Muslims] had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. Many had eluded their would-be ravishers by killing themselves.... Sikh refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered."

—*Train to Pakistan*

All criteria for sexuality break down when a man uses his penis as a weapon in a premeditated assault on a terrorized woman. Former Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver has described how in his

pre-political days he celebrated rape-as-revenge:

"Rape was an insurrectionary act. It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's laws, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women—and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was very resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I felt I was getting revenge. From the site of the act of rape, consternation spreads outwardly in concentric circles. I wanted to send waves of consternation throughout the white race."

—*Soul On Ice*

Cleaver's sadistic assaults were motivated by a desire to reverse the terms of centuries-long racial oppression through terrorizing and degrading white women (whose ancestors were far more likely to have been European peasants than Southern slaveowners), an act of defiance against white society.

Thus, rape at the final discontinuity ceases to be a sexual act. In the Nazi concentration camps, the fascists committed barbaric sexual atrocities that can be considered the essence of rape. In the autobiographical account *Out of the Night*, Jan Valtin recounts what the Nazis in one prison camp did to a Jew arrested for attempting to rape a young female Nazi.

During the night the guards of the camp mercilessly beat the Jew to death in his cell. The next morning the Jewish prisoners in the camp were brought out into the compound yard, ordered to dig a deep hole and then stand at attention before it. The other prisoners were then marched out into the yard and lined up against the compound wall. Nazi guards emerged carrying the corpse of the Jew on a stretcher. Valtin was then witness to the following:

"On the stretcher lay the mangled corpse of the Jew who had been murdered at night. His abdomen was a smear of dried blood and a clump of bloody rubbish was where his genitals had been. His face was convulsed and his eyes, wide open, were twisted upward in a glassy stare. The guard in the doctor's garb led the stretcher crew past the lined-up prisoners, and all of us stared silently at the dead man. The corpse was naked and the gulls cruised close and screamed. At a command, the stretcher-bearers dumped their burden on the ground close to the rim of the hole.

"Several of the Jews who were standing around the hole clasped their hands in front of their faces. Two others collapsed. They were cuffed and beaten until they stood straight again.

"'Pants down,' commanded Toussaint.

"The row of Jews lowered their pants. They were not men any more. They were animals without a will. They were stiff with fear.

"'Now masturbate,' commanded Toussaint.

"A few of the Jews reached for their genitals. Guards ran along their file and struck the others in their faces.

"'Masturbate, I said,' Toussaint roared. 'Masturbate, you swine!'

"The Jews obeyed. They feebly went through the motions that were demanded of them and many of the guards wore broad grins.

"'Faster,' Toussaint shouted. 'You desert bandits! You lustful reptiles! Show us how you do it in your cells at night!'

"The Jews pretended to masturbate faster. They knew they would be beaten if they did not. They knew they could not afford to collapse."

The corpse was then kicked into the hole.

"Each of the other Jews was ordered to step forward and shout three times: 'I am a race polluter.' After shouting this three times, each Jew in turn was pushed into the hole atop the dead Jew. After he had shouted again, 'I am a race polluter,' he was allowed to climb out of the hole."

This sickening brutality epitomizes the essence of rape, although the elements are manifested in a disparate form: the victim—sexually abused and dehumanized; the sex act—completely divorced from the goal of sexual gratification and a nightmare of fear; the motivation—heinous sexual and racial degradation.

Legal Reforms: A Deterrence?

Recent statistics indicate that the number of reported rapes in New York City alone has risen 103 percent over the last five years (*New York Times*, 2 December 1974). Rape victims, especially if they are poor as most of them are, can expect almost nothing in the way of aid or redress from the "peace-keeping" agencies of the capitalist state: the cops and the courts.

Should a woman try to report a rape to the police, the ensuing ordeal is often a painfully degrading follow-up to the sexual assault itself. Women are frequently denied immediate medical attention and are met with either indifference and disbelief or salacious interrogation by leering cops.

Until recently, the laws on rape were generally so completely inadequate that one published article about rape without exaggeration could be entitled: "What Can You Say About Laws that Tell a Man, If You Rob A Woman, You Might As Well Rape Her Too—the Rape is Free" (*Redbook*, September 1972). In a recent typical year, only 18 rape convictions were obtained in the courts of New York, compared with thousands of complaints ("Governor's Approval Memorandum No. 16," 22 May 1972).

In response to this situation, a campaign has been launched around the country for the reform of the sex offenses laws to provide for easier convictions of accused rapists. The focus of the reform agitation has been the corroboration laws, which although strictest in the state of New York are similar in many other Northern states. Previously, New York law required for conviction a witness besides the victim to identify the assailant, medically determined proof of actual penetration and proof of forcible compulsion. Rape is the only major felony in which the uncorroborated testimony of the victim has up to this point been held as inherently untrustworthy.

The first two requirements have now been dropped, and there is continued pressure for eliminating the remaining corroboration requirement—proof of forcible compulsion and the attempt to commit the rape (e.g., semen on the clothes of the victim). These corroboration requirements have in the past been the primary obstacle to more frequent convictions of accused rapists, since in many cases it is virtually impossible to meet the requirements. Thus, reform of the rape laws by elimination of these corroboration requirements would seem to hold out the possibility for a more equitable and non-discriminatory administration of justice.

Reforms Will Have a Racist Impact

Such reforms do not insure equitability, but merely shift the areas of abuse under bourgeois “justice.” Through malice or mistaken identity, innocent men (a concept which the feminists reject to one degree or another) are accused of rape. The reforms that have been proposed will mean that men can be convicted of rape on the basis of totally uncorroborated testimony.

Two recent well-publicized cases involving mistaken identity are those of Lawrence Berson and William Schraner, two New Yorkers accused of separate incidents of rape. In both cases the men were positively identified by the victims. They were released only when the actual rapists turned themselves in and confessed—an unexpected and almost unprecedented occurrence.

The proposed reforms likewise ignore the need to protect a defendant from accusations motivated by malice or revenge. Precisely because rape involves an act which under normal circumstances is voluntary, it is inevitable that ambiguities about consensuality will arise in many cases, particularly in those cases—the majority of those reported according to the estimates of several studies—where the man and woman are previously acquainted. Conviction merely on the basis

of a woman’s statement that an act of intercourse was not consensual is an open invitation to victimization, since rape is the most easily fabricated of felonies.

Furthermore, in this deeply racist society rape laws have been and will continue to be used to victimize black people. In the last 40 years, 455 men have been executed for rape; 405 of them were black and 398 were convicted in the southern states (*Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics*, 1973). It is not coincidental that the staunchest allies of the feminists in the fight for reform of the rape laws are police officials, District Attorneys’ offices and state legislatures. The trend toward making rape convictions easier by expanding the prosecutor’s rights and limiting the defendant’s rights flows not from a newfound concern for the rights and safety of women but from the campaign for “law and order” being waged by the capitalist state.

While legal-reform advocates might like to dismiss vigilante lynch mobs as past history in the South, legalized lynching certainly is not; Emmett Till was not the last black man to face death at the frenzied behest of racist public opinion. Right now, three black men—Jess Walston, Vernon Brown and Bobby Hines—await death in the gas chamber, convicted in a North Carolina court of raping a white woman. According to their defense, which is supported by Democrat Julian Bond and the Southern Poverty Law Center, the woman was offered a ride one evening by the three defendants; she voluntarily entered their car and then voluntarily had sexual intercourse with each of the three men. They dropped her off at her home in the full view of several white bystanders. Days later, under pressure from her family, she charged the men with rape.

The case is egregiously typical, and not fundamentally different from the famous 1931 Scottsboro case. The Scottsboro boys were nine black youths who were charged with raping two white girls in a freight car of a train. Despite contradictory testimony at the trial, the local court found eight of them guilty and sentenced them to death. Although not executed, the Scottsboro defendants served long prison terms and the last was not released until 1950. Under the reforms demanded by the feminists, racist frame-ups cannot but increase.

Another legal reform that has been proposed is the elimination of all rape laws, so that women could then prosecute accused rapists for assault. California has recently made a move in this direction by declaring testimony about the past sex life of the woman inadmissible evidence. Advocates

of this reform can present a compelling argument. In the past, defense attorneys have so abused such testimonial evidence in order to impeach the victim's character that the trial becomes a brutal circus with the burden of proof of innocence placed on the rape victim. The prospect of such emotional ordeals and stigmatization has in the past certainly kept many victims from prosecuting a rape case.

But prosecuting rape as an assault becomes snarled in all the ambiguities of consensuality. Time and time again the bourgeois courts have demonstrated that they have no intention of spending the time and money required to work through the tangled web of testimony in a contested case. Rape is unique as a crime in that it is the circumstances of the act which determine whether it is a crime or voluntary sexual intercourse. Attempting to reduce rape simply to assault cannot insure an equitable administration of justice. And whatever might be gained for the victim by de-traumatizing and tidying up trial procedure will be at the expense of new abuses of assault prosecution.

Taking the Law into Your Own Hands?

The soaring increase in violent crimes, such as rape, murder and assault, has made fear a part of everyday life for increasing numbers of urban residents. Law and order *are* prerequisites for civilized living. Yet in the hands of the bourgeois state, "law and order" translates into a justification for wanton cop brutality against ghetto residents, for smashing labor militancy and for anti-communist crusades. The administration of class-loaded, race-loaded capitalist "justice" ranges from callous indifference to the grievances of the poor, unemployed and laboring population to cold-blooded armed defense of the status quo.

If one is a victim of grievous injury such as rape and knows that the chances for equitable redress through the agencies of the capitalist state are virtually nil, the compulsion to "take the law into your own hands" is strong and even reasonable. Recognizing that the cops and courts have done little to stop rape, militant feminists have for some time exhorted women to learn self-defense techniques as a measure of protection against physical victimization.

The case of Inez Garcia is only one of a spate of cases to receive national publicity and press coverage in the last several months where a woman attacked by an alleged rapist managed to kill or seriously injure her assailant in retaliation. Another case is that of Joanne Little, a black woman prisoner in a North Carolina jail.

A prison guard, threatening her with an ice pick, allegedly attempted to rape her in her cell; as he was committing the rape she seized the weapon, stabbed him several times and then fled the jail. She turned herself in eight days later and now faces murder charges.

The feminists who regard all rape as a political crime thus consider self-defense a political act of liberation. As one feminist newspaper put it:

"Within the patriarchal society, women who 'take the law into their own hands' are defying their assigned role of passivity, and to break away from an established role is a political act."

—*off our backs*, November 1974

Many militant feminists are now advocating vigilantism as deterrence and retaliation for rapes.

Vigilantism Will Be Racist Terror

However compelling is the argument of the feminist militants, the proposal to "take the law into your own hands" runs into the very same contradictions as the liberal feminists' cry for "law and order" to stop sharply rising incidents of rape.

Marxists recognize that this is a class-divided society and that the state will defend its monopoly on legally sanctioned violence. Concerning retributive violence, the feminists are left pondering, "How we do it without getting caught is the next question" (*off our backs*, November 1974).

Moreover, this is a racially divided society, and thus "grievous injury," on the scales of bourgeois morality, will have a definite racial bias: a southern white married woman discovered embracing her neighbor will draw one sort of response, but the black man suspected of even showing affection toward the same woman may expect a much different treatment. Therefore, any sanction to "take the law into your own hands" will turn into a license to terrorize and murder black people on behalf of the prevailing, racist social values. Vigilantism will turn into an extra-legal prop for the authorities, which writ large is not simply a lynch mob, but a fascist movement.

The glib feminists perhaps consider it "symbolic" vigilante terror to shout and to spray-paint on alley walls the slogan, "Castrate Rapists!" But there are white racists in this society who are awaiting the social and political conjuncture when they will *act* on precisely such calls for torture. Castration for accused rapists was a punishment practiced by the southern slaveocracy, in all its decadence and with its insistence that blacks were not human beings but chattel. Eventually, as Eugene Genovese has noted, even the slaveholders abandoned castration as a torture for the crime of rape: "The punishment for rape remained death;

punishment by castration receded, although in Missouri it survived into the late late-bellum period" (*Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*). As their battle cry, the feminists have taken up a punishment that sickened even the most brutal slavedrivers and slaveowners!

The currently popular film *Death Wish* has as its theme just the kind of vigilantism desired by the militant feminists advocating "rape squads." In the film a man whose wife is fatally beaten and daughter viciously raped and whose great personal tragedy receives little concern from the police vows to bring the "wisdom" of the frontier West to New York City. The protagonist thus begins an individual campaign of blasting muggers and prowling rapists off the streets and subways.

In the film the protagonist's crusade leaps into the headlines and is received with sympathy and even enthusiasm by broad layers of public opinion yearning for law and order. Significantly, the movie audiences, whatever their social and racial composition, have been described as identifying closely with the vigilante and have cheered as he shoots down the muggers and rapists. *Death Wish* makes a direct and visceral appeal to what is undeniably a growing reaction among both whites and blacks in large urban centers to the crime and

random lumpen violence which are making urban life a nightmare.

The movie producers have made a glaringly obvious attempt to present racial "balance," including a racially integrated cast of muggers. Real vigilantism in a city like New York will turn into attacks on racial minorities and will trigger race riots, not "safe streets."

Contradictions of Bourgeois "Justice"

Within the confines of capitalist society and through the "justice" of the bourgeois state, the search for an equitable administration of justice for the crime of rape is caught in a maze with no exit. Each proposed solution, from legal reform to direct vigilante retribution, runs into flat contradictions arising out of the intersection of sex, race and class in this capitalist society.

The juridical basis of the development of the present system of rape laws is a moral code, based on the institution of the nuclear family, that regards a "violation" of a woman to be a decline in her "property value." Only in a workers state will men and women stand in full equality before the law, the administration of which will be a part of the creation and maintenance of a social fabric of well-being for the population as a whole.



ON NORTHERN IRELAND

14 March 1977

These supplemental remarks were made at an SL forum in New York "British Troops Out of Northern Ireland: Workers Must Crush Sectarian Terror" given by a comrade of the London Spartacist Group. They were published in Workers Vanguard No. 156, 6 May 1977 and reprinted in Spartacist No. 24, Autumn 1977.

Life is complicated, comrades. In the past generation, in the attempt to defend the just struggles of oppressed peoples, there's been a tendency to lose the context in which, for proletarian revolutionary Marxists, that struggle must be undertaken. What we are seeking to do is to defend the core of revolutionary Marxism, the **proletarian** solution, against those who would simply embrace the "good" nation against the "bad" nation.

I believe that there's very little that can be added to Comrade David's talk in the particular framework of Ireland. I'd like to underline one thing: he spoke of the metal workers' strike in 1919, in which 12,000 Catholics and 3,000 socialist, class-struggle-oriented Protestants were fired, driven out of the industry. Ireland is a very small

country, so that is probably **more than half** of the metal workers. Driven out!

What then do you have? We thought we had a bad purge in the late 1940's in the United States where 10,000 communistic elements were driven out. But that's 1/100th of one percent, not over 50 percent. So those who think that the Irish are simply locked into endless sectarian killing should examine the historical record. The metal workers could have been and were trying to be the leadership of the proletariat on the island, but over 50 percent of them were socially annihilated. That's a defeat in a struggle, not the organic chauvinism of the priest-ridden and the arrogant!

That's where the function of the revolutionary party comes in. Every generation there recurs

the opportunity and the loopholes where an international Leninist formation that is alert can intervene. You must not take what is at present as the inevitable product of history which cannot be changed, ever. It's necessary to fight, not to be passive.

And in the case of Ireland, it's particularly easy. On the island of Cyprus, a Greek is a Greek and a Turk is a Turk. How many of you have had the same experience that I have had, of working with young militants, either Ulstermen or from the Republic of Ireland? As soon as they're broken from the nationalist ideologies, and you encounter them and work with them as comrades outside that poor island, they are simply components of the English-speaking nation. That's the truth. It is only when locked into this poverty and oppression that they're thrown at each other's throats. They may *become* separate nations, in the defeat of the proletarian goal. But not yet....

Last point: when I talked here last time, some young woman, who I'm sure was entirely well-meaning, said, "Does any people who oppresses others have a right to exist?" That's the only thing that I took away from the discussion that I'd been

brooding about. And then I thought, if one wants to be idiosyncratic and make trouble, what's the most chauvinist people on earth, who absolutely have the right to exist? I think it's probably the Chinese. In 2,000 years they developed no other term for foreigners except, "the barbarians." Do you understand the conception behind that? But they have the right to exist. They were just a very powerful people, used to suppressing those on their borders and never running into anybody from a culturally higher standpoint, even if they were occasionally conquered by "barbarians." It's the nature of the world in the framework of a class-divided society.

I have two observations to end with. For many minorities that are powerful—the young woman put it the wrong way around—it is seen as *necessary to oppress in order to exist*. That's one of the lessons of life that we have to shatter, but it does give some insight into the question. Finally, what should be very obvious, something that precedes Marxism but was encompassed within it: we do not believe that any baby born into an ethnic, religious or national group thereby deserves or merits a death sentence. That's the answer to that young woman.



THE POLANSKI STORY, NEW LEFT MORALISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE WEEKLY

18 February 1978

These "rough dictation points to include in a draft" were printed in SL/U.S. Internal Information Bulletin, whole No. 30, June 1978.

The fact that four of the nine members of the Editorial Board came together in an oppositional bloc didn't fall from the skies. It arose through Burroughs' agitation and incorporates the young comrade Weinstein, the silent Karen Allen, and won over as its main spokesman for the Ed Board meeting of 9 February 1978, Gordon.

This was evidently prefigured by analogous discussions and objections—as regards Burroughs—within the paper staff over the article "Fear and Violence in NYC" [WVNo. 147, 4 March 1977], i.e., black youth terrorizing A-train riders. Other stories on sensitive extra-class social questions have appeared in other party/youth publications, but without the same cast of comrades in production, and have not, so far as is presently known, precipitated the same kind of objection or opposition; i.e., in *YSp* [No. 29] of February 1975, "Rape and Bourgeois Justice," authored by

"Matt Thompson" and "Sarah Arnold," and more tangentially the piece on witchcraft in *W&R*, the article on heroic Soviet spies, and the article on Japanese in American concentration camps.

However, there was a bit of a furor over my "Draft CC-IEC Regulation on 'Compassionate Transfers'" of 20 September 1976. Objections centered on the issue of compelling legal marriage as a possible requirement as evidence of seriousness of the would-be compassionates. And the arguments had a similar flavor to those around the Polanski issue.

The inner thread between these articles is not simply that they were heavily collaborated on, or at least suggested by JR, but rather that they are piecemeal aspects of a long-time struggle to develop a unitary conception of the human experience ranging from the enormously extended matrix of the "Old Stone Age" through the decreasingly

perceivable qualities characterizing our species in the transition from exploitative and patriarchal society to global communism. (This overall concept was first initiated in a talk—unfortunately not taped—given in NYC in Joel S.’s apartment some eight or ten years ago. It was based on my having spent some weeks consuming the then comrade Helen Janacek’s entire library of anthropology and archaeology while in the midst of and recovering from a severe bout of influenza.)

A component of this view now generally understood and accepted in our tendency is on the national question which, i.e., on the basis of orthodox Leninism lays a considerable stress for the mid-late 20th century on the concept and implications of “interpenetrated peoples”; and to hark back to the core of the nationality outlook of Marx and Engels, I offer the following observation in rejoinder to the perfectly New Left moralist question that a young woman of the Landyite tendency asked at one of our public forums in NYC in the past year. To her question: “Does any people which oppresses another have the *right* to exist?”—to this bit of touchingly naive contemporary petty-bourgeois “guilt trip” designed to permit the consciences of present-day progressives to rest easy while, e.g., the South African whites, the Israelis, the Bihari Moslems, the Ulster Protestants, and a generation ago, the Germans (and doubtless a generation before that, the Turks for their crimes against Greeks and Armenians) continue to exist, we have to answer in consonance with Engels’ brilliant, tragic observation, as I recall, in the preface to *The Peasant Wars* that historic experience overwhelmingly demonstrates that any peoples who have not successfully and repetitively oppressed others have in fact long ceased to exist, and that, not at all parenthetically, one of the central aims of the Marxian Socialists is simply to destroy this pattern of human progress which has been characteristic of the whole period of “surplus product,” i.e., beyond the hunting-gathering time.

Sometimes the weight of peoples is too small and they are destroyed. Generally our New Left moralizers would prefer to treat such cases by ignoring them rather than making of them “bad peoples” as opposed to the “good peoples” who did it to them. This latter is the methodology for current situations which compel such childish moralizing, which is nothing less than the straightforward transposition of Western medieval religious teaching: the struggle between God and Lucifer (and inside the SL, for the latter, read me).

a) Everyone knows that Columbus and the Spanish conquerors were bad to the people in the

Caribbean. Said people of the Caribbean were Carib Indians who had been, we are told, there for about 200 years. Who cries for the rich diversified Indian peoples of the region before it became the “Caribbean”?, i.e., before the Carib Indians moved systematically from the north coast of South America and simply killed every male from newborn babe to graybeard on the islands. The innocent Landyite girl by her methodological lights would have to see the Spaniards as the scourge imposed by the just God in a New Left heavens.

b) There are some peoples with the bad luck to be disappeared in the contemporary present. The mountain peoples—primitive communist “montagnards”—used to live all over the south and central plains of Vietnam. Now they still hang on in the mountain regions. Today the verb “hung” is perhaps more applicable. These prize running dogs of successive imperialisms, i.e., the French, the Americans and one supposes before that, the Manchu court, have had the following simple central position, not untrue: “The enemies of the Vietnamese are our saviors” and they always must support those who would dominate and disrupt the Vietnamese who every year make less of them inexorably. Thus the tragic quote in *Decent Interval* paraphrased from memory as follows: from a young chieftain to his CIA contact, “Oh sir, now that the Vietnamese have won and you leave, take with you 50 of our children so that our seed will be preserved, for the Vietnamese will surely do away with the rest.” Now, we as Marxists know that in the central struggle waged in Vietnam, the victory of the Vietnamese people against the imperialists *and* upon the basis of a social revolution, albeit deformed, was centrally just, but unlike the revisionists and Stalinists that such a victory on any basis less than the international Trotskyist one of the triumph of the historic working class and therefore, of the authentic Soviet form must carry with it many deformations and the seeds of many crimes, not least those against the small, weak and backward peoples of the effective region. (The New Leftists are eager to vicariously denounce the small, strong, advanced peoples who stand in the way of “progress,” but it is not so easy in fact to take nuclear weapons out of the hands of the Boers and Israelis who are quite prepared to look after their seed their own selves. And again it comes back to the basic point of Marxism-Leninism: on this planet today it is possible to, and we aim to make ourselves the leadership to achieve the shattering of this piecemeal and genocidal “march of progress.”)

c) To cut it nearer at home, i.e., to gore the New Leftist ox at a more sensitive spot, consider the plight of the North American Indians. They

did, you know, fight on behalf of British colonialism against the rise to power of the qualitatively more democratic and representative and republican United States of America. One does not recall offhand any theoretician of the New Left wrestling with the apparent necessary contradiction of simultaneously cheering on the Yankees at Bunker Hill while aforesaid Yankees were busy doing their level best to wipe out the redskinned running dogs of the British a few hundred miles further west. This is not to mention the concurrent and even contemporary complexities of inter-Indian struggles, e.g., Cheyenne vs. Sioux in the 19th century (General Custer had loyal, and from their standpoint rightfully so, Indian support). Today “a hundred years of broken trea-

ties” is the cry of the Pueblos who seek the protection of the Supreme Court and the WASP establishment while the Navajo make deals with the Teamsters (and presumably the Mafia) to squeeze their small neighbors. So it goes.

All of the above ruminating grows out of the contemplation of a Burroughs anxious to be a good New Left liberal in facing feminism, i.e., the sexual history of a woman must be irrelevant in a rape case, versus a Burroughs who must be very pro-black. What does he do when faced with the Scottsboro Boys case—where, if these kids were to be saved from the electric chair, it had better be legitimate for their lawyer to introduce evidence that a young white woman had been turning tricks in a hobo jungle the night before.



WHO CAUTERIZES THE CAUTERIZERS?

31 December 1978

This note, and the report Robertson refers to, were printed in International Information Bulletin No. 10, “On the Logan Regime, Part II—‘What Do You Mean Overthrow?’,” about the manipulation of comrades and intrusion into their personal lives by Bill Logan, leader of the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand. Logan was found guilty of crimes against communist morality and expelled by a trial body at the international Spartacist tendency’s first international conference in August 1979.

At the end of the report to the New York local (15 October 1978) I left off the report with an unanswered question: who cauterizes the cauterizers? In the course of subsequent remarks in the Bay Area again on the subject of the recent British events I offered upon reflection the traditional and only general valid answer. To paraphrase comrade Cannon in his introduction to *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, I sought to say approximately the following:

“We had better hope that we create a sufficiently committed and involved communist organization so that when its founding cadre inevitably departs from the stage of revolutionary history, by revisionist default or otherwise, we have generated within our ranks a viable split, i.e., the combative, restorative forces to go forward struggling to lead the new political generations.”



NO “CRITICAL SUPPORT” TO POPULAR FRONTISM

August 1979

This presentation was made during a panel discussion on the popular front at the First International Conference of the international Spartacist tendency. Edmund Samarakkody, leader of the Revolutionary Workers Party in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), was also a panelist. This was published in Spartacist No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80.

In 1966, on behalf of the Spartacist League of the United States, I sought to make a statement to an international conference [the London Conference of Healy's International Committee], a statement comparable in unpopularity to that which Comrade Edmund just made. (laughter) We trust that the sequel will be qualitatively different. (laughter) Now would be an appropriate time to reveal the secret codicil to the articles of agreement that were worked out in Sri Lanka a couple of months ago. We agreed to turn over to the RWP the names of our opportunists if they gave us the names of their sectarians. (laughter)

Now, my remarks are subsumed generally under the title, as I put it down, of “Electoral Coalitionism and the Communists.” I first want to touch on a point that needs to be hammered out in the incoming International Executive Committee, but I'd certainly like to sketch a view in a sentence or two. As is perfectly clear to everyone who heard Comrade Samarakkody, in every subjective sense [he expressed] intense hostility and opposition to the popular-front governments in Sri Lanka. The point at issue really revolves around the relationship of the LSSP-R, now the RWP, and the LSSP. It was expressly put that the reason that the RWP, in about 1972, came to regret their vote that assisted in bringing down the popular-front government was because they wanted at that time to make a renewed overture to the LSSP.

Now, in a certain sense, the experience of popular frontism was chemically pure in Sri Lanka in a way that it has not been in Chile, Spain or France. Because the popular front in Sri Lanka had a chance to run on and on and on and dissipate itself with its only momentum without being displaced by counterrevolutionary generals or internal or foreign fascists. The Sri Lanka Freedom Party is, at least for the present, discredited, but the Communist Party is badly damaged, and the LSSP is a corpse—it is dead! Its trade-union base is disintegrated, it has lost its youth, its women, the Tamils hate it as a chauvinist party of a master nation. And the LSSP-R, now the RWP, tied themselves to the LSSP—which is a corpse—and they are seen as a left-wing split from the LSSP but still within its orbit—part of

the old boys of the LSSP—the best of a bad lot. Where have the subjectively revolutionary elements of Sri Lanka gone? I have to report that in Ceylon where the Trotskyists used to be preponderant over the Stalinists, the Stalinists have for the present won. The Mao-influenced youth of the Stalinist parties broke away and were the founding cadres of the JVP [Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna—People's Liberation Front]. Now, we know that the JVP are just popular frontists with a gun, very much like the MIRistas in Chile. But they happen to include something like 20,000 of the youth and the young women that are Ceylonese militants, subjectively more or less revolutionary. There are no youth, women or Tamils hanging about the stench of death of the LSSP. The JVP has the reputation in Sri Lanka of intransigent opposition to the popular front. They have 20,000 members, the RWP has 20 members, and no women or Tamils. This is a question to be pursued in the International Executive.

There is nothing special, inventive or unusually Marxistically creative about the position advanced by the iSt. We're simply trying to apply the developed Bolshevik experience, especially as expressed in the period from February to October 1917, in the modern movement. And not even as late as 1917; basically it goes back to Luxemburg's writings on coalitionism in the Second International at the turn of the century. To be sure, the American Socialist Workers Party likes to point out that coalitionism is not popular frontism, unless the Stalinists are present in the coalition. Around about 1905 you'll find a very partial position by Lenin, when the Bolsheviks were still struggling for a united workers party in Russia. The later, anti-comrade Shachtman was fond of quoting one of these positions: “Oh, where the Bolsheviks are in the majority we will oppose the Cadet Party. Where the Mensheviks are in the majority the Bolsheviks will loyally support the Cadet members of the Duma.”* This, along with the organizational question and others, indicates that the evolution of the Bolshevik faction of revolutionary social democrats into the Bolshevik Party of communists was a process over a decade.

And as my last sentence, let me frighten you with a thought I just had. If, in fact, we did not have this position that we do on opposition to popular fronts and any electoral support to any wing of a popular front, I think that we would belong in the left wing of the Mandeliste USec majority [of their 2½ International]. But we're serious people and intend to carry out the logic of *our* position.

Summary

There's a problem in viewing the position of the iSt on popular fronts as Oehlerite; that is, when one tries to be a rightist, one is thought, at least vulgarly, to be smarter than a leftist. Now there's a difficulty in taking the Second International as an abstraction. The Second International produced from 1917 to 1919 a rather creditable Communist International. Presumably one should have something to do with that before and during that time. But the Second International in the period of the 1920s was moribund, rightist and largely [openly] in the arms of the bourgeoisie. However, the Depression and the rise of fascism and the rightward turn of the Communist International precipitated a new leftist development in the Second International parties in the early 1930s. It is wrong to have an invariant tactic toward the Socialist Party through these three periods as some comrades would do. Not only is that indifferent to the question of revolutionary opportunity versus betrayal, it's not even intelligent.

Now, regarding the question of the JVP, the issue is one of how the JVP is seen, not what it is. The JVP is seen on that island as a militant, if insurrectionary opposition that means business. We compared it with the Chilean MIR which is, of course, no flattery to the JVP—they merely

prepare a *new* version of a popular front. But on the evidence available to us, the LSSP-R—now the RWP—is only viewed as the far left—with a principled backbone—of the old LSSP. And the fact is that Trotskyism in Ceylon, which used to be predominant among the workers—is now bypassed by a factor of a thousandfold.

Comrade Norden did all this fine research on a very confused situation in the French section in the mid-30s. Faced with these complexities, I took a different route. The American Trotskyist organization was unsplit, a principal mouthpiece of Trotsky, and it operated under purely parliamentary conditions in that period. So I chose to use the American Trotskyists as the model for what Trotsky and the Fourth International meant [generally] in that time.

Popular frontism existed in the United States in the late 1930s in the form of the Roosevelt candidacy for president and the LaGuardia candidacy for mayor of New York. In 1936 the labor bureaucrats, social democrats, Stalinists and bourgeois democrats invented a new workers party, the American Labor Party. It was created to bring a few hundred thousand crucial votes in New York State into the Democratic camp. Towards this experiment, and toward every candidacy of the post-split SP and the CP, the Trotskyists had an implacable and central opposition in the name of opposition to the popular front and to every single party that supported the popular front. So much so that until that time the Trotskyists in the United States had largely ignored electoral politics. But faced with the popular-front issue, the SWP was pushed to running its own candidacies for the first time in order to underline its electoral opposition to popular frontism. And they were Trotsky's mouthpiece.

* In 1957 Shachtman was preparing to liquidate his Independent Socialist League into the American social democracy. To rationalize joining a party that supported the Democrats he pointed out that in 1906 Lenin favored maintaining unity with the Mensheviks, even though the Mensheviks wanted to bloc with the bourgeois Cadets in the elections to the Second State Duma. In the article quoted by Shachtman, "Party Discipline and the Fight Against the Pro-Cadet Social-Democrats" (*Collected Works*, Vol. 11), Lenin stated that "The sanction of blocs with the Cadets is the finishing touch that definitely marks the Mensheviks as the opportunist wing of the workers' party." Lenin called for "the widest and most relentless ideological struggle" against "these shameful tactics of blocs with the Cadets." However, added Lenin, if the Menshevik position should become the party line, "*all* of us, as members of the Party, must *act as one man*. A Bolshevik in Odessa must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing a Cadet's name even if it sickens him. And a Menshevik in Moscow must cast into the ballot box a ballot paper bearing only the names of Social-Democrats, even if his soul is yearning for the Cadets."





Family Photo

The Campus TROTSKYITE

February 1949

Vol. I, No. 1

STATEMENT OF POLICY

With the appearance of THE CAMPUS TROTSKYITE, the voice of revolutionary socialism will again be heard on the Berkeley campus. THE CAMPUS TROTSKYITE will be published at least monthly by

one side or the other, depending upon the group --- but nevertheless a definite choice to give its allegiance to one of the two contenders listed above.

Let us examine both the capit-

Jim riled Shachtmanite leaders with brazen *Campus Trotskyite* at University of California, Berkeley, 1949. Jim in Richmond, California.

Family Photo



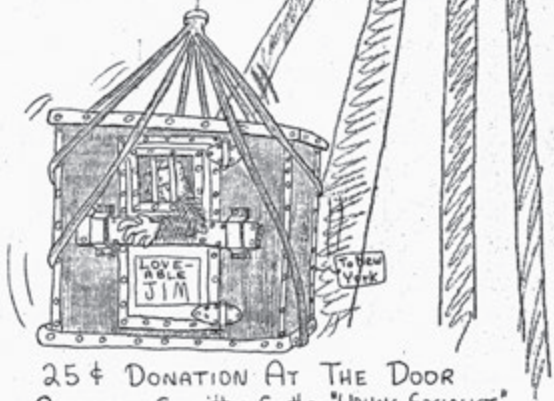
Jim, an avid scuba diver, 1956.

Family Photo



Jim and family, circa 1990. From left: Rachel, Lizzy, Jim, Martha, Sarah and Kenneth.

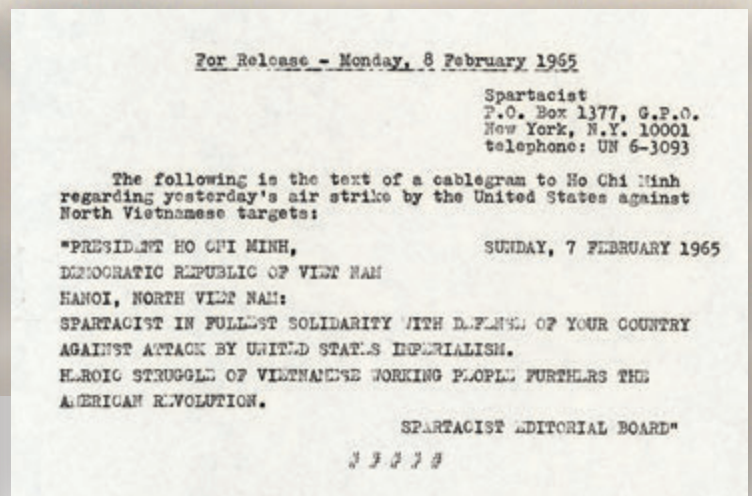
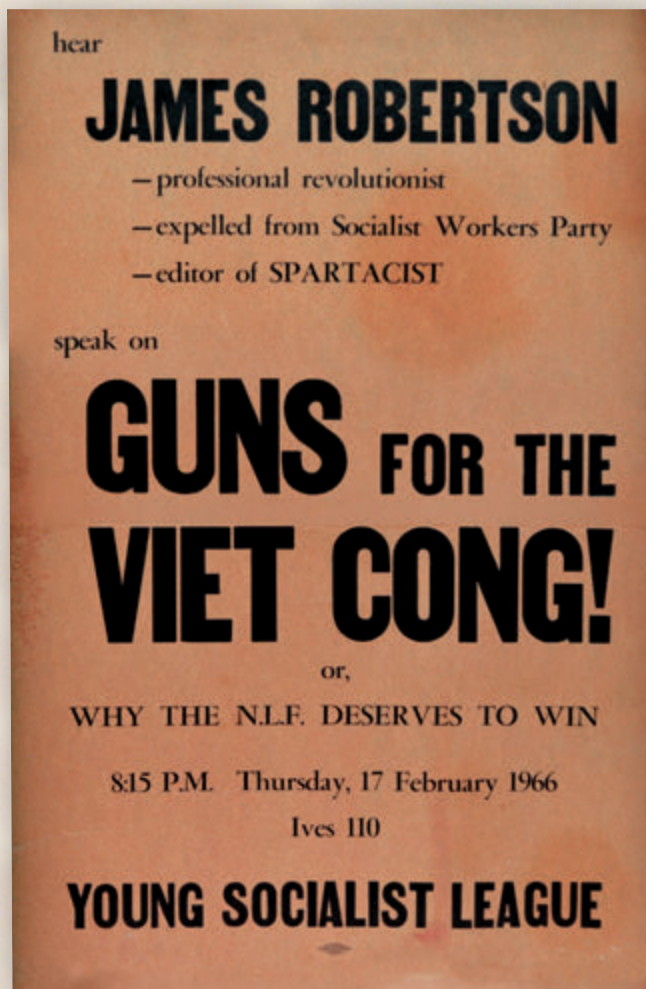
We're Going To Have A
GOING-AWAY PARTY
for JIM ROBERTSON
COME! HAVE A GOOD TIME
& HELP US RAISE NECESSARY FUNDS
Monday Evening, April 28, 8:30 p.m.
At 2431 DWIGHT WAY, BERKELEY



25¢ DONATION AT THE DOOR
AUSPICES - Committee for the "YOUNG SOCIALIST"

dr - 4/58 labor donated

Young Socialist invite to 1958 going-away party for "Loveable Jim," sketched as a caged beast, being shipped from the Bay Area to New York.



Revolutionaries in the belly of the imperialist beast fought in the antiwar movement for class solidarity with the Vietnamese Revolution. Spartacist saluted heroic struggle of Vietnamese workers and peasants.

1979: Jim in discussions with veteran Ceylonese Trotskyist Samarakkody whose 1964 vote in parliament brought down the popular-front government.



Wes Ervin

1973: Popular front paved the way for bloodbath in Chile. Thousands of leftists and trade unionists were massacred.

Unique on the left, Spartacist fought for proletarian independence from the Salvador Allende popular front.



Reuters



Workers Vanguard

SPARTACIST

NUMBER 29

SUMMER 1980

50 CENTS



Afghanistan and the Left:

The Russian Question Point Blank

Afghanistan is a flash of lightning which illuminates the real contours of the world political landscape. It has exploded the last illusions of the Left to reveal the implacable hostility of U.S. imperialism to the Soviet degenerated workers state. It has stripped away all diplomatic cover for Washington's alliance with Maoist/Stalinist China. And it has confronted the left inescapably with "the Russian question": the nature of the state originating in the Bolshevik Revolution and its conflict with world capitalism. (continued on page 2)

Hail Red Army!

Counterrevolution in Afghanistan:	
The Khmeini Connection	5
SWP/HKE: The Blood Is On Your Hands!	6
The Bolsheviks and the "Export of Revolution"	8
Open Letters to the Party Committee	10
The Anti-Spartacists	14
Leninist Faction-SL/B Declaration of Fusion	18

Jim built the ICL on the Russian Question, in revolutionary continuity with James P. Cannon, who said: "We do not examine the Russian revolution and what remains of its great conquests as though it were a bug under a glass. *We have an interest! We take part in the fight!* At each stage in the development of the Soviet Union, its advances and its degeneration, we seek the basis for revolutionary action. We want to advance the world revolution, overthrow capitalism, establish Socialism."

A Spartacist Pamphlet \$1.00

Solidarność: Polish Company Union for CIA and Bankers



1980 1000

Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377, GPO, New York, N.Y. 10116

1990: Spartakist Workers Party campaign poster for East German elections demands: No to Capitalist Reunification! For a Germany of Workers Councils!

Wählt SPARTAKIST

Nein zur kapitalistischen Wiedervereinigung!

- Für Streiks und Fabriksbesetzungen — Stopp! die kapitalistische Übernahme unserer Betriebe! Wir brauchen Arbeiterschützungsorganisationen, um diese Kampfmaßnahmen zu verteidigen! Gegen die imperialistische Destabilisierungskampagne: Bildet Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte, um unsere kollektivierte Wirtschaft zu verteidigen!
- Kampf dem D-Mark-Anschluß! Für das Recht auf Arbeit für alle! Verteidigt unseren preiswerten Wohnraum! Fallt nicht herein auf den kapitalistischen Schwindel einer „sozialen Marktwirtschaft“ oder einer verlogenen „sozialistischen Marktwirtschaft“!
- Für eine zentralisierte Planwirtschaft unter der Herrschaft von ArbeiterInnen, den Instrumenten der proletarischen politischen Macht!
- Für proletarischen Internationalismus!
- Für Arbeitervereinsfrontaktionen, um die Faschisten zu stoppen! Nieder mit Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Feindschaft gegenüber Homosexuellen und AusländerInnen!
- Keine antikomunistische Hexenjagd gegen gegenwärtige oder frühere SED-Mitglieder!
- Volle Staatsbürgerrechte für alle ausländischen Werktätigen und ihre Familien!
- Völlige Gleichberechtigung der Frau!
- Schutz der menschheitswürdigen Zukunft der Jugend!
- Für eine Rente für die Rentner!
- Für einen planmäßigen Umweltschutz!
- Nur durch Arbeiterrevolution kann der Frieden gesichert werden!
- Für proletarisch-politische Revolution!



Wählt die drei „L.“: Lenin, Liebknecht, Luxemburg!

Wählt die Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands!

Ihr wählt damit eine gesamtdeutsche Partei von revolutionären Arbeitern

in der internationalistischen Tradition von Lenin und Trotzki.

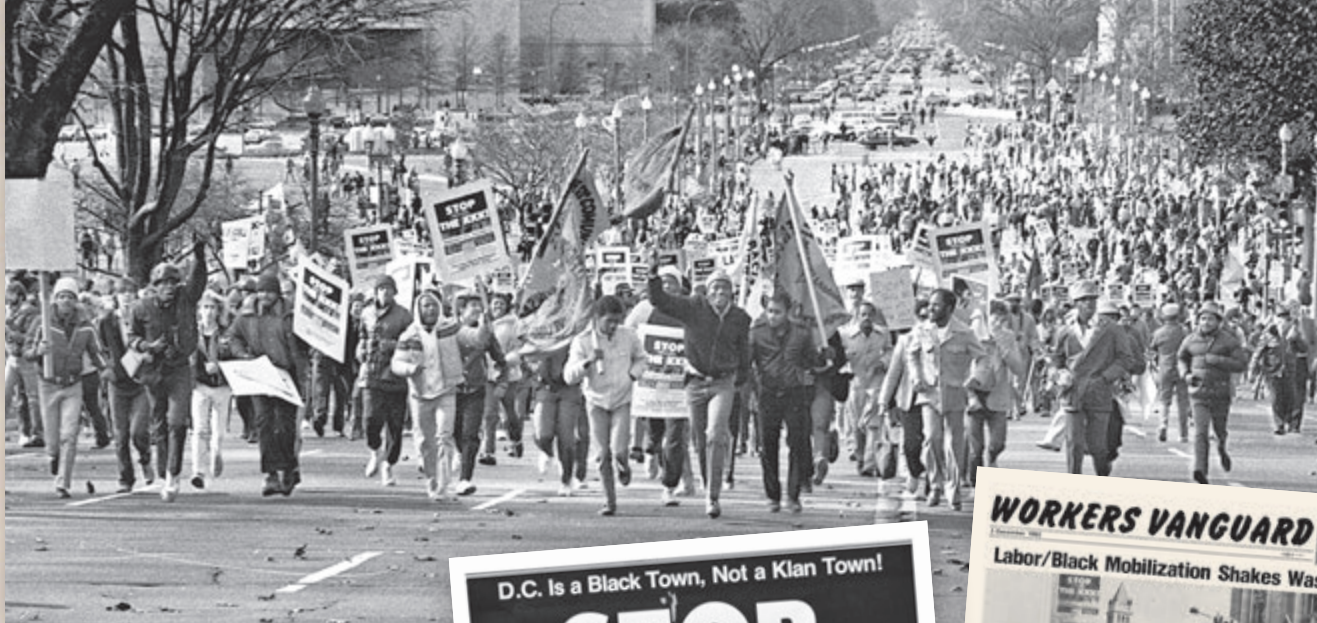
Wir kämpfen für die Verteidigung der DDR, die zu einem roten Rätedeutschland in einem sozialistischen Europa führt!

Für ein Arbeiterrätedeutschland!

Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands

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(Vertrieb in einem gemeinsamen Lager mit anderen Parteien)



Workers Vanguard

On Jim's initiative, Spartacist League mobilized labor and blacks to stop KKK terror in nation's capital, 1982.



Spartacist

Cops claimed red conspiracy, not police terror, sparked Harlem "riots." Jim was subpoenaed by Grand Jury while picketing outside courthouse to defend Progressive Labor from witchhunt. Jim toured U.S. to speak about lessons of the Harlem events.

(1964?)

The Harlem Riots

Cops, Reds and Black Nationalists

James Robertson

- * Editor, the SPARTACIST, a revolutionary socialist publication
- * Barred from Harlem by court injunction during riots
- * Subpoened last week by Grand Jury "investigating" riots
- * Initiator of Harlem Solidarity Committee

We Tore Down The Flag of Slavery!



THE CIVIL WAR!
WORKERS STATE!
YOUTH

[illegible][illegible]

1984: A supporter of the Spartacist League and Labor Black League for Social Defense, in Union Army uniform, climbed flagpole and tore down Confederate flag of slavery hoisted by San Francisco mayor.

New Yorkers had plenty to be angry about over the blackout. After a day of mind-boggling 90-degree heat and no shade, with humidity, they found themselves completely unattended in the dark for the second time in two days.

Traffic lights went out and many were forced to spend the night wherever they were at the time. Others stumbled along with flashlights and candles on the streets, unsure, in the darkness. They climbed up their windows to spy on neighbors without seeing and without

[illegible]

the word from the top was called out with vigor. There are just some pictures of men they kept thinking of.

• Sam Jones in December 1991, black members of ex-NAACP group were told they would have to pay a two-dollar fringe charge and pay steep fines if a woman if they committed the crime. The next month, a \$100 dollar lawsuit was filed with the NAACP.

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San Jose
(408)

Black friends in a San Jose store when they were arrested, was sentenced to 18 months in prison. The magazine outlined the steps to remove them, saying "There are many ways to free him." The cops told the woman to pay for their food, although they were not allowed to eat it. When they were to be freed, he told them, "I am Indian woman has ordered by the manager after he was her tell to her Black friends. A year later in 1973, 13-year-old Loretta was arrested for a kidnapping plot. When he was released with his health certificate.

2-4

For More Information

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Continued on page 3

1993: Spartacist League and Labor/Black Leagues mobilized hundreds coast to coast against Jim Crow service at Denny's restaurants.

A SOCIAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL JOURNAL

August 1983

These comments, made at the August 1983 Seventh National Conference of the SL/U.S., were published in Women and Revolution No. 28, Spring 1984.

When you have a title like *Women and Revolution*, that means all of human history and sociology, all the way back. And we're really not limited, except by our own incapacity, in what should appear in that magazine. It ought to be the anthropological and social journal of our party. That's where we ought to take up questions of why Freud is a great man and where he went wrong, and what happened when we got patriarchal society. As well as the kind of questions of what happens to those young Sinhalese women that are sucked into that Free Trade Zone just south of Colombo.

In this country, we've got black and white—the black question has an American centrality for the proletarian revolution, because in America you have a white racist ruling class on top of blacks—but *all* societies have men and women. Everywhere across this whole planet there's a division between men and women. So as soon as you say "women and revolution" all questions are open.

And I'm just afraid we haven't exploited that magazine the way we should have. The worst question that was ever asked was "Where do babies come from?" Because that only became a *question* when property became a question and patriarchal society was coming in. Ten years ago we were raising questions similar to those in the book that appeared recently, *Lucy*, in its last chap-

ters on what sex might have been like a million or so years ago. I don't think that we've ever put that kind of thing in *W&R*. We were asking the same questions and had better answers, but at least the questions are now being raised.

You know, comrades, I remember Murry Weiss said, "You know, young comrades keep coming in and saying, I was looking at some back issues of the *Fourth International* and especially the *New International* in the '30s and they read a lot better than our magazine today, that I edit." And Murry looked at them and said, "Yeah, I know it, but they had Leon Trotsky, Jim Burnham and Max Shachtman and a bunch of other people writing for it then. Now all you got is me—I'm sorry!" He was editor of the *International Socialist Review* then. Well, every national conference I say this, and I always get in trouble, because every feminist in the room always tries to shoot me down: "Even the most beautiful girl in France can give no more than she's got." So I think we have relatively failed to exploit *Women and Revolution*, but it's because of the intellectual limitations of our organization.

But *W&R* ought to be the open journal for every question of human experience, because when you touch the woman question, you touch the being of us all.

ON THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL'S ORGANIZATIONAL RESOLUTION

19 July 1988

This was a contribution for the introduction to Prometheus Research Series No. 1, August 1988, "Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work."

The Organizational Resolution from the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921 embodied very fully Lenin's final understanding of the means and ways to shape a "communist party" into an authentic revolutionary workers van-

guard. Lenin dealt centrally with the case of mass "communist parties" that were still half-digested former Social Democratic parties or large components of such parties. In particular he centered on the mass KPD which had resulted from the fusion

of the Spartacus group with a large majority of the USPD at the Halle Congress in October 1920.

The Organizational Resolution in no way can be seen as separate from the working *political* program of the CI in the time of Lenin and Trotsky. The Organizational Resolution hence must be taken together with such defining political documents as Lenin's 1920 "*Left-Wing*" *Communism, An Infantile Disorder* and Trotsky's 1924 *Lessons of October*. Behind both these works stands Lenin's profound and illuminating *The State and Revolution* written in 1917 (the balance of the material from that incomplete work used somewhat differently in his 1918 *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*).

Few among declared Marxists, followers of "anarcho-syndicalist communism" aside, have taken issue with Lenin's "*Left-Wing*" *Communism*; very many of those who reject the Comintern founders' vision of world revolution, however, take issue with Trotsky's *Lessons of October*. These revisionists see the German crisis of 1923 as at best moot in its revolutionary possibility. They also dismiss or ignore the revolutionary potential in Bulgaria in 1923, Estonia in 1924, Poland in 1926 (the Pilsudski coup), England in 1926 and the profound revolutionary developments in China in 1925-27. Trotsky's "lessons" were meant as a warning and a guide for any such revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation. To which revisionists of Leninism-Trotskyism reply, "But none of them won." Such sceptics make themselves at one with the early post-Leninist Comintern, principally under Zinoviev's direction, which only *mechanically* played at revolution and postured, thus strongly helping ensure this outcome not of mere failure, but of defeat.

At the end of and shortly after World War II numerous countries faced revolutionary opportunities but these were either deformed or still-born. The desperate struggle of the international imperialisms no longer had to rely alone for a base among the masses in the somewhat decrepit Social Democracy. Counterrevolution had a powerful new ally in the thoroughly Stalinized parties with their pervasive general line of building popular fronts including sections of the bourgeoisie. The Comintern itself had been officially dissolved in 1943.

The programmatic material, both political and organizational, of the Communist International of Lenin's time are the concentrated expression of that leadership which did see the Russian Revolution through its many vicissitudes and to victory.

This material, then, ought to be powerfully educative for those in later generations who aspire through necessary struggle to win socialism on this planet. The time to move is always *now*, critically incorporating yesterday's experience, not the centrist appetite toward tomorrow.



PRESENTATION AT THE FUSION CONFERENCE OF THE iST WITH THE REKKEN GROUP OF JAPAN

August 1988

Printed in International Internal Bulletin No. 55, May 2002.

On behalf of the delegation of the iSt, I would like to give greetings to the comrades of the Rekken Group of Japan. I want to speak about two things: Why there should be an international organization, and something of the iSt's understanding of critical points in the history of the Japanese workers movement.

Regarding the first point, I take it as given that we have a Marxist understanding of the development of a global world economy. The bourgeoisie is not necessarily a united force internationally. That is why we have world wars. But from time to time very powerful coalitions of national bourgeois elements combine, and they are almost always willing to combine to defeat an insurgent

proletariat. In the 19th century a conscious political organization of the working class grew up. This organization, the Second International, was largely known as Marxist, although the practice concretely in various countries tended to depart considerably from the thought of Marx and Engels. The First World War laid great stress upon most of the national economies and the societies of those states that were in any way involved. Particularly this is true for the direct combatants, and especially for those who were defeated in the war. But the proletariats of all countries where such a working class existed did experience excitement. Thus, there was a radicalization in countries such as Japan, which was only nominally involved in

the war, and in Sweden where there was no formal involvement in the war.

In Czarist Russia, the workers party succeeded in taking power during this time. And already there is a very important lesson in this circumstance. For would-be revolutionists, it is absolutely insufficient simply to admire current revolutionary developments. Only those who many years before that and in a very continuous way struggle for a social revolution will be in a position to participate in such an outcome. Because the Bolsheviks had made the first revolution in a state, the Czarist empire, they naturally became the leading respected force among social revolutionaries. This proved to be a two-edged sword. The Bolsheviks barely had the political capacity to lead their own revolution. This is perhaps why there is such a cult of Lenin and Trotsky among the Bolshevik leaders that has come down to us. Many of the Bolshevik leaders working as part of a team were quite adequate but as individual leaders had strong failings. This was accentuated when the actual forces of mass revolution in the new Soviet Union began to fall away and become tired. It is for this kind of reason that communists say that one must study the Russian Revolution critically.

However, it is the only full-blown proletarian revolution which is available for study by communists of the future. And the road to the Russian Revolution was very complicated. It involved legality and illegality; parliamentarism and antiparlamentarism; the organization of the workers and work among the peasantry. And because Czarist Russia was an empire, the Bolsheviks had to deal very substantially with the national question, and also questions of the Czarist foreign policy.

Parenthetically, comrades should be aware that V.I. Lenin and his faction supported Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, which from the vantage point of the First World War would appear to have been a mistake. But then Lenin was not born and did not develop instantly into the leader of the Bolshevik Party. Many of the documents that we should read and study are concerned with the separation between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, which was something that the Bolshevik faction had to experience in life on the road to becoming the Bolshevik Party.

Now, in the light of these few remarks, it would appear that for an organization such as the international Spartacist tendency, a very small one, that we should be very modest in our work internationally. Despite years of various kinds of effort, we are, at bottom, untried and untested in any particular country, and the assertion of global authority in these circumstances is as

grotesque as was the political career of Michel Pablo. We have a political program, which can in one sense never be finished, never be complete, because future circumstances will always come to pass in a way which is not exactly envisioned. But our program, which is based on a hundred years of capitalism and on all previous world history, has great current validity. And it is this political program which must be decisive in all our affairs.

Let me offer some observations on the Japanese workers movement as an illustration of the decisiveness of program. The foundation of Japanese communism suffered from a couple of severe problems. The Japanese workers movement first began to show itself episodically around the turn of the century. Given the authoritarian traditions in Japan, the workers movement did not have an organized, continuous existence before the end of the First World War. Thus, it did not have much of a history and the various efforts at organization and political expression had more the character of experiments. With the Russian Revolution and then the end of the First World War, subjectively the pressure for communism increased in Japan. This was in part a consequence of the very large increase in the Japanese industrial base during the First World War, and therefore an increase in the contradictions in society that are characteristic of a modern economy. The Japanese communists turned easily to the Russian communists for advice and direction.

Apparently, in the division of labor in the Communist International, Nikolai Bukharin got primary responsibility for assisting the Japanese comrades, the way that Lenin had responsibility especially for Germany, and Trotsky for France, and Phil for Mexico.

I believe that two very large mistakes were undertaken in the 1920s in the direction and development of the Japanese Communist Party. The political one was the theory of the two-stage revolution: that Japan was still a partly feudal country and that it was necessary to struggle for the democratic environment of pure capitalism. Thus, the early programs, while quite revolutionary in dealing with what was thought to be feudal survivals, did not call for the expropriation of capital, industrial capital. And by 1927, the Moscow/Bukharin-written program of the Japanese Communist Party called for the workers and farmers and small bourgeoisie to be formed into a single bloc.

This is not merely the failure to apply the permanent revolution to all the colonial countries, it is much more blatant. Japan had arrived at a capitalist stage of development through compromise

and assimilation between the old elements carried over from the Tokugawa shogunate through the Meiji Restoration.

The modern ruling class of Japan, which was essentially capitalist at the time of the First World War, had incorporated in it feudal survivals. In this way it is more similar to England which still has a monarchy, and a House of Lords, than it is to the United States or France where very thoroughgoing bourgeois revolutions had removed feudal remnants.

The Comintern with its class-bloc theory caused the Communists to be an obstacle to a developing social revolution in Japan. The same program was applied in China, which actually was an underdeveloped, semi-colonial country. And because there was at that time a raging social revolution in China, the political program of the Communists led straight to defeat. The Japanese state was much stronger and destroyed the Communists in Japan. The democratic form that had been adopted by the Japanese government was a very thin veil over a strongly authoritarian and able regime.

Parenthetically, the British in India also ran a very effective police force and sterilized the Communists very early on. In China the disintegration of the Manchu dynasty permitted more freedom of action for the masses. The Japanese bourgeoisie became very frightened when in 1928 they had their first general election with voters not based upon property. Baron Tanaka was the prime minister. The Peace Preservation Law had been adopted. And in 1928 the death penalty was added to the possibility for dangerous thoughts. The proletarian parties in the elections got about 1/2 million votes, mostly pro-Communist. Beginning on 15 March 1928, mass police roundups took place. They never stopped. In the first raids, 1,500 comrades were taken. And basically they were never let go until 1945.

There had been some factionalism of a desirable sort in the Japanese party. When the principal founding leaders of the Japanese Communist Party were arrested, a man named Kazuo Fukumoto became a leader. He suffered the usual flaws of being a professor, a distance from mass work. However, theoretically he was on the correct track: that Japanese capitalist society had already entered an advanced stage of capitalist decline, like the West. He was called to Moscow in 1927 with six other Japanese leaders and recanted. Bukharin's theses were adopted and have remained in place in the Japanese party to this day.

There was another opportunity for an explosive expression of the Japanese masses with defeat in 1945. But unlike Germany in 1918, Japan was not just defeated, it was also occupied by the victorious power. Initially the occupying power, the Americans, encouraged measures of political liberalism. The Japanese Communist Party, now thoroughly Stalinist programmatically, became very large overnight. But their tactics were never aimed at social revolution, but rather to facilitate the foreign policy of Stalin's Soviet Union. When the Korean War came, General MacArthur was easily able to deal with the Japanese Communist Party, and they were discredited.

And then we have witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s explosive expressions of New Leftism among the Japanese intelligentsia, youth. Meanwhile, Japan has become a great world power, with an immensely powerful proletariat. There is an urgent need for the struggle to develop a Leninist vanguard party in Japan, part of a Leninist International.

This is very late in the day of international capitalist development. We stand in the shadow of a generalized nuclear holocaust. The bourgeoisie cannot be compromised with, because they want no compromise. Gorbachev is wrong. These capitalist societies must be replaced from within through social revolution.

Tactics. It's the second mistake of the Japanese party.

On the organizational question: Politically, the Japanese comrades had to do what the Bolsheviks found themselves doing with the "April Theses," that is, creating a working-class socialist revolution, even though the Russian proletariat proportionally was undoubtedly much smaller than the Japanese proletariat. This political thing required a leap by the Russian vanguard in 1917. But organizationally it was something that required no leap for the Comintern to apply to Japan. Czarist Russia, too, was very authoritarian, and the police were very repressive. The Bolshevik solution was an editorial board abroad and underground work in Russia. The Comintern always directed the Japanese comrades to build a purely internal party. The Japanese editorial board should have been abroad in Shanghai or Vladivostok, and linked to the local organization through representatives and the smuggling of the central organ. Then it would have been possible to resist liquidation by an efficient police force. And this was not done.

ON SOVIET INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN

12 August 1989

This letter to a comrade in Germany is from the James Robertson Papers, box 27.2, at the Prometheus Research Library.

Dear Max,

I received a copy of your letter to Federico and have been thinking about it. When we hailed the Red Army's arrival in Afghanistan, there were two major considerations involved, to my mind. The first was that the intervention appeared necessary because the preceding left populist coup had objectively a qualitative lack of base in the country, thus inviting a hostile presence at the SU's borders. Two, that the arrival of the Soviet soldiers at Brezhnev's behest would *objectively* bring with it inevitable and desirable social change in Afghanistan. I hope that none of us had any illusions that this army was other than a reflection of the bureaucratism of Soviet life. Thus some of the accusations of ill conduct and atrocities attributed to the Russian army in Afghanistan are undoubtedly true; indeed, many are reported by veterans returned to the Soviet Union. The transformations in Afghanistan did not depend upon the subjective good will of the ranks of the Red Army, its command or the Political Bureau of the bureaucracy. We thought that the Russian military presence would have significantly more far-reaching social consequences than, for example, it did in East Europe, from the latter stages of World War II down to the present day. This is because the East European nations are pretty well-defined social, national and historic entities whereas Afghanistan has long been a more amorphous and polyglot region.

What the Kabul leadership and its populist social base—that too, I gather, mainly in Kabul—thinks about all this is very likely to be deduced from their circumstances and immediate prior history. When Federico went to Afghanistan, three things came to mind. One, it would be good if Afghan radicals read Plekhanov, especially his articles against themselves (i.e., the Narodniks). Two, that it would be good if the Afghan radical factions arrived at decisions in another fashion but that we could only suggest by historical narration (e.g., that the split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was not settled by machine guns) and by our general tenor of approach, that there is another way. But, three, also to be very clear that both a Marxist outlook and the idea and practice

of democratic struggle depends upon there being a working class within which to struggle for leadership. And therefore to tacitly admit to Afghan friends that the building up of an economic infrastructure of development (in flat contradiction to the destructiveness of the civil war) was the way out, the Soviet military shield and vast infusions of Soviet economic aid facilitating this. The military presence is gone, and the Kabul regime has necessarily turned to “national reconciliation” while still based upon such forces as it commands and very heavy Soviet military supplies. “National reconciliation” is either a tactic intended to separate the mass from the tops on the other side, or with or without such intention, if pursued with sufficient increments, would end up reducing the Kabul forces to merely one among scores of competing ethnic and tribal clerical reactionaries.

As a somewhat extraneous thought, the original seizure of power in Kabul by the leftists seems to me to have been the incarnation of Mandel's theory of the red universities in a sea of reaction from the early '70s. Kabul was one place where it really was like that, with the ensuing consequences.

And on another plane entirely, it strikes me as likely that this lengthy civil war, one way or another, is a decisive event in the history of the area known as Afghanistan, and it is possible that national compaction may emerge from this motley gradient of decomposing tribes and feudal areas of many peoples and languages. I would have preferred the straightforward absorption of the area as a series of districts in Soviet Central Asia, but the state of international class struggle as it is reflected in the negotiations of the American imperialists with the Russian leadership seems to have been weighed against this course. On the other hand, it seems highly principled and even delightful to throw the Baltic states out of the Soviet Union (for a while, at least!) except that the very heavy population from elsewhere in the Soviet Union means that this step would be social civil war badly disguised as an ethnic conflict.

What do you think about these matters, Federico?

In haste,
Jim



WHERE IS EAST GERMANY GOING?

27 December 1989

This letter to the Trotskistische Liga Deutschlands Central Committee was printed in International Internal Bulletin No. 20, February 1991, "Documents and Discussion on the Collapse of Stalinism (Part 1)."

To the Central Committee of the TLD

Dear Comrades:

The division between the German states, lacking any underlying decisive element of any national question, represents the purest division between two differing class-based states of one nation that the world is ever likely to see. Because of the combination of the pre-1933 strength of the KPD, the geography of religious divisions in Germany and especially the more profound destruction of the pre-existing Nazified superstructure in the Russian-occupied zone of Germany, the essential eclipse of the bureaucratized state in the East gives us a great opportunity. (It may be exceeded in Poland should the ex-official trade unions combine with the worker ranks of Solidarność to combat the enormous price the workers are supposed to pay through starving unemployment and superexploitation in Poland.)

Here is the script that the West German bourgeoisie seem to be working to. Massive immediate economic links between East and West Germany in every conceivable way; to go slowly in the political process centering a "new stage" upon the May 6 elections where the SED is supposed to lose heavily; this to be then followed by a series of successive federated steps imposed, for example, by considerations that the Catholic party cannot obtain a majority in a centralized, unified election and that many social issues, such as abortion, are formally irreconcilable.

In this situation we have one great strength. We join with the mass of East German workers in not wanting to be cannibalized by West German and world imperialism. We have three major positions which must cause us to appear well-meaning utopians before the East German masses in or out of the SED. One, our belief in the possibility and ultimately the inevitability of social revolutions in the capitalist countries, i.e., the world revolution. Two, the belief that the Soviet Union can undergo a political revolution to such an extent as to throw up a state structure comparable to that of the time of Lenin and Trotsky. Three, our belief that there is a severe misunderstanding in East Germany of the difference between a democratic, loyal, multiparty form of workers council rule and "free elections."

There are three tasks that we should pursue that are illustrative of our intentions. One, the equal, non-discriminatory treatment of foreign workers along with an amiable stance toward the Soviet troops. Two, the use of remaining and partially dismembered forces of state repression against anti-Semitism, fascism and racism. We should particularly single out the Betriebskampfgruppen for such tasks, struggling to maintain and expand them through the present, calling for their subordination to the workers councils, and ignoring and riding roughshod over their constitutional ambiguity as having been created 35 years ago as the instrument of a then one-party state. Three, fight against a witchhunt of Stasi or SED members per se, demanding strict accountability in individual trials and denouncing purges.

Evidence suggests that the East German army is subject to the same polarization as the SED itself, i.e., communistic at the base, social-democratic to fascist in the officer corps. We should, however, remain open to elements at the top, making common cause at the base. The Vopos seem to pose themselves in a curious intermediate position, but they are not the cops and prison guards of a capitalist regime.

Republikaner propaganda and cadres are working East Germany. We should avoid any formal disclaimer of their "right to free speech." They are Nazis in drag and their conduct will lead them into many physical confrontations with the pro-working-class elements described above, which the Republikaners should lose, badly and sensationally.

We should move in every way to form up our Spartakist Gruppen so that we can contest heavily in the May 6 elections in a tacit bloc with those who want to defend the fundamentals of a position common with us.

We claim to be that continuity which goes back to Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht, in the face of decades of Stalinist lies. Our faithfulness to truth, publicly expressed and if necessary corrected, in all things large and small must be manifest to any reader lacking fascist malice.

Much of this has been written in the assumption that the Russian leadership is not anxious to withdraw its armed forces which presently stabi-

lize the situation (vis-à-vis the Bundeswehr) and that these circumstances give us a great breathing space now from which we will benefit, providing it is used to maximum effect.

Urgently, go forward,
Jim,
for the I.S.

P.S. If I am off the mark, you should let me and others know. This statement does not deal with many tactical problems, but to the extent that the statement is agreed with, the tactical problems and urgent application to them should be clear.

P.P.S. The individual contact reports have been of great help in formulating the above.



STOP THE NAZIS THROUGH UNITED FRONT ACTION!

1 January 1990

Mobilizing call for the demonstration at Treptower Park issued by the Trotskistische Liga Deutschlands and the Spartakist Gruppen. Reprinted in Workers Vanguard No. 493, 12 January 1990.

The vile desecration of the Memorial to Fallen Soviet Heroes in Treptow on December 28 provokes disgust and outrage among millions of workers and broad layers of the population of the DDR. This provocation is directed as well at our workers state, which was built on the ruins of Hitler fascism.

Tens of thousands of workers from Berlin factories and throughout the DDR and BRD must be mobilized in powerful united-front actions to crush these killers. And it must be *now*, before it is too late! We also turn to our colleagues from Vietnam, Poland and Mozambique, who particularly suffer from anti-foreigner hatred and racist violence.

Resurgent fascism is still an extremist fringe phenomenon. It would again threaten all mankind as soon as the first crises in a reunified *Großdeutschland* appear. Today, however, the SPD/SDP is the chief instrument to bring about such a Greater Germany. Throttling the hydra-headed fascist monster now is to blunt this Social Democratic penetration.

It is the foremost task of the working people to sweep away the sinister Nazi pack. In carrying out

this mission, we extend the hand of fraternal solidarity to our brother Soviet soldiers and officers. The German workers movement has the strength to sweep away those who carried out their murderous work under the cover of night and fog.

- For united workers militias under the control of workers and soldiers councils! Workers and soldiers councils to power! For a Leninist-egalitarian party!
- From the bloodhound Noske/Ebert/Scheidemann to Brandt/Lafontaine: Social Democracy is the Trojan horse of counterrevolution!
- Full citizenship rights for foreign workers!
- For economic revitalization through central planning under workers councils!
- No sellout of the DDR—The DDR must not become the Panama of German imperialism! For a red soviet Germany!

Wednesday, 3 January 1990, 18:00

S-Bahnhof Treptower Park

Parkseite, Berlin

Spartakist Gruppen

Trotskistische Liga Deutschlands



Trotskyist Addresses SED-Supported Rally

“FOR A NEW WORKERS PARTY!”

3 January 1990

Translation of the speech by Trotskistische Liga Deutschlands leader Renate Dahlhaus to the Anti-Nazi rally of 250,000 people in Berlin's Treptower Park. It was published in Arbeiterpressekorespondenz (Workers Correspondence) on 4 January 1990 and appeared in Workers Vanguard No. 493, 12 January 1990.

Comrades, Anti-fascists:

We will never forget that 20 million Soviet citizens gave their lives to smash Hitler's fascism. They must not have died in vain.

When the fascists committed their outrage here, the Trotskyist League and Spartakist Grup-

pen immediately took the initiative for today's demonstration. The fascists are raising their heads here in the DDR, in Erfurt, Dresden, Gölitz, Halle. What is urgently needed is the militant mobilization of the working people, including immigrant workers, comrades from Vietnam,

Poland and Mozambique, to stop and to crush the fascist beast while it is still small.

The Leninist united front, the workers united front that Trotsky fought for in the early '30s, was needed then and is needed today to stop the Nazis.

If the fascists are smashed they cannot make a bid for power. But that means that the working class must be organized and strong and a contender for power. The highest form of the united front in a revolutionary situation like we are going through today is the workers and soldiers soviet.

As long as capitalism exists there is a cycle of struggles which keep recurring. There is less of a material basis for fascists in the DDR because the natural base of fascism, capitalism, does not exist here today. A political revolution has broken out and is growing in our midst, and we must defend it.

Economic absorption and political incorporation by stages—which West German imperialism, aided by the SPD, seeks—can turn this political revolution into a social counterrevolution. This must not happen! It is necessary to fight against it!

That's right, stop the Nazis through a workers united front! We have to think further. Our economy is suffering from waste and obsolescence. The SED party dictatorship has shown that it is incompetent to fight this. East Germany urgently needs selective.... [Interjections] Comrades, learn to listen, learn what a united front means.

What is urgently needed is a selective modernization of existing industry. With us in the DDR things are very different than in those countries, the other "socialist" countries which adhere to Stalin's concept of building "socialism in one country," and demonstrate that it is a transparent stupidity. We have hard choices—we must understand the danger of being at the mercy of the world market.

Comrades, fighting against the sellout of the DDR means getting clear in our minds that we are not going to wind up at the mercy of the world market controlled by the imperialists and the Deutsche Bank. The means for selling out the DDR is the Social Democracy—that had better be known to us all.

Do not be deceived: the military threat of impe-

rialism, which continues to be organized above all by the American ruling class, still persists. Yesterday, today and tomorrow they use direct and indirect military violence to achieve their aim.

This is directed centrally against the Soviet Union and everywhere that the capitalists have been eliminated as a class, or where imperialism hopes that it has an opportunity. The Soviet Union practices its own economic autarky which is not particularly beneficial to us and has led the Soviet Union into grave economic difficulties.

Lenin said, "Politics is concentrated economics." The fight for the power to make these decisions and to run this country must lie in the hands of workers councils so that rational decisions satisfactory to the majority can be arrived at. This can only be done through open and sometimes painful debates before the whole people. Perhaps our example will encourage the Soviet Union to take the same road. [Interjections]

Comrades, listen and learn that only through painful and open debates can the road to socialism be opened.

The Soviet Union will certainly take the same road, and that would also assist us in jointly solving economic and political problems and in the defense of our states, our workers states, which are presently transitional, broken from capitalism but certainly not yet socialist.

Comrades, as everybody knows, the power.... [Interjections] Comrades, as you know, the SED's monopoly of power has been broken. The masses are free to speak their minds. Learn to listen to them. It is only through the benevolent pressure of the Soviet Army that this has been made possible. What is lacking here is real organized conflicting political parties in struggle, a precondition for real workers democracy.

These are some of the concerns and some of the aims we seek to address as we fight to forge a new workers party—of equal rights, equal duties—in the spirit of Lenin, Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Stop the Nazis through united-front action! Workers and soldiers soviets to power! Workers of the world unite!



LETTER TO OUR COMRADE SOVIET SOLDIERS

27 March 1990

This statement of internationalist greetings was first printed in Russian and German in Arbeiterpressekorrespondenz No. 29, 27 March 1990 and published in Workers Vanguard No. 499, 6 April 1990.

Dear Comrades,

Soldiers of the Soviet Army, you come from a country that is very troubled now. Your officials and political instructors have so praised Lenin and so denied and buried Trotsky that one is now a boring icon and the other a monster. Actually they were both real men in a real time who led the masses of Soviet people to liberation insofar as was possible in a poor, backward, war-ridden country.

Today at home things are very confused. On the one hand it is permitted to talk about and seek answers to hidden things in our history. On the other hand capitalist exploitation is being encouraged. The nationalities are restless and want to break away because the decades of Stalinism have very much come to taste of tsarism, which Lenin characterized as “a prison house of peoples.” Perestroika has greatly fueled and intensified pre-existing national antagonisms by promoting economic competition and self-interest. The socialist principles of equality, internationalism and working-class solidarity are degraded.

At another pole Pamyat and their ilk long to go back to the “old Russia” of obscurantism, backwardness, and the persecution of Jews. Great Russian nationalist demagogues are spewing this poison among the workers in order to paralyze their ability to act in their self-defense across national lines. As Lenin said in 1919: “Shame on those who foment hatred towards the Jews, who foment hatred against other nations. Long live the fraternal trust and fighting alliance of the workers of all nations in the struggle to overthrow capital.”

The Soviet Union of today is not the poor thing that came out of the Civil War of 1920. But since 1945, its imperialist enemies have been united under the direction of the United States government in a relentless, all-sided struggle to destroy the Soviet Union. Stalin’s criminal usurpation of Soviet and party democracy, hostility

to international socialist revolution and cowardly crawling before one or another imperialist power has so weakened the Soviet Union that Stalin’s heirs are now seeking to give it up. They are caving in to the prospect of a “Fourth Reich.” This will embolden the most dangerous warmongering forces, from West German revanchism to the Pentagon, who are now aiming for the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its destruction as an anti-capitalist state.

This course is supported and pushed by large layers of the urban intelligentsia who are in fact the children of the former bureaucrats of Stalin and who now believe that they can become capitalist administrators and prettifiers. But the economic and political reality of capitalism over the grave of the multinational homeland of the October Revolution will be anything but pretty. Beware the lies of “free market” demagogues who paint a fool’s paradise of life under capitalism. Beware the lies of the nascent social democrats who speak of “controlled capitalism,” they are, knowingly or not, a Trojan horse for a new Operation Barbarossa.

The Soviet Union needs a strong workers party built on internal democracy and military unity at the front. Since 1945 you and your fathers have stood here in the DDR, on this front line against imperialism’s threats to our common gains, achieved through the overthrow of capitalism. We need to deepen military and economic cooperation between the DDR and the Soviet Union as well as the other workers states on the basis of workers democracy. This was the communism of Lenin and Trotsky. It is high time that you learn how the Soviet Union really came into being and apply these lessons today.

Best wishes from German, American and other communists of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

March 1990



Overcoming the Bourgeois Division Between Mental and Manual Labor MAINTENANCE AND THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

June 1994

This presentation to the Ninth National Conference of the SL/U.S. in June 1994 was published in Workers Vanguard No. 605, 2 September 1994.

In a very real way, this report is dedicated to Nina Hartley (who personifies the struggle against a parallel kind of invidiousness and hypocrisy, in her case sexual, inherent in the bourgeois order). America, uniquely among the advanced industrial countries, suffers from the religiosity of organized and repressive superstition. And one aspect of that, besides the Nina Hartley one, is the question of maintenance and the communist movement.

The bourgeois norm is management on top, maintenance in basement (a variation on the theme of priest-ridden Italy—man on top, woman in kitchen). When we were at our old national office, we had what I thought to be an optimal configuration. We had offices on the fifth and second floors, but on the tenth floor, right next to each other, were the Central Office and the maintenance department. It worked very well; it was real and collaborative, and it was very contradictory to the bourgeois norm which is, of course, that stockbrokers are vastly superior people to plumbers.

Now, just as a semi-aside, in order to change the world, you have to be able to change it, not merely learn something to write about it. As Stalin said, “Paper will take anything that is written on it.” One time, William F. Warde (George Novack) gave a nice little chat on philosophy, and he used the Marxist phrase: “The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world; the point is to....” At that point I picked up, “destroy them!” And the man looked visibly shaken. But there was a point.

So if you cannot, in an educated way, work with your hands, you are ineffectual. And if you don’t know what to do with your hands, you are an ignorant person, and you are certainly not a physical scientist or an engineer. Perhaps you are Peter Camejo [a former leader of the Socialist Workers Party], who is a politically correct, socially conscious investment counselor.

Now, there are limits to this observation. Stalin robbed banks while Trotsky wrote. However,

I would point out that Trotsky also organized the Red Army while Stalin seemed to have also been turning his comrades over to the tsarist Okhrana [secret police]. A model that I saw in life, at the College of Chemistry at Cal [Berkeley], were rather young, hotshot professors of chemistry who, in the course of their research on the borders of known science, did their own electronics, their own plumbing, their own glassblowing and a host of other things, which they learned on their own initiative, undoubtedly under the guidance of journeymen and master craftsmen. But they did it and they did it right, because those measurements meant everything in their work.

And that shows another side of the problem. A good journeyman, without the engineering or scientific overview, necessarily bumps against a conceptual ceiling and must be frustrated. I think that Bukharin, in one of his speculative books, suggested that with the victory of the working class and the development into higher stages of socialism, the last residue of previous class-divided society to be shattered would be the monopoly of the petty-bourgeois-derived intellectual skills, and that after that we, increasingly united as a species, would be on the road to communism.

So you have the bourgeois dichotomy between the doer and the thinker, the blue and the white collar, work and leisure, dirty and clean, menial and advantaged. What we seek are unifying communist values that not only permit us to redo the plumbing, but maintenance teams are very close to being the nuclei of military formations. Also, since I think this is a central axis of the world, I am left therefore with some kind of blinking indifference to preoccupations such as academic multiculturalism. The pH of water does not care about one’s deep ethnic-rooted taste in music, which one should certainly enjoy, if one does. But I don’t see that it changes much.

Thank you.



ON QUEBEC INDEPENDENCE

4 March 1995

This presentation and summary at an internal debate on Quebec was printed in International Internal Bulletin No. 37, July 1995, "On the National Question in Quebec."

Lately, I got into this discussion in a backward way because there was some suggestion by disappointed East Germans that maybe they were well on the way to having become a new nation. This seemed to me unlikely, and I started doing some reading. I wrote some notes, one version of which is dated from March of last year, on the formation of nations and divergences therefrom. I did not expect to deal particularly with the question of the formation of the nation state by a conquered, assimilated people now driving out the other linguistic group by a series of laws, and furthermore the recent obliteration of the prior political parties in Canada and the emergence of new dominant ones growing out of the failure of the attempt to resolve, within a common political economy, the pervasive presence of two languages, flying in the face of all experience.

There's a close comparison here, by the way, with the United States and Mexico. The product of the earliest bourgeois revolution, England, colonized North America. So did two essentially feudal formations, Spain and France. You can guess what happened. The feudal formations from Europe had their colonies smashed. The Americans took what they wanted of Mexico, places where there were few Mexicans; the British obliterated French control of the French colonies, made a deal with the local church to keep the Québécois in line, and eventually got Upper Canada, Ontario, as a result of the arrival of counter-revolutionists from the original English colonies in America, afterward reinforced by large numbers of Scots driven from Scotland. This led to the province of Ontario, which their humorists have described therefore as "it's very hard to tell a Canadian from a very dull white person."

So these are the two parallels. I do not want to cast John Masters in the position of wanting to massacre Los Niños de Chapultepec, as U.S. Grant was made to do under Winfield Scott in 1845. And even then the Americans withheld themselves from taking the Mexican parts of Mexico, only making Texas safe for slavery, which was the point of it all and why up to the American Civil War they were casting big eyes on the Spanish colonies, Cuba and Puerto Rico and Mexico and Central America. This is all part of a common kind of experience.

But I do think that what's new—in answer to a comrade who did write a few pages on what's taking place in Canada now—is that the political structure in Canada has collapsed. I believe only John Majors' Tory Party has managed to get a vote as small, or popularity as small, as the Canadian Tory Party. Something new, called the Reform Party, has arisen, and there has been a sharp rise in Anglo chauvinism. So I do recommend my notes.

John accurately described briefly the history of the French under English occupation, and the urbanization and dramatic turnaround in the character of the French population in and around Quebec. It used to be until quite lately that Québécois women produced 13 live births, the highest known in the world. Now they have one of the lowest. There's been a profound social change in Quebec, with the loss of the power of the church, the urbanization, the industrialization, and the passage of the dictator, Duplessis. And I also noted that both John and I were zealously studying something about one Abbé Groulx, who seems to have been the father of cultural nationalism in French Canada. I tried to do some research on one question: What was the attitude of the Comintern, in its founding first four congresses, to the Québécois question? (Because we know, in a rough analogy, that the Communist International had an enormous amount to do with shaping the attitudes of the communists toward the black question in the United States.) The answer is: absolutely nothing. At the Fourth Congress of the CI, a Canadian delegation turned up claiming to be from Canada and not the United States, and that was their achievement.

The probable transitional demand in the founding Canadian Communist Party could humorously be put as for a government of Scottish workers and Jewish radicals, the Montreal component being the Jewish radicals. Anti-Semitism, quite characteristic of pre-1789 Europe, was endemic in Quebec, because that's where they issue from. As an urgent parenthetical, may I remind everybody that the Québécois never experienced the French Revolution. They got some of the views and attitudes appropriate to it after around 1950. It wasn't until 1959 that the old monster who ran Quebec all those years did finally pass on to a higher plane.

So I believe that we should want an independent Quebec. This is not a similar language group like the Norwegians adjacent to the Swedes, where the Swedes, Danes and Norwegians have been trading state powers off among each other for 1,000 years. Or even the Poles, whose schoolteachers in the 19th century zealously invented Polish in order to separate themselves from the other Slavic peoples. This is really a completely different nation. And it's been going very strongly that way. English speakers are being driven out of Quebec. The French speakers want it for themselves. They, however, are a little nervous about going independent because what they want is a strong, dominant, sovereign, independent Quebec in the context of a Canada which pays their taxes. That's a contradiction, and so they are driving out the foreigners.

A foreigner, by the way, is somebody who's English-speaking and transfers from another province to Quebec. Their kids have to go to a French school. So they get a good deal of local chauvinism, without the corresponding independence. They'd like to have the best of all possible worlds, but of course what you have therefore are annoyed Anglos in western Canada who are forced into the hideous indignity of reading the labels of their dog food cans that they're opening—in French. So it's an entirely anomalous structure that's gone on for far too long.

The latest votes and figures that John accurately reported—I'd be interested in seeing the breakdown. There still are some English speakers and some miscellaneous immigrants in Quebec.

I have one qualm: the Indians are going to get it. The Québécois are no longer the French trappers and traders who went out to live with the Indians. There is now a compact, very chauvinist French population. So what about a goodly number of Mohawks on the American border and a very thin spread of Indians in the upper two-thirds of what they now call Quebec but which was in fact given to the province by the British government in the 19th century. That's where all the big power stations are that make the Quebec power system, the hard-core base of modern Québécois industry.

It's sometimes been argued that one must think of the poor Maritimes separated geographically from the rest of Canada. I see my time is up, so I'll just point out that Alaska has managed to do all right under the same travail of being separated by hideous Canada from the rest of the mainland USA.

One last sentence. The position of the American government has been interesting. They don't seem to want to rock the boat. They've got a system that, as far as they're concerned, works to the

North and they'd just as soon it stayed that way. That seems to be what they are all promoting. But I do think that it's anomalous to call for the maintenance of a conquered people who plainly want out—in the concrete ways they insist on a closed, French-language culture and society, and are rather timorous about departing with one-quarter of the Canadian national debt as their inheritance from having been under the English for so long.

Summary

Centrally, what has evolved and of course enormously intensified under the period of industrialization is that a common political economy compels, demands and requires a common language. The common language is also then the vehicle of the culture. And much to the surprise of Marx and Engels, many otherwise unlikely quite small national groupings that they had assumed were not viable have, through the instrumentality of schoolteachers, become nation states, about which we are not particularly fond.

However, I was concerned by Norden, who I thought was simply being, in a very episodically contemporary way, politically correct by speaking of the breakdown of the nation state at each end, where you're going to have little regional groupings like Brittany or what have you within France, and then, in the context of the European Union, these big aggregations of capital headed by the United States, Germany and Japan. I believe this to be terribly impressionistic—the global economy which is conquering everywhere. That will last until the first good depression or military clash. It's terribly naive.

A common political economy is a much better way to understand this than to read Stalin's list from 1913 of evidence of a nation. Israel is the most extreme example, followed closely by the Sinhalese, for how a large subjective element can wreak havoc with this list.

I believe that in the future of the working-class struggle in Canada, that the past, present and future ease of hatred of the other people, rather than of the possessing class in one's own language group, is the poison that we want to combat. We are for national rights and are virulently opposed to the nationalists. And one of the ways to balk the nationalists is to see their aims fulfilled; that takes that issue off the agenda and tends to clarify where the real social contradiction ought to be fought out. And I believe the confinement in a common state is poisonous—to the historically conquered and the conquerors.

Of course, since about 1950 the French are no longer downtrodden, priest-ridden, rural peas-

antry. They've turned into almost the opposite of that. I think comrades have spoken well to the idea that by the 1970s there was some exhilaration at the idea of nationalism and now it looks pretty ho-hum. Except that the Québécois national demands also considerably annoy the Anglo component, which is why you get this Anglo virulence as well as the French virulence. The barriers being thrown up linguistically are quite severe and chauvinist, by the way, and the Anglos are quite ready to take offense, so that I see the situation as truly poisonous.

I think you have to come and examine each situation in its own terms. I'd like to point out the evolution in Puerto Rico where we'd be quite prepared to be for the independence of Puerto Rico, but in fact with nearly half the population migrating back and forth to the mainland of the United States, English has become a co-language there. The tendency seems at this point to be toward assimilation, so we should be very careful to be for self-determination for Puerto Rico, not pushing them to independence when their own economic inclinations seem to be going in the direction of assimilation. It's a different case.

I do believe there's an underlying parallelism between Quebec and Mexico, because each of them had the bad fortune to run into a much more high-powered, more modern imperialism in the world, the British. The French and Spanish colonies lost, in their respective ways.

I also think that it is in a deadly way premature now to begin talking about a federation of workers states in North America. Let's get the workers states, then we can talk about federation.

What it looks like now is the Yankees are going to force themselves down everybody's throats. It's like in Russia today, in the ex-Soviet Union, talking about, gee, if we ever have a revolution in the future, we're going to put the Russians on top. That doesn't bode too well. When there's the deed of working-class victory and authentic equality between the peoples, then you talk about federations. When pushed before social revolution, I consider that to be a very deadly idea.

I've got one more thing. We must oppose strongly any implication of strengthening the imperialist United States by now advocating taking the Anglo provinces into the present United States of America. Once we have a workers revolution, then we'll be interested in *ein Volk, ein Reich*. In the meantime, let's not be in a big hurry to strengthen Yankee imperialism. They're not in a big hurry, by the way, because they use Ottawa as the soft cop for American imperialism. When the American ambassador gets drunk and pees all over Mother Teresa, the Canadian ambassador comes up and says he really didn't mean it. They're content with that work in the world.

So yes, I believe that we should advocate the independence of the Québécois. I believe that cuts through a presently terribly poisonous situation. Remember, we're not Stalin that makes it happen the next day. It's an advocacy on the grounds that there are two separate nations with separate languages, separate cultures that should go their separate ways and fight their own bosses, and then the working classes of these two countries will have a basis for a common future.



NOTES ON QUEBEC

20 May 1995

Printed in International Internal Bulletin No. 37, July 1995.

In opposition to previously held opinions I believe that A) We should be "strategically indifferent" to a future unification of Anglo Canada with the United States, only being concerned in principle that it be democratically arrived at, particularly on the part of the Canadians involved. We of course reserve the right specifically to oppose such an act if its principal aspect is to strengthen American imperialism. B) We must recognize that the French population in eastern Canada is descended from a French colonial population conquered in the 18th century by the British.

Following World War II this priest-ridden, rural peasantry emerged as a self-conscious nation. The enactment of the language laws around 1970 asserting the monopoly of French in public life in that province ended the period of choosing alternatives (self-determination) by the French. This was a vote for separation from, rather than assimilation into, Anglo Canada.

The founding Canadian Communist Party, based upon class-conscious Anglo workers and Jewish radicals, evidently failed to assert the right of self-determination for the downtrodden French.

We (our tendency in Canada and internationally) erred in asserting mere self-determination for the French, who had already asserted their separateness. Now that we recognize our error, if we choose wrong on this question we will find ourselves thrown into the arms of Anglo chauvinism.

So we should have been since our inception, are now, and in general in the future should be, for the independence of this separate nation. We do not, however, promise to be for such independence at such junctures where it would cut across a unifying struggle of the working class for state power.



INTERNATIONALISM IS A DEAD LETTER IF...!

22 November 1995

Printed in International Bulletin No. 38, Third Edition, November 1996.

Bay Area

For the Consideration of the IEC:

INTERNATIONALISM IS A DEAD LETTER IF...!

With half a moment's thought it is obvious that the question of language capacity is a necessary prerequisite to move in the world at large. Yet this consideration is often omitted from formal calculation.

Through about 1970 our political tendency was trapped inside the Anglo sphere. Even though we were ardent and necessarily internationalists there was nothing that we could effectively do about this deadly impasse. Then we recruited three comrades as Marxist fallout from the New Leftist wave in the radicalizable academic milieu: Sharpe (French and German), Dimir (German) and Norden (Spanish). These were the comrades who allowed us to break out.

The fact that these individuals had devoted a good part of their working professional lives to their language achievements underlines the depths of the problem. With quite good will comrades working in language study groups in Colombo and New York and with strong organizational encouragement were unable to break the Sinhala/English barrier. We had lost the young Sinhala academic who got his advanced degree in Nova Scotia—after that good will and good intentions availed us nothing. In South Africa today English is seen as the language of freedom, as it used to be in Ceylon by minorities. But the majority in Ceylon had other ideas and now that is lost.

The linguistically-threatened situation of our Japanese group has not been qualitatively improved despite the continuing expenditure of great effort. If we are granted enough time we will have the necessary bi-linguality there. But in the meantime any disputes directly involving the SGJ are rendered qualitatively more difficult for positive outcome.

It is readily apparent that even with a number of avenues existing along the German-English connection that the dispute in the last year around our perspective for German work was made seriously more difficult and complicated because of the goodly number of comrades not proficient in both languages to be found both in the German section and on the IEC.

At bottom Lenin's thought (*What Is To Be Done*) was meant to overcome this difficulty—namely the acquisition by the revolutionary workers party of individuals assimilated to it from the academically trained intelligentsia. This of course, and depending upon context, comes with problems and dangers as were reflected upon by James P. Cannon in his *Struggle for a Proletarian Party*.

Cannon's trip to France on behalf of the Fourth International in early 1939 was still-born, foundering on the technical side over his monolingualism.

Among our current opponents, British Workers Power is supposed to consist in its core of young academics. Even the requirement of reading capacity in two foreign languages for a Ph.D., which I suppose is general in the world, might have given them the crucial leg up for their LRCI. The American Healyite descendants, David North's Workers League, is supposed to have several former Slavic studies graduate students in its cadre. This presumably shows up in their ability to intervene in the Slavic parts of the ex-SU and to pose as scholars on the origins of the Left Opposition.

Without the language capacity to bridge the gulfs between the people of the world we are not merely lost, we are non-starters.

For a Welders' and Bilinguals' Government!

Sanguinely,
Jim

P.S. I myself am the pathetic walking example of this problem: a lot of years in Spanish, an exposure to French, uneven but prolonged attempted

German, a thirst for the Cyrillic alphabet (thank God it is drawn from Greek—I had had a lot of math)—and today, nothing! I will grant you that the U.S.A., China, Brazil and Russia are all very

large places, too often and foolishly seeming to be the whole world. The nationalists in India want to turn it, too, into a massive monolingual (Hindi-speaking) state.



A POINT ON REGIONAL AUTONOMY

2 May 1998

The following transcript of remarks at a Bay Area district conference was printed in International Internal Bulletin No. 51, March 1999.

I want to speak a little bit about autonomy, either geographical or cultural. Usually when you read Lenin attacking the Austro-Marxists, it's cultural autonomy, which was a way to save the very motley Habsburg Empire by in a given town in some place in the Western Ukraine, you have 18 nationalities and each one of them has their own school district, and they all pay taxes to the Habsburgs in Austria. One can also have geographical autonomy; you can count it a lot of ways. But in any case, it's a *deal*, comrades. Self-determination is a unilateral right, so people decide to pick up the gun; they're going to be independent and they fight, and they either win or lose. Autonomy is always a deal to be arrived at between two sides who feel that there's enough basis for a mutual compromise. It's also, therefore, a very concrete deal because it depends on the issue that is in dispute, which can be a number of different things. And in any case, both of these questions of differing peoples of one kind or another are subordinate to the issue of social revolution. The great gain of the Leninists was to find a way to defuse the national antagonisms in favor of working-class power, which took some doing. It was successful.

The racist fascist Enoch Powell just died, and one of the things that he had to say in life was that autonomy is a good thing from the standpoint of the people in the capital city; it's a way of dealing with questions, because it's a deal. So the com-

rades have noticed that I've been kind of equivocal about the vote on the Scots parliament, which is autonomy. Well, I have been kind of equivocal. I think that the *right* for the vote is quite important. But much more important, really, is that at the mouth of the Tweed River there used to be a Scottish town called Berwick, and around 1307, Edward I killed all the people who lived there and brought in English people. Berwick is part of Scotland; there's no doubt about that, unlike other places that you could look at on the map nearby and say, "Well, if we're going to have a Greater Scotland, how about Carlisle, the Isle of Man..." No, there's not much basis for that. But Berwick was an atrocity inside the borders of Scotland about which there's no question, no matter how you have Scotland in the British Isles.

But in any case, autonomy is not a very big thing; it's often a palliative, sometimes happily entered into, sometimes not. The Scots, for example, have always had autonomy: their own law, nominally their own currency, and they send representatives to a common parliament. The latest referendum was just a question of proposing to redo the deal. So it's no panacea at all whereas self-determination really is kind of a panacea. For example, the Québécois, having been conquered by the English, want out. Well, we support that right. And that does not depend on the opinion of Anglophone Canada, unlike autonomy.



ON PERMANENT REVOLUTION

16 January 2001

This edited transcript of a presentation to the Bay Area SYC appeared in International Internal Bulletin No. 55, May 2002.

What's called the permanent revolution is sufficiently necessary that you cannot have a Marxism of the twentieth century without a big component, a wedge of it, that could be described as permanent revolution. They talk about globalization now, but one of the principal points at the beginning of the twentieth century—and it was already existent then—was the economic unity and hierarchical structure of the world, economically. So that internationalism was not some kind of abstract idealism, but for the working-class revolutionaries grew out of the reality, that same reality of the international situation which led to the imperialist wars. It's very concrete and very real. And that's one of the basic considerations, that no place on earth could be considered in isolation or in abstraction.

Now, I assume that you comrades either are reading or have read *Results and Prospects*, which was Trotsky's and also Parvus' analysis in connection with the 1905 Revolution in Russia, and then the later polemic *Permanent Revolution*, which was a response to those odd people who had become the ideologues of the Stalinist bureaucracy, who did not understand how the October Revolution had come about and in fact, prior to that, would have argued for the impossibility of a workers revolution in Russia. This makes it very peculiar, and Trotsky thought when he was writing it that it was a very peculiar polemic he had to write.

There's no hope of appreciating Marxist theory in general if you do not have appreciation of some history and also of some science. Because you do not know what you're doing otherwise. Everything is possible. The best person to put it was J.V. Stalin, he said paper will take anything that's written on it. And an awful lot of paper is written that way. So that if you feel the discontents of modern society and want a fundamental change in the way that social life exists, if you do not pay attention to other historical circumstances and have some appreciation of physical reality—basic laws of science—you're helpless. And nine times out of ten you will be involved in organizations and programs that are contrary to what you aspire to, because you are a victim of any demagogue. So you must know something. And that is one of the crucial reasons why a revolution

ary workers party also needs a section from the radical intelligentsia, who come over and make common cause with the workers' program. Because in most societies, unlike the unusual American one, scientific and social scientific knowledge are kept apart from the working class.

It was very good of Trotsky to see that a modern component of industrialization acquired by a large, backward empire on the fringe of Europe—not through the natural, organic outgrowth and development of events within tsarist Russia but imported as part of foreign loans, foreign engineers, foreign schemes—led to a concentrated industrial proletariat, not very numerous relative to the extremely large country but possessing very considerable social power. Trotsky was writing around 1905. The capitalists, going through the 1848 revolutions, observing the then-growth of the working class, had fled the revolution and made common cause with the old order. That was already in 1848. The capitalists no longer played the role that they had as an advanced and extremely radical element in England in the 1820s and 1830s, where both the capitalist factory owners and the workers were physically attacked by townspeople and others who were led by the old order of landowners, in particular, commercial elements. So there was actually a very sharp division in England at the dawn of the industrial revolution between the landed mercantile elements and the factories. And of course the French Revolution was the most striking expression of that.

Even today, however, there are places that do not involve the permanent revolution because they do not have a sufficiency of modern society. I read an interesting book called *The Redundancy of Courage* by one Timothy Mo, writing on East Timor in the period after the Indonesians had arrived (that is, the Portuguese had thrown the colony over). He said explicitly in his book: you know, I am aware of Trotsky's theories, permanent revolution and the like; I don't happen to agree with him. And naturally enough, he was writing about a society that hadn't seen a proletariat of the industrial character—ever. They'd seen plenty of Chinese merchants and the extraction of tropical raw materials but nothing in the way of industry

there. Similarly, a war that people in this country don't know much about because it was remote in time and place, but the tribal peoples in Morocco and Algeria in the 1920s, led by a man named Abd al-Krim, staged a hell of an uprising in the interior of these countries, defeated the Spanish army in Spanish Morocco and fought it out and were only barely defeated by the French army in North Africa, in big military open confrontations. The French Communist Party in fact did a good deal of good. In 1926 longshoremen dumped the military supplies for the French army into the bay at Marseilles. They were supposed to be transhipped across to fight the Tuaregs. But Abd al-Krim was not an element of permanent revolution. These were guys running around on camels in the classical tradition of the Sahara desert.

Some other places are important in this connection. There was a big agrarian revolution starting around 1911 and running on for five or six years in Mexico. There was a working class in Mexico, in the mines, and handicraftsmen in the cities. They generally sided with the government against these insurgent peasants, or were neutral, because nothing seemed to involve them; they did not play a social role. Likewise, there was a rather radical Dutch socialist who found himself in the Dutch East Indies before the First World War, Sneevliet, who later became quite an important communist. And he wanted to do something toward the emancipation of the natives from the Dutch colonialism. So he helped set up a rather radical Moslem group on Java called Sarekat Islam, calling for the expulsion of the Dutch, because that was the material that lay at hand in these non-industrial countries.

So with the establishment of the Communist International in 1919 they adopted some quite strong and anti-colonial positions. Nothing at all like the posture of the Second International, who of course were Socialist Parties, sometimes even in the government of the colonial countries. So if you are aspiring to be the government of France or England, you can hardly call, at least very sincerely, for the independence of French Indochina or British India. So such resolutions were taken. But what the Comintern failed to appreciate is that during the First World War the normal processes of the economy had been badly disrupted, and in both China and India very substantial industrial production had developed with the creation, consequently, of significant modern industrial working classes. And of course in these countries that get their industry later, they don't go through the evolution from handicraft to small factories to larger ones, but instead it's much more economically feasible to bring in the largest, latest modern

technology to get the highest rate of profit, so that there is the least amount of labor involved in the production of the various commodities. Typically, they started with textile because it's easy to start up, but in the cases of both China and certainly India, steel mills too. The famous Tata family in the Indian steel industry got their real start in the First World War when British steel was being consumed on the Western front or else put into ships that were then sunk by U-boats.

By the time of the Second Congress of the CI, the issue is being brooded about: Wait a minute, are we just going to find some local insurrectionaries of a religious or tribal or national character to give military support to so that they can make trouble for their colonial masters who are our enemies, the imperialists? What about the question of the development of communist parties based on the working class? This in general was not something that one envisioned; since communists are supposed to be working-class parties, it's very hard to visualize communist parties—or it was then at least—in the absence of the proletariat.

Of course in Japan, which had been a pretty closed but by now highly industrial area, a communist party was being formed, but also communists were coming into creation, the first little nuclei, in China in 1920, and communists underwent a steady creation in India. India, like Japan, had a very efficient imperial police force. So that little was heard in the 1920s of either Japanese or Indian communism. In addition, in Japan (I don't know about the Indian case) the party was being advised, I believe, by Bukharin. And for reasons which elude me, instead of having a leadership and press published abroad and then smuggling it into cells into Japan, they kept recruiting these likely young Japanese comrades, sending them back into Japan to constitute a local Central Committee and they of course promptly got arrested because the Japanese police were quite efficient.

One time we had a problem where we had some significant contact with some non-proletarian revolutionary insurrectionaries. And we wondered what kind of advice to give them. We got on quite friendly terms with the radical government in Afghanistan and, on inquiry—we had a comrade visiting there—found out they had one factory in Kabul with maybe a hundred workers. That was the proletariat of Afghanistan. There were these very serious-minded modernizing young army officers. They were about the equivalent of the Decembrists from December of 1820 in tsarist Russia, that is, progressive, modernizing army officers, maybe who had been abroad, who had some sense that their country was not a nation and not even a

state. It had three different ethnic groups within it; the Pashtuns dominated things but they didn't have really a common internal political economy. They'd always been a buffer region between tsarist Russia and the British empire in India, as in the Great Game. Only they had acquired along the way at one point a fairly progressive emir, Amanullah, who won independence from the British and proclaimed a monarchy. Then there was this strata of army officers led by Muhammad Daoud who fell to some faction fighting, Daoud was killed in a coup and the pro-Soviet regime won out. What advice do you give to people who say we want to have a revolution, we want to have a modern country, we want to abolish the reactionary fetters of Islam, we want to be friendly with the Soviet Union? I said to Federico, who was going over there, I guess you better tell them that the best thing they could read would be Plekhanov, because he was dealing with the tsarist empire at a time in which industrialization was just coming into play, and there is no reason for these army officers to go off in the direction of populism, which is misleading.

But, in general, that's not a problem that you run into in modern life. Although in Mexico, something very peculiar: here's a country that now has acquired a large industrial proletariat and it had been experiencing an isolated peasant insurgency in Chiapas. That shows a considerable incapacity in the Mexican working class, i.e., the success of the government in keeping it tamed within the framework of economic trade unionism and limited by the ideas of Mexican nationalism, so that the Mexican working class has not lately been threatening to the regime. Of course, as is always the case, the nationalist Mexican government gets a minor portion of the profits that accrue to the adjacent big imperialism, the United States, and they are its tools. I believe that the newest president, no longer from the PRI but from the more right-wing party, is also in charge of Coca Cola distribution for Mexico. Coca Cola, the well-known national drink of the Hispanic world.

Alma: It competes with Inca Cola.

Jim: Yes, I know about Inca Cola, as a matter of fact. It's bright yellow, I believe.

Rojas: The Incas drink it with potatoes.

Jim: Well, you can ferment it but I don't think that's what they had in mind.

So, in 1920, the application of permanent revolution to Russia was self-evident and not in dispute. In fact, in Pathfinder's edition, there's a nice big cover page from the English edition that the Third International brought out in 1921 of Trotsky's *Results and Prospects*. Trotsky had written

a special introduction to the 1919 reissue in Russian. It was just one of the books of one of the leaders of the October Revolution containing whatever insights were appropriate to the development of the October Revolution.

Suddenly in 1924, associated with Stalin's announcement that socialism could be built in one country, was launched by all of the other leaders of the Soviet state an attack on permanent revolution as a denial of revolution, a denial of the role of the peasantry, a denial of the greatness of the Soviet state, a difference with Lenin. And every other kind of bad thing, was Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution. So Trotsky had to go and write a necessarily tedious defense called *The Permanent Revolution*, explaining in fact that this is pretty much what happened and Lenin pretty much came to recognize that that was the way it was going to go and that the elastic formula of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry could in practice only be achieved under the hegemony of the working class, i.e., something called the dictatorship of the proletariat, although with a workers and peasants government. It didn't work too well after the early period, because the left-wing party of the peasants didn't want to sign the treaty acknowledging German victory over Russia, and so it staged an insurrection, started shooting people, carried on as revolutionaries should. It's a little hard to remain in the government with people who are actually ordering their officers to assassinate you and such. The Left SRs had a good heart, it's just that it wasn't easy to get along with people who want to overthrow you because they think you've just betrayed the country by signing an injurious peace treaty. So after that the Bolsheviks ruled alone.

It took a bit of doing to see that the proletariat in China and India had set it apart from countries like those all across North Africa, or East Timor later, or Chiapas today; that a proletarian revolutionary perspective in a backward area was indicated; and that there is even the chance that such a place might acquire workers power earlier than an advanced country, because the proletariat had such a concentrated character in the port cities of China, and in the industrial sectors in India for that matter, out of all proportion to the strength of the other social classes.

Here are a few other points. One of the things that gives me some pause is that if permanent revolution is not true, then how could tsarist Russia have become a dictatorship of the proletariat? I mean, that's sort of fundamental and that's where all of its detractors end up doing double-talk. Especially the later worked-out, highly Menshevik,

characteristic Stalinist idea of the two-stage revolution in backward countries, in which first the working class is to help the local capitalists to get into power, and then the local capitalists, together with perhaps the landlords and the imperialists, take guns and shoot the local workers—that's the second stage of the two-stage revolution. This has been repetitively practiced until at least in the Islamic bloc the fundamentalists have come up because the communists have lost all credit and the nationalists don't look too good either. So instead you have fundamentalists.

I notice that there has been very little urban industrialization throughout the entire Islamic belt, from Morocco all the way, until quite lately under the generals in Java, across a whole strip of the world. So Islamic fundamentalism has had a pretty good shot at it without being conflicted by an industrial proletariat. Of course, that's in a sense why one ends up with Islamic fundamentalism at the end of the twentieth century in this part of the world, because it's something more appropriate to the ninth century. The Islamic areas have been kept in profound backwardness throughout this period. And you think about that: all across North Africa, all across the Arab portions. There is a considerable amount of oil extraction, but the extractive industries do tend to operate in odd places at distances from urban centers and their product, metals or petroleum, is taken straight away. So it doesn't quite have the social effect. You notice the same thing in the coal mines that classically supplied the industrial revolution, that they tended to be in rural areas in the United States, up in Appalachia, mountainous areas, and that does undercut the social impact of those sections of the work force. In fact, as I was thinking about this point, it occurred to me that the German name for a miner is *ein Bergmann*—a mountain man.

There's another unpleasant characteristic of the Stalinist bureaucracies which clashes with the three elements of the permanent revolution, and that is that the Stalinist bureaucracies are intensely nationalistic entities. So that they have the interests of the Soviet Union, the interests of China, the interests of Yugoslavia, the interests of Cuba, the interests of Vietnam, and these bureaucratic leaderships stand at the head of these clashing national entities such that there have been quite serious battles along the Amur River between the Chinese and Russian armies and also a brief but quite bloody war between the Vietnamese Stalinists and the Chinese Maoists. That's one of the reasons that led Trotsky, writing pretty early on in *The Permanent Revolution*, to make the observation that if the Russian

Soviet state does not find expression abroad in new revolutions in the advanced countries, it will sooner or later, willy nilly, be defeated. He wrote that in opposition to the artificial optimism of the Stalinists, who said that, well, we are independent of the world market and we can just go it our own way. No, no, Trotsky said, we live in the world. The national insularity, national socialism, of the Stalinists, of course, is the handmaiden of the denial of the rest of permanent revolution.

It's a little bit irrelevant, but you might as well hear it, because you may not have read it somewhere else. Cosmology deals with the birth of our universe. It has undergone some evolution, and there's a question: is it expanding now or is it contracting, what is the fate of our universe? That's called cosmology. We were having a political fight with a comrade named Yossi a couple of years ago, and I don't know how cosmology got into the fight, it was not an organic element of it, but Yossi announced that the reason people believe the current theories of the nature of the universe is because it's papal propaganda. And since he was truly an ignorant person, it was impossible to persuade him that there might be any other virtue to the struggle to determine the cosmological constant, other than a secret discussion in the College of Cardinals. Basically, this was an elaborate, long way around to say that he had lost any confidence in the revolutionary capacities of the working class and was thinking about retiring to some kind of private life by way of a reformist world view.

Revolutionary History is not a very good organization in terms of its politics, but it's on the lookout for interesting material, and somebody named Gary Tennant did a lot of work, a lot of academic work, must have gotten a few degrees out of it, on his history of Trotskyism in Cuba. It's really quite interesting to see the inability of the Trotskyists to take hold, as a matter of fact, in a country where the pressures were very strong to either fall into economism or to drift into the orbit of the radical nationalists, which was the fate of the Trotskyists in Cuba. They got their kick-start around 1928 and then gradually disappeared from sight. But if you want to see the relationship between the tendency of revolutionary Marxism and its inability to take root because it did not have proletarian soil, this is a pretty good example. Yet the problems were very severe in Cuba, and in the absence of the proletariat contending, you did get the Castroist solution, under the umbrella of the presence of the degenerated Soviet Union in the world. So if there's a sufficient pressure and other avenues are closed up, some damn thing is going to happen.

I have not dealt much with the post-war expansions of the deformed workers states, although this is a suggestion of it. There's another good book by Benjamin Schwartz, *Chinese Stalinism and the Rise of Mao*, which really helped to clarify this.

So, I hope you have a sense that in countries that don't look like they might sustain a proletarian revolution that in fact if there is the importation of elements of modern society, particularly the factory system, you get something that grows up out of quite different soil. Often the capital that will come with that will not be a local capital or at least undiluted local capital but a lot of foreign capital—in Russia it was mainly French capital, although there were a few Russian millionaires too. If you get modern factories, you get factory workers and their social weight is very strong, while the owners of the factories are already deeply in the arms of reaction. So that the formulae from the earlier nineteenth century that the bourgeois-democratic tasks of course will be carried out by the bourgeois democrats, which is to say the people who own capital and want to employ it, is no longer true.

It becomes kind of a cliché in the age of imperialism, because obviously at the core of imperi-

alism, besides being welfare for sections of the middle classes of the metropolitan countries seeking employment and then paying their wages, is also the export of capital into foreign climes. That capital is not always exported to build railroads, which are transient, or mines, which are perhaps remote, but some of it is perhaps going to end up in industries that are urban and concentrated. And then you have a proletariat that can easily get quite strong, quite conscious, quite militant, new, raw and with no democratic protestations easily available. Let's take a particularly gross example. In Cuba, there was a great deal of American investment, plus the American government owned Cuba too, when it came down to it. Here's the Batista regime, which was really quite murderous; it left no room for any so-called liberal capitalist opinion to deplore Batista, to deplore American imperial rule and ownership. So what you got was a petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, with a working class rather dispersed and paralyzed, who ran an insurgency and under the shield of the Soviet Union actually managed to replicate a deformed workers state. One which still sits there, by the way, although with a rather decrepit set of Castro brothers running it.



REMARKS ON YOUTH

19 June 2004

The following is an excerpt from remarks made by Jim at the SL/U.S. 12th National Conference, June 2004.

First and least immediately relevant, but it is relevant. I have been advocating the following: We will not have a new national youth organization until we have acquired a carnivorous leadership of the youth. And I want to explain what that means. The aim of any youth leadership is to fight the party leadership. That's the real truth, and I've been a youth leader for many decades, sometimes for ill, sometimes for good. The founding youth leadership in the Communist International became, in the main, the party leaderships everywhere except where there were mass workers organizations, as in Germany, Czechoslovakia, France. But toward the end of the '20s, the entrenched party leaders were resistant to Stalin and the youth leaderships were ready tools to supplant working-class leaders of whatever persuasion.

The Spartacus Youth League in the early '30s was the darling of Max Shachtman and contained

the cadres of the Workers Party, the Shachtman organization. [Seventeen years later] the left Shachtman youth went over to the SWP, and out of part of it came our own antecedents. So it's a mixed bag, but it's a kind of a safety: it's very good for a party leadership to have some carnivores on their trail. And in order to become a youth organization that wants to get the party leadership, you have to publish a newspaper, get an office, collect money—youth never have any problems about collecting money when they've got a *reason* for it—go on national tours, set up local branches, appear to participate in campus struggles, and all the other things you have to do to get the party leadership.

So I want to make a pitch along those lines. Otherwise, you will have what us carnivorous left-Shachtmanite youth found in the SWP: party youth, who hang around the party headquarters and bring coffee to party members, not dynamic and virulent

creatures. They were the ones at the founding of the YSA who said, "But comrade Wohlforth, comrade Robertson, you have no Americans held up as ideals for the youth; you only have all these foreigners, Lenin and Trotsky and Luxemburg and Liebknecht and Engels and Marx—how about some Americans?" I remember somebody, when they didn't like the answer, said, "Well, show us an American." In

fact, I came up with a couple of Americans, at least people who lived for a long time in America, but our party youth hangers-on had never even heard of them or didn't like them: Sorge, De Leon, admirable people. What they wanted was Debs, because he was a little soft in the head, with a good heart but not much of a brain. He's the one who started running for American president.



THE BOLSHEVIK SCHOOL OF EXPERIENCE

15 April 2006

These remarks from a Spartacist League/Britain dayschool were published in Workers Hammer No. 195, Summer 2006.

On the Easter Rising

The issue of the 1916 uprising is a matter of *before* and *after*. If you go back to John Brown's taking Harper's Ferry—where he was subsequently smashed by then-Colonel Robert E. Lee, chief of the Confederate armies a year later—Frederick Douglass said to John Brown, don't do it, you can't possibly win. That's on the way *in* to something. Beforehand, something like the Paris Commune should not have been done—it would, on the basis of analysis, lead to a massacre. But after the fact, when the workers have gone out and raised their arms, you must defend this, and learn from it, but *above all defend it*. Lenin had a big quarrel with George Plekhanov about an uprising. He said to Plekhanov, after the fact if you announce publicly that they should not have taken up arms that makes you a criminal to the working class.

Going into the Easter uprising in Dublin, you can see that there was about everything wrong with it. Capitulation to the nationalists, isolation.... I think Connolly is quoted as saying, we cannot win this because the arms have not arrived, our connections with the countryside have not been sustained, but it's better to go and fight. Well, if a Marxist-Leninist had a chance to talk to him then, one would say: you're out of your mind, don't do it. But, they did it. And it was a blow against British imperialism and against the whole capitalist world order. It must be defended *fully, thoroughly, completely* as an act against the oppressor.

What Made the Bolsheviks Different

I'd like to get to the core of my remarks, that is, why the Bolsheviks were so special. That's crucial. In the Tsarist empire there was a multifaceted, repetitive and massive school of experience

for the working class, the like of which took place nowhere else on this planet: working in parliament, boycotting parliament, armed insurrection, going underground, dealing with the national question. Everything happened over and over. The Bolsheviks were tested, tested, tested, making every kind of mistake along the way; fighting with the boycottists, having a narrow party, having a broad party, throwing away the conditions of membership. Every kind of circumstance took place. Somebody here made the point that Lenin didn't generalise from the particular experiences of the Bolshevik faction, which retrospectively was seen as the party after 1912, until the war came. Then, looking at the response of the different sections, above all the German section of the Second International, Lenin came to appreciate the uniquely valuable quality of the Bolsheviks' own experience and used it as the core for the documentary programmatic basis for the founding of the Third International. And it happened that way, there was nothing special, there were not men of a special mould (to quote Stalin) in the Bolshevik Party. They just had a special kind of experience: a very broad mobilisation of the working class and a big section of the intelligentsia.

OK, "One Big Union" reminded me, there was the Winnipeg General Strike and it was smashed. Jack MacDonald, who came to found the Canadian Communist Party, learned trade union tactics from that and they had a pretty good party up in Canada. But they never had any factionalism, so they were easily rolled up by the Stalinists. However, practically every founding leader of the Canadian Communist Party became a Trotskyist. Maurice Spector didn't like Jack MacDonald so Maurice Spector became a Trotskyist. Jack

MacDonald looked at where the party was going and became a Trotskyist [laughter]. Because that was what was indicated in terms of remaining faithful to the programme. But the American party reflected the diversity of its origins out of both the IWW and the Socialist Party, so there was a lot of factionalism which became institutionalised. It became an illness in the American party, but an illness that by 1928 became a great virtue, because some people were going to go over to Stalin unconditionally and others were going to look really critically at Stalin. And furthermore there was a certain amount of factional loyalty, so you had a chance to go and talk to your own people before you got expelled.

I really appreciate the talks by both Edward and Julia. I thought they were extremely powerful explanations. And they are insights gained from the heights of our experience—and this is

important—the commanding heights when you can see very far because the class struggles are very large and all the fundamental questions are posed. Now we’re in an unusually deep trough, and the experiences that are immediately available to us are not very good. So we had better make very heavy reference back to the experiences of the workers movement when it could see much further: 1918 through 1921. And furthermore, there’s a quote by Lenin in January 1917. He gave a talk in Switzerland and said: “We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution.” Now, I run into various panacea-mongers who say, what is your immediate perspective? Don’t pay so much attention to your immediate perspective, because you don’t know what’s going to happen in February! [Laughter]. What is your *programme*? That is the decisive question.



ON RUNNING FOR EXECUTIVE OFFICE

February 2007

These comments, made during discussion at the Fifth Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), February 2007, were printed in International Information Bulletin No. 101, June 2009.

Now, I think that the executive office question is simply a corollary to Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, and the balance of the material, which he didn’t have time to finish because he had to rush back to Petrograd, that’s what he threw into the later polemic, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*. I wish people would read all of Lenin’s notes that he’d assembled for *State and Revolution*, which I take as the founding principled declaration for the Third International, which in the course of its early congresses underwent a certain attenuation over the colonial question and over the question of electoral office. And these attenuations got locked in, so that the separation from the Second International was not completed in a decisive way. And I don’t think that what we’re proposing to do here today is any extension on the Communist International, merely the completion of its founding in a certain theoretical sense.

Now I move on to the first volume, *State and Revolution*. Lenin, incidentally, was widely denounced by the Second International, when they read it, as anarchistic. Not the good anarchists, who are for anybody but Bush, but really an anarchistic type. Now, when I joined the Communist movement 61

years ago, I started reading right away, and *State and Revolution* made a lot of sense to me. And I have to tell you, that when I tried *Foundations of Leninism* by Stalin, I thought there’s something wrong with me, I couldn’t get it. By the time I read the selected works of Mao, I knew it was his problem, not mine. OK, it’s very important to realize that in the capitalist electoral process, we are alien, we are not part of a continuum. We are the conscious exponents of an alien class proposing to take hold—in fact, with all the subtlety of a pirate ship coming alongside a heavily, richly loaded East India ship. As a general guide, when Adolph Joffe committed suicide, he left a testament to Trotsky and in it he said, Lev Davidovich, you’ve always seen further, but Lenin was more determined. And Trotsky took that very much to heart. And the suicide came at a time following the breakdown of the United Opposition with Zinoviev, and, I believe it opened up Trotsky’s greatest period of Marxist creativity. He wrote the *Critique of the Draft Programme* that Bukharin had drafted for the 6th Congress. It has a name now, *The Third International After Lenin*, and it was very powerful. And interestingly, Jack Barnes of the degenerated SWP specifically denounced

Trotsky in his ultra-leftist period, meaning this time, these 5 years or so.

I suspect; I wasn't here; I didn't get to hear the reporters, but I bet this is a point that they made. The Second International never resolved its pre-1914 concept that socialism will be achieved by the workers revolution or otherwise. The otherwise: all experience with this has been some variation of workers parties propping up the capitalist order, pure and simple, and that was supposed to be the principal job of the Communist International, was to break up that by workers revolution, period.

OK, and I'm sure this point has been made. I hope that we will do some research on the role of the Militant Group when it ran the Liverpool local Labour executive. They had a particularly shameful exposure on their local execution of the tax policies of the central government. And that undermined them so that it was rather easy for the Labour Party, when it was deciding to become "new," to get rid of them.

About Italy, here's a point about municipal rule. The *New York Review of Books* in March of 2006 and the letters in May of 2006 had a review of a book by a former American ambassador to Italy, Richard Gardner, who was there under Carter. And the reviewer said Gardner, the ambassador's alarm about Communist control of regional and city governments seems misplaced. Such responsibilities were, in fact, important in strengthening the trend within the PCI toward a pragmatic reformism. And this is just a liberal historian, as far as I know.

Here's a couple of one-liners. Spartacus was not a Roman tribune or consul, nor even a property-qualified senator, among whom there were a few radical slave owners. Thomas Münzer, the leader of the most, if not the most outstanding, peasant revolt (the one that Engels wrote on; there were peasant revolts recurring across feudal Europe) was not an elector of the Holy Roman Empire. They were aliens.

All history shows that any serious struggle, that is, with a military axis, must have separate bases of power. Thus when you look at South Africa and see that the ANC simply moved in and was accepted into the pre-existing government structure, I think that's enough said about the class nature. There was an ethnic transition of a considerable sort. And then you have another example of the Greek CP. I believe it was in 1944 or thereabouts. Churchill was coming to the nicest hotel in downtown Athens, so they planted a bunch of big bombs under the hotel and almost got Churchill. They only found the explosives the day before. Why did the Greek CP do this? They

wanted a couple of more ministers in the provisional government. You know, think about that.

Now, Lenin had a debate with the ultra-lefts and he had to use a formulation, which while quite true, one would have preferred to keep within the proximity only of communists, because it's been used ever since, quite accurately, to describe critical support as a rope is to a hanged man. And we can certainly give critical support to groups, somebody who wants to run for president as an allegedly militant workers party. But we caution, we say what we believe to be the truth of the consequences of this to the large majority who are going to go vote for this party or individual and don't believe us. We say the truth. One time I used that word in a transcript, only I used the Russian *Pravda*, and the transcript came out "brown duck." There are a few more things like that that happen with transcripts.

OK. Now, so it's OK to run for parliament, that is, for the consultative body that is presumably the congress, what have you. But even here I would remind you that Lenin, the Bolsheviks and the Third International were very concerned that the parliamentary fraction be ring-fenced from political corruption by pre-signed resignations, and that most of the candidates for parliamentary office be workers from the factory bench. He did not envision, however, a red tsar. As a transitional demand, early on, before 1914, one of the Bolshevik planks was for a democratic republic. Well, that seems pretty mild, but that at the minimum under the conditions of tsarism means at least a political revolution. People often pass over that too easily.

OK, I'm almost done. In 1948 the Socialist Workers Party in the U.S. first ran a presidential campaign and the circumstances are interesting. It was done as a compromise measure after a hard faction fight in their central committee with a pro-Henry Wallace, Progressive Party, CP-backed campaign which a big minority, who later became the Cochranites, wanted to support. So I think Cannon was pushed into this. Now let me tell you about these election campaigns, which last I heard is still going on. I worked in the elections for the SWP in 1956 and 1960. I can affirm that, whatever else, they were also a deadly waste of time, mainly exhausting, going from county to county (in New York state), trying to get signatures to get on the ballot. And as soon as you do that, then you relax, and that was all over. So they were empty and as we in hindsight now see were wrong. And I think that Cannon had better sense in the bulk of his life than to fool with this kind of thing, having had some very bad experience in 1924, which you can find in "Letters to a Historian."

ON THE 1946 FRENCH CONSTITUTION

22 August 2011

This letter was printed in International Information Bulletin No. 121, April 2013.

Dear Comrade,

I very much appreciated your letter of the 17th about the nationwide French referenda just after the Second World War.

A number of years ago I read that Jim Cannon had opposed in principle voting for any constitution for the French capitalist state. Since the issue, as I recall, was on an earlier distinctly more democratic one as against another adopted a year or so later, I was inclined to want to retain the earlier one. But given Cannon's great political authority with me, I stalled on ever expressing a decisive opinion.

Stimulated by your letter I think I have arrived at a clear-cut position. Cannon was wrong in his categorical opposition to any constitutional arrangements that reflected and sustained the capitalist order. The key for me to unravel the question lay in constitutional amendments. The substantive,

as well as legal, point is the winning vote for an amendment carries the main motion, rule or law. The Marxist movement has frequently taken positions on amendments (to deal with some example from the imperialist epoch: the direct election of U.S. senators, against the Volstead Act, controversially for the Ludlow Amendment and for the ERA).

This should, in no case, mean prettifying the mechanism of bourgeois rule, e.g., see *An Economic Interpretation of the U.S. Constitution* by Charles Beard.

28 August 2011

A more serious matter to my mind is the requirement to take an oath to support the U.S. Constitution in order to be seated after winning the popular vote.

Comradely,
Jim Robertson

ON THE 1946 FRENCH CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

1 February 2013

This letter to the IEC was printed in International Information Bulletin No. 121, April 2013.

Dear Comrades,

I want to make an observation that so far as I know has only been implicit in the arguments offered by Alexis, Kathie and other comrades in France regarding the May 1946 French constitutional referendum.

The referendum was held while the sharp social divisions in France remained inside a bourgeois parliamentary framework. If social struggle in France

had become extra parliamentary then the whole agitational weight of the Trotskyists should necessarily and vitally become simply anti-parliamentarian and for the victory of workers soviets.

Of course propaganda about the need for soviet power is everywhere and always a constant for a revolutionary organization.

Comradely,
Jim R.

ON THE SENKAKU/DIAOYU ISLANDS

15 December 2013

This note to the I.S. and WV by Martha was printed in International Information Bulletin No. 124, October 2014, "On the Unconditional Military Defense of China."

Dear Comrades,

Jim wanted me to pass on an objection to our line on the question of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. This comes after reading Philipp's report of 6 December 2013 "Re: Japan-US anti-China provocation in the East China Sea."

He thinks that what we wrote in WV#1036, "in general, the question of the ownership of these

uninhabited rocks and islets does not in itself pose defense of the Chinese deformed workers state" is wrong. The islands in question are non-trivial. We should be pro-Chinese here, not indifferent. Blocking China from these islands makes China more easily subject to naval blockade.

Comradely,
Martha



THE REVOLUTIONARY TENDENCY AT CONCEPTION

6 February 2014

This presentation to the Bay Area local was published in Marxist Studies for Cadre Education No. 10, June 2018, "On Party History."

The first thing that comes to mind is to break down the history of the capitalist order into its various periods. The reason for this is because the period after the Second World War was in fact a new period, and the Trotskyist movement did not understand it. It was disoriented. And that disorientation made it much easier to have revisionism in the movement—that is, the surrender of a revolutionary working-class perspective.

The *Communist Manifesto* came a little late in the development of industrial capitalism, which really took off in England around 1780. But the French Revolution followed and there was an entirely new period. So it was really quite astonishing that Marx and Engels managed to go over from the humanist ideas of the League of the Just to the Communist League, which was based on the idea that the working class—a class created under capitalism but with no social interest in a system of exploitation—was so organized by the process of production that it could constitute itself as a class seeking power, laying the foundation for a proletarian revolution and a new society.

Around about 1890 the development of capitalism within the various advanced countries had reached a point that the export of capital and the competition between the great capitalist powers and the would-be great capitalist powers—poor Italy always falls into that category—reached a point where the best situated of them became imperialist. This development was most notice-

able in the division of Africa—a continent which, unlike the Far East and the Americas, had very little to offer the capitalist order. Nonetheless, they willfully divided up all the peoples of Africa into colonies, then states that to this day do not correspond in any way, shape or form to the culture or language of the inhabitants.

The competition between the imperialist powers culminated in the first "Great War," World War I, and in the immediate aftermath—not only revolution in Russia, but a shock wave of revolutionary upheaval across Europe. Although only narrowly contained within the tsarist empire, the Russian Revolution was an extremely conscious social revolution, which is why the work of the Bolsheviks and of the Communist International, founded at their inspiration and under their leadership, is still the model for us today.

After 1923 there was a restabilization in Europe. But the situation fell apart with the Great Depression following the crash in 1929. The decline in the capitalist order was only overcome by the rearmament going into the Second World War, which was a rerun of the first. With the victory of the Allies in the Second World War, the United States emerged triumphant as the unique imperialist victor in the world. Most of Trotsky's and the Fourth International's anticipation of an upsurge by the proletariat did not take place. Rather, the Stalinist parties experienced a great renewal because they'd been the leaders

in many parts of Europe of struggles against the German occupation.

There was great disorientation in the Trotskyist movement. I could go into a lot of chapter and verse, but the principal development, in hindsight, was the development of Pabloite revisionism. Pablo (aka Michel Raptis) became the principal leader of the Fourth International. This revisionism was fought by the SWP in a principled but rather inconclusive way and never followed through on internationally. It was not easy in the American Socialist Workers Party to even get this faction fight going until 1953. The new principal executive officer of the SWP, Farrell Dobbs, was unwilling to mount a struggle that he didn't see any practical immediate purpose to. Cannon, the founder and historic leader of the party, was out in L.A. So it took some doing to get this going. Eventually they did.

At the end of it, Cannon's principal ally, Murry Weiss—Murry and his wife Myra Tanner Weiss, who were co-leaders of the SWP in L.A.—went into the center expecting to play a significant role in the SWP. Farrell Dobbs had great authority in the party generally, second only to Cannon. He was in power and Cannon was in retirement. So the Weiss grouping underwent a very sad process. Starting out as the left wing of the SWP, and being excluded from the national administration of the party, they moved right and emerged by 1960 on the right wing of the SWP. The Weiss grouping was more impressionist than Farrell Dobbs, that's for sure.

I came to know and like Murry personally when he found an opening in the left wing of the Shachtman youth organization, which was us, and facilitated our involvement in the re-creation of an SWP youth organization, the Young Socialist Alliance. All these names sound almost identical—the Socialist Youth League, the Young Socialist League, the Young Socialist Alliance. There aren't a lot of choices. There's something to be said for using colorful words rather than descriptive words for names. So that if you call something Red Flag or Spartacus (or even "The Howling Wolf") it's more colorful and it strikes people more.

[From the floor: "*The Campus Trotskyite*."] Yes, well, at Cal, where I was a new student at the time I went over from the Communist Party to Trotskyism, there were a hundred Stalinists and less than ten Trotskyists on campus. We figured there was nothing to be modest about, so we took the name *The Campus Trotskyite*. The Shachtman party's central office was horrified. Shortly, we went through a whole series of changes. Every issue of *The Cam-*

pus Trotskyite or *Student Socialist* or whatever we ended up calling it had some new announcement. I think the last one was, "by the way, we've all just changed our names from the Workers Party to the Independent Socialist League." Every single issue had some new titular change.

Nonetheless we were a very serious organization. When the Korean War started, I remember staying up all night for two nights, that is, for three days and two nights, the longest I've ever stayed up. We cranked out an issue of *Student Socialist*, which said: "This Is Not Our War." In the anti-Stalinist in form/anti-Communist in content framework of Shachtmanite theory, this was about as radical a statement as you could make. We really got that issue out.

The witchhunt was quite severe then. Unlike now, at that time people believed in the FBI. All that some campus cop or FBI agent had to do was turn up with a camera, and nobody would take your leaflets or listen to you at a street meeting at Cal's Sather Gate. People believed what the FBI was saying about you. These days the joke is, "I'm from the government and I want to help you," and everybody immediately slams the door and is very frightened. But they had a lot of moral authority at that time. So the witchhunt was really very effective. And it wasn't only all the reds getting fired and being persecuted in various ways. The social isolation was profound.

When I got into New York just after the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban population was leaving town, going back to Havana. People now don't know that, they only know about Cubans fleeing the revolution and occupying Jersey City and Miami. But something like 50,000 to 100,000 Cuban working people went back to Cuba after the revolution. There was a huge population transfer of Cubans. The Hispanic janitor in the apartment I finally got on West 15th Street in Manhattan came up one day and said, "Hey, the FBI was around asking after you. What are they up to?" New York had never actually embraced the witchhunt in the same way that the rest of the country had, and it was a very congenial experience at the time to run into a situation where if the *federales* were after you, the assumption was that they're doing something wrong and not you. Well, I digress.

The point is there was a lot of disorientation in the Trotskyist movement. The Cuban Revolution came around New Year's 1959. At that time, we were building a youth organization for the SWP. And even the unusually zealous revisionist Peter Camejo wrote a document in 1960 about how Castro and his 26th of July movement were

just petty-bourgeois radicals. He disappeared this document very early on.

Shane Mage also wrote a document, from a standpoint of permanent revolution, in the summer of 1960 developing the point that in fact the Fidelistas were a petty-bourgeois leadership of a section of the peasantry, and that they had taken power. The American government had lost confidence in Fulgencio Batista. He fled and the Castros occupied Havana.

The cadres from the left-wing split in the Shachtman youth that were developing the youth organization of the SWP were principally: Tim Wohlforth, who became a leftist in the Shachtman organization rather late, but was in New York and Murry worked with him closely; Shane Mage, who was then out in Yellow Springs, Ohio, at Antioch College; and myself from the Bay Area where I had had a majority base from the Young Socialist League.

Shane was a genuinely brilliant guy, he took an IQ test once and it went off scale, it was over 200. Later when I was an editor I could never edit his work, because if I changed a phrase the whole document fell apart, it was so intricate and so logical and so closely developed. So I developed a new technique of editing. I put in an asterisk and wrote a footnote, “what the author means by this is,” and then whatever I thought was better.

The document that Shane wrote was of orthodox Trotskyist persuasion. It’s called “Cuba and Marxist Theory.” He showed it to Tim and me, and we said, “Hey, this is really good. We want to sign it too.” Shane had stressed that the majority of the SWP leadership was defaulting on the outlook of permanent revolution. Tim or I—one of us and I don’t remember if it was Tim or me—said, “furthermore the party is tending to deny the proletarian centrality of the revolution,” and then the other one of us said, “and the vanguard party.” I don’t remember who offered which. But in any case we signed this document and submitted it in August of 1960. We didn’t completely correct it. If you look at it today you’ll still see some “I’s that should be “we’s. That’s because Shane wrote it, and we just contributed a few ideas. He edited them into his document.

We thought, “Well, we’re new boys in the SWP, this is not going to have much effect, but we believe this is Marxist truth, so we’d better say it.” But we were also the leaders of the youth organization and here we had just dumped this load on the party. That was in about August of 1960. In January of 1961 the party called a plenum on the Cuban question. The point of it was to bring us to heel, to stop us. They hit us pretty hard. We didn’t

recant. Instead we called a faction meeting. That’s what youth leaders do. The function of the youth leadership is to conspire against the party leadership. The whole history of the communist youth movement shows that any youth organization worthy of its claim to Marxism is necessarily a potential alternative to the incumbent party leadership.

There was one major thing wrong with the document that we submitted. I just looked at it lately. It said that the way things are going, there’s only one of two choices—and it was Shane who wrote this, Tim and I just made the points about proletarian centrality and vanguard party—either that the Cuban Revolution would ignite proletarian revolutions in the leading countries of Latin America or there’d be a counterrevolution in Cuba. Of course, neither of these things happened.

What crystallized very early on, as soon as the nationalizations took place in the summer of 1960, was that Cuba became then what it is now, a deformed workers state. To my mind in 1961, in the first months after the SWP leadership called us to account, this was a very important clarification. We’d been looking not so much at East Europe, where the Soviet Red Army had come through chasing the Germans and subsequently creating deformed workers states, but at Yugoslavia, where the Titoists had come to power in a way similar to Cuba as well as China and Vietnam. But the leadership of the revolutions in these countries had been called Communist parties—they were Stalinists. These parties were a vanguard of declassed urban elements that found themselves in the countryside under conditions of war or civil war, with their connections to the bourgeoisie broken. Mobilizing sections of the peasantry, they succeeded militarily in taking power in those countries.

In Cuba, the 26th of July movement had the same social composition—Fidel, Guevara and others—as the Stalinist parties, and the base was the same. But they had no linkage whatsoever, initially, with Stalinism. The local Stalinist party in Cuba was one of the mangiest and most servile to Yankee imperialism of any Stalinist party you are likely to encounter. Following the Cuban Revolution, it promptly pursued an entry into the July 26th movement. Although it was sneered at and generally denigrated by the Fidelistas, it didn’t matter. They all amalgamated.

The document, “Cuba and Marxist Theory,” that we submitted was the start of the Revolutionary Tendency, which has become us. This material can be found in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8, which I suspect is out of print, although it’s worth reprinting. Not only is there a preface that I wrote, but also a postscript to the preface, which I

think is a good deal longer. This brought it up to date to 1973. What I want to read here is the summation written in 1963 for the SWP convention, which is the last one they let us go to before we got thrown out. (Except in the Bay Area—they only threw out Geoff White, and the local SWP leadership objected to expelling the rest of the left wing. They stayed in until the SWP did some particularly unspeakably rightist thing and they quit, although by then it was a formality.)

Here's the conclusion that we arrived at after two years of faction fighting and worrying about the inability of the Trotskyist movement in the post-World War II period to come to grips with what had happened since 1945, or actually since 1943. In other words, after Stalingrad, and the Germans started to lose the war, it became quite clear what the shape of the new world was going to be:

“Experience since the Second World War has demonstrated that peasant-based guerrilla warfare under petit-bourgeois leadership [notice we don't have to say anything about Stalinism] can in itself lead to nothing more than an anti-working-class bureaucratic regime. The creation of such regimes has come about under the conditions of the decay of imperialism, the demoralization and disorientation caused by Stalinist betrayals, and the absence of revolutionary Marxist leadership of the working class. Colonial revolution can have an unequivocally progressive significance only under such leadership of the revolutionary proletariat. For Trotskyists to incorporate into their strategy revisionism on the *proletarian* leadership of the revolution is a profound negation of Marxism-Leninism no matter what pious wish may be concurrently expressed for ‘building revolutionary Marxist parties in colonial countries.’ Marxists must resolutely oppose any adventurist acceptance of the peasant-guerrilla road to socialism—historically akin to the Social Revolutionary program on tactics that Lenin fought. This alternative would be a suicidal course for the socialist goals of the movement and perhaps physically for the adventurers.”

—“Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International,”

Draft Resolution on the World Movement,
reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9

That was our conclusion. It was written before Che was murdered by CIA tools.

I've got a few other points. At one point in 1961 I sat down and had a long talk with Tim and episodically persuaded him of the outlook that I'm expressing here. He wrote a very nice document, which is in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8 [“Cuba and the Deformed Workers States”], expressing these views. But he almost immediately repudiated it, developing instead the “theory” of “structural assimilation.” That is the idea that a country that is getting shaky and is temporarily absorbed

by a deformed workers state, itself becomes a deformed workers state, then breaks away. Wohlforth said, “Oddly enough I started this theory by thinking about Cuba, but it turns out to be the only country where that is not involved.”

It reminds me of the hydraulic society theory of Karl Wittfogel. No theory however ludicrous is likely to be entirely without merit. In fact, in the post-World War II period, if the Soviet Union hadn't existed, I don't believe any of these other social revolutions creating deformed workers states would have taken place. The imperialists would have had a free hand everywhere including China. But that doesn't say a lot for Tim's theorizing.

The key question that Cuba answered was: you don't need to be Stalinists to act like Stalinists. That is, if the social composition and the organization and the political situation are comparable, including the Soviet Union being in the world, then a comparable force without the Stalinist label can do the same thing. This, by the way, was useful in a quarrel with Jan Norden. At some point toward the end of the war in Vietnam, an agreement was signed to leave troops in place but to end the war. Norden wanted to say, “Once again the Stalinists have betrayed.” But leaving the troops in place was like Fidel being in Havana. I said, “No, no, let's wait a little bit, Norden, don't denounce the Stalinists for betraying in Vietnam. Let's see what happens.”

Of course there's that famous picture of the roof of the American embassy in Saigon, where you saw what happened. That was a hell of a Stalinist betrayal! And we didn't do what Shane Mage did in our initiating document, which is—with perfectly good proletarian, Marxist intentions—say something absurd.

I want to end with one more thing—we're in a new period now. The end of the Soviet Union has brought in a new period, and we're quite unfamiliar with it. They're slowly working on an article in the center called “Then and Now” [subsequently published in *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 1050 and 1051, 8 August and 5 September 2014], which makes the point that the crash came in October 1929, and by 1934 there were three citywide general strikes across America, all led by ostensible communists. That was then. Now we have a country that had a very bad crash and has an immiserated population, but nothing much is happening. The reds are not leading sections of the working class today, and they were then.

In the first caucus meeting that we had after we were trashed by the SWP majority National Committee, I said, “Well, this is a pretty tough but worn-out party and I guess they'll give us, if we're

lucky, 18 months.” Wohlforth trashed me up one side and down the other for saying this. When the meeting was over I went up to him and said, “Why did you say that? You know what kind of organization we’re in. You know they’re not going to put up

with this.” And he said, “Yeah, but there’s people who want to have hope, like Freddy Mazelis, and we can’t say things like that because it’s liable to dispirit him.” I didn’t think that spoke too well of him, not Mazelis, but Tim Wohlforth.



CRIMEA IS RUSSIAN

1 March 2014

This letter to the I.S. and WV by Martha was printed in International Information Bulletin No. 123, June 2014, “Crimea is Russian.”

Dear Comrades,

Jim thinks we should consider a position on the Russian intervention into the Crimea (if true) that it is principled to support this as long as Russia offers special rights to the Muslims in the Crimea. The Russian intervention would

simply correct the (stupid) administrative error that Khrushchev made in giving the Crimea to the Ukraine. Hopefully comrades are agreed on this.

Comradely,
Martha



CORRECTION ON CRIMEA

25 March 2014

This letter to the WV editor was printed in International Information Bulletin No. 123, June 2014.

Dear Ray,

Yesterday we received and I read Jonah’s critique of the Crimea position as expressed in the WV before last. I think he is correct and that I am complicit in our unprincipled softness in dealing with the national question in the Crimea. Self-determination, when there is a clear-cut ethnic majority, does not depend on the fate of a minority(s) so long as it/they are likely to survive.

I think my wrongness depended on two things: my highly probable correct assumption that the Russian government will appear to give the Crimean Tatars a square deal for compelling diplomatic reasons and therefore some substance, and also an underlying softness on my part to the

strong American imperialist hoopla against the Russian move.

We could correct this by a supplemental article which notes and agrees with Jonah’s well-taken point; distinguishes the Crimean situation from the Russian occupation of the two ethnic enclaves just inside Georgia’s former border; and your suggestion of polemicizing with political opponents, presumably on the whole American imperialist (and its NATO creature and with the EU gang going along) adventure in the Ukraine and the Russian response.

At least this is a suggestion for the IS, the American PB and your editorial board.

Best, Comradely,
Jim



ON GREECE: A TACTICAL PROPOSAL

16 July 2015

This letter by Martha was printed in International Information Bulletin No. 128, September 2015.

Dear Comrades,

Jim would like us to try and think forward and so he is proposing a possible and logical next step. As things stand Golden Dawn will probably win. We can consider launching committees or a movement

with a numbered point program to mobilize workers, the unemployed, youth, pensioners, etc. (must be careful with the etcetera because we don't want to go much into the middle class). This would probably be taken away from us or end up in a popular front.

VERY ROUGH DRAFT

ENOUGH

Repudiate Syriza's sell out to the EU over the EU banks holdings of Greek government debt. The EU and its currency the euro have been a tragic trap of suffering for the great bulk of the Greek people. The EU and euro must be repudiated. Committees throughout the country must be set up to struggle for this and toward a government which will act in the interests of the working people and be subordinated to them. We also call upon all like-minded and class-conscious working people throughout the misnamed European Union to support us in our aims and to consider the implications for their own countries. Break with the Capitalists and their Banks!



ON THE 1976 QUEBEC AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS STRIKE

30 November 2016

This letter, sent to the International Secretariat and Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyiste, was printed in International Discussion Bulletin No. 136, February 2017, "The Fight for a Leninist Program on the National Question, Part I: The Fight in Canada."

Dear Skye,

There is a reason why the Canadian comrades at the time picked the Air Traffic Controllers strike to write what they did. There was a national upsurge in Quebec and the then TLC chose to write on the one excess that they could find in that political upsurge.

The comrades should have hailed the upsurge while **also** noting the one question which fell outside the legitimate and praiseworthy liberationary political movement. They picked an issue to be right on where other considerations were primary as a way of denigrating the outburst of national struggle.



A BIT OF OPPORTUNISM ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

27 January 2017

This was printed in International Discussion Bulletin No. 137, February 2017, "The Fight for a Leninist Program on the National Question, Part II: The Fight in the IEC."

A thought coming off of reading Rosemary's document of 26 January on Spain and Reuben's document of 26 January on the national question. When we have no practical support we describe an oppressed nation's struggle for independence as a desperate measure. When we have supporters we view independence as a great gain. Thus the four Québécois comrades vastly sharpened our understanding. It's a pity we didn't win

over a few Basque or Catalan militants early on, but not so easy with the lines we were following.

Comradely,

Jim

P.S. Speaking as a long-time former party administrator Lenin was surely qualitatively better than us even though we authentically wanted to be Marxist revolutionaries. Nonetheless the evil BT and the silly IG couldn't stomach our essential commitment.



LETTER ON CASTE

1 July 2018

This letter to the SL/U.S. CC was printed in Internal Discussion Bulletin whole No. 130, August 2018.

Dear Comrades,

Oppressed national minority or caste? Describing Mexican-Americans as a caste* might seem to be without much current significance, but it does have significance. Because it puts their historical oppression on the same legal and social basis in America as former black chattel slaves who are

* In caste-ridden countries (e.g., India, the U.S., Japan) the invariant criteria for caste is a sexual line of division drawn in blood.

still a race color-caste. Since this is not the case with Hispanics the reason for such a designation for the Mexican-Americans lay elsewhere.

What the discussion has revealed powerfully is our need to get substantial, relevant and frequent material into *Workers Vanguard* in the Spanish language, working in consultation with the ICL's Mexican section.

Comradely,

Jim Robertson



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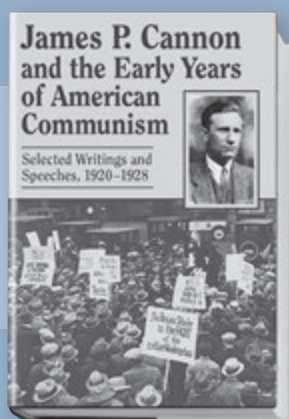
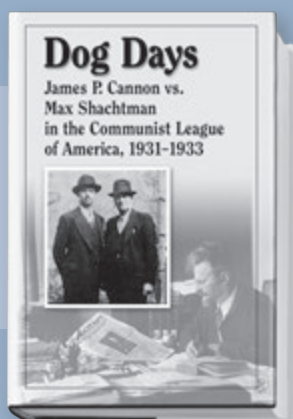
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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS IN BIBLIOGRAPHY

<i>Apk</i>	<i>Arbeiterpressekorrespondenz</i>	<i>SLBIDB</i>	Spartacist League/Britain <i>Internal Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>ASp</i>	<i>Australasian Spartacist</i>	<i>SLBIIB</i>	Spartacist League/Britain <i>Internal Information Bulletin</i>
<i>BIGEM</i>	<i>Boletín Interno,</i> <i>Grupo Espartaquista de México</i>	<i>SLDB</i>	Spartacist League <i>Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>CC</i>	SL Central Committee	<i>SLIB</i>	Spartacist League/U.S. <i>Internal Bulletin</i>
<i>CM</i>	<i>Cuadernos Marxistas</i>	<i>SLIDB</i>	Spartacist League/U.S. <i>Internal Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>CO</i>	SL Central Office	<i>SLIIB</i>	Spartacist League/U.S. <i>Internal Information Bulletin</i>
<i>DSp</i>	<i>Spartacist</i> [German edition]	<i>SLIntIB</i>	Spartacist League/U.S. <i>International Information Bulletin</i>
<i>ESp</i>	<i>Spartacist</i> [English edition]	<i>SpADIDB</i>	Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands <i>Internes Diskussionsbulletin</i>
<i>FSp</i>	<i>Spartacist</i> [French edition]	<i>SpB</i>	<i>Spartacist Britain</i>
<i>IB</i>	<i>International Bulletin</i>	<i>Spk</i>	<i>Spartakist</i>
<i>IDB</i>	<i>International Discussion Bulletin</i> [iSt, ICL]	<i>Spto</i>	<i>Spartaco</i>
<i>IEC</i>	International Executive Committee	<i>SSA</i>	<i>Spartacist South Africa</i>
<i>IIB</i>	<i>International Information Bulletin</i> [iSt, ICL]	<i>SSp</i>	<i>Spartacist</i> [Spanish edition]
<i>IntB</i>	<i>International Internal Bulletin</i> [iSt, ICL]	<i>SWPDB</i>	Socialist Workers Party <i>Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>IKD</i>	Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands	<i>SWPIIB</i>	Socialist Workers Party <i>Internal Information Bulletin</i>
<i>ISR</i>	<i>International Socialist Review</i>	<i>SYLDB</i>	Socialist Youth League <i>Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Labor Action</i>	<i>SYLDB</i>	Spartacus Youth League <i>Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>LB</i>	<i>le Bolchévik</i>	<i>SYLIB</i>	Socialist Youth League <i>Internal Bulletin</i>
<i>LTFBI</i>	<i>Ligue Trotskyste de France Bulletin</i> <i>Intérieur</i>	<i>SYLIDB</i>	Spartacus Youth League <i>Internal Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>LTtIBI</i>	<i>Lega Trotskista Bolletino Interno</i>	<i>SYLOB</i>	Socialist Youth League <i>Organizational Bulletin</i>
<i>LVP</i>	<i>Lenin and the Vanguard Party</i>	<i>TLCIDB</i>	Trotskyist League of Canada <i>Internal Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>LWB</i>	<i>Left-Wing Bulletin</i>	<i>TLDIDB</i>	Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands <i>Internes Diskussionsbulletin</i>
<i>MB</i>	<i>Marxist Bulletin</i>	<i>TLLTIDB</i>	Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste <i>Internal Discussion Bulletin</i>
<i>NEC</i>	National Executive Committee [YSA]	<i>WA</i>	<i>Workers' Action</i>
<i>NYSLIB</i>	New York Spartacist League <i>Internal Bulletin</i>	<i>WH</i>	<i>Workers Hammer</i>
<i>PB</i>	Political Bureau [SL]	<i>WR</i>	<i>Women and Revolution</i>
<i>PRS</i>	<i>Prometheus Research Series</i>	<i>WV</i>	<i>Workers Vanguard</i>
<i>RCL</i>	Revolutionary Communist League	<i>YS</i>	<i>Young Socialist</i>
<i>REB</i>	Resident Editorial Board	<i>YSF</i>	<i>Young Socialist Forum</i>
<i>RWP</i>	Revolutionary Workers Party	<i>YSp</i>	<i>Young Spartacus</i>
<i>SLAIDB</i>	Spartacist League/Australia <i>Internal Discussion Bulletin</i>	<i>YSR</i>	<i>Young Socialist Review</i>
<i>SLANZDB</i>	Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand <i>Discussion Bulletin</i>		
<i>SLBDSGIDB</i>	Spartacist League/Britain & Dublin Spartacist Group <i>Internal Discussion Bulletin</i>		
<i>SLBIB</i>	Spartacist League/Britain <i>Internal Bulletin</i>		

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