



**“The Struggle for World Socialist Revolution”**

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# Ernest Mandel

## 1923–1995

Ernest Mandel, longtime leader of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), died in Brussels, Belgium in July 1995 at the age of 72. Mandel was one of the last of those who could claim membership in the revolutionary Fourth International of Leon Trotsky. He joined its Belgian section in 1939, on the eve of World War II. After the war, Mandel became one of the principal leaders of the revisionist current led by Michel Pablo which destroyed Trotsky's Fourth International in 1951-53. This Pabloist current repudiated the core of revolutionary Trotskyism—the insistence that only the working class under the leadership of a revolutionary party can smash capitalism and open the road to socialism—in favor of impressionistically tailing Stalinist reformist and petty-bourgeois nationalist forces.

From the time of its formation in 1963 until his death, Mandel was chief ideologue and spokesman for the Pabloite USec. In this capacity, in November 1994 he debated Joseph Seymour of the International Communist League in New York City (see page 9). During his decades as USec leader, Mandel's lack of programmatic confidence in the capacity of the proletariat to fight for power in its own name and under its own revolutionary party led him to broker every manner of political bloc, from hailing Mao's Red Guards to Khomeini's "Islamic revolution." After counterrevolution swept across East Europe in 1989-90, Mandel began to speak of the "crisis of credibility" of socialism. That the crisis of credibility referred to the USec itself was shown at the July 1995 World Congress where debate centered on outright liquidation of their organization, i.e., seeking to dissolve into a broader formation. It was the politics of Mandel, a consummate centrist, which brought the organization to this dead end. Trotsky's classic definition of centrism fits Mandel like a glove:

"A centrist always remains in spiritual dependence on rightist groupings and is inclined to cringe before those who are more moderate, to remain silent on their opportunist sins and to cover up their actions before the workers...."

"The centrist frequently covers up his dawdling by referring to the danger of 'sectarianism,' by which he understands not abstract propagandist passivity (of the Bordigist type) but an active concern for purity of principles, clarity of position, political consistency, organizational completeness."

—"Centrism and the Fourth International,"  
February 1934

### World War II: Revolutionary Caldron

Mandel grew up in Antwerp in a Communist family of Jewish origin. His father had participated in the German Revolution of 1918-1919 as a member of the Spartakusbund/German Communist Party. Many obituaries have told of Mandel's courageous activities as a young Trotskyist militant in occupied Belgium during WWII.

As a young revolutionist, Mandel was greatly influenced



Spartacist

Ernest Mandel in 1977.

by Abram Leon, author of the brilliant work *The Jewish Question, a Marxist Interpretation* (1942). At the start of WWII, Leon led about a dozen militants from the Stalinist-influenced, socialist-Zionist group Hashomer Hatzair into the Belgian Trotskyist group, even as the section lost its leading cadre through defections and demoralization. Leon became an animating force in the group and edited the paper *La Voie de Lénine* (Lenin's Road). As party secretary, he oversaw every aspect of the work, including, according to Mandel, internationalist agitation "among the proletarian soldiers of the Wehrmacht" and propaganda work aimed at the workers in Nazi-occupied Europe.

In seeking to build revolutionary cells in the occupying German army and to intersect the working class inside Germany, the Trotskyist work was flatly counterposed to the nationalist, popular-front Resistance movements led by Stalinists and bourgeois figures like de Gaulle. Groups like the small Dutch Committee of Revolutionary Marxists (CRM) embodied Trotskyist internationalism. The CRM, entirely isolated from the French and Belgian comrades, sent some of its members to work in Germany under the Nazi forced labor program in the hope of participating in revolutionary developments there at war's end. (For

more on this history see "Documents on the 'Proletarian Military Policy,'" *Prometheus Research Series* No. 2.) Obituaries which have associated the young Mandel with the official Resistance have done him and the Trotskyists a disservice.

Mandel wrote a tribute to Leon, who was killed at Auschwitz in October 1944 at the age of 26, which became the introduction to the posthumous publication, in 1946, of Leon's book on the Jewish question. Mandel's account of the wartime activities of the Belgian Trotskyists in this essay (written under his pseudonym Ernest Germain) stands at great variance with the political positions he later promoted as a leader of the USec. Mandel credited Leon with pulling together the dispersed Trotskyist cadre and beginning the "incessant, stubborn and unyielding work" of building an underground, internationalist vanguard party because he had the "courage to think, and to think correctly." This courage of the intellect—necessary to follow Lenin's road—was not to characterize Mandel's subsequent political career.

The Fourth International at this time confronted formidable difficulties of both an internal and external character. The effect of Trotsky's assassination by a Stalinist agent in 1940 was compounded by the decimation of the European Trotskyist leadership at the hands of the Nazis—and the Stalinists. Thus internally the movement suffered a sharp break in historic continuity. Only the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which had collaborated closely with Trotsky before the war, emerged with its cadre and organization intact. But the SWP failed to rise to its responsibility to play a decisive political role in the International.

The leadership of the Fourth International in Europe then fell in large measure to a group of young men who had not been centrally involved in the revolutionary movement during Trotsky's lifetime. Chief among these was Michel Pablo (Raptis), a product of the Greek Trotskyist movement, whose formative political experience was as an underground cadre in Nazi-occupied Europe. Mandel's fluent pen and intellectual capacities, including a rare gift for languages, propelled him also into the front ranks of the world Trotskyist movement.

The postwar world could not be understood or acted upon simply by mechanically applying Trotsky's prewar writings. In a February 1940 interview, Trotsky is quoted as saying:

"The question is whether, as a result of the present war, the entire world economy will be reconstructed on a planned scale, or whether the first attempt of this reconstruction will be crushed in a sanguinary convulsion, and imperialism will receive a new lease on life until the third world war, which can become the tomb of civilization."

The war ended, however, with a major expansion of Stalinist rule through the Soviet Army's occupation of East Europe and through indigenous, peasant-based social revolution in Yugoslavia and later in China. The Stalinist parties of West Europe emerged from the war with enhanced prestige based on their role in the resistance to Nazi occupation. But as part of the agreement with imperialism on the division of the spoils of war, they used this influence to sabotage revolutionary situations which erupted in Italy and France. In this situation, the massive economic assistance provided by U.S. imperialism under the Marshall Plan allowed the capitalist order in West Europe to be restabilized as parliamentary democracies. Similarly, the U.S. occupa-

tion of Japan resulted in a stable, bourgeois-democratic regime. U.S. imperialism turned its attention toward reversing the Soviet victory in WW II and taking back that area of the world in which capitalism had been destroyed. Later, a key anti-Pabloist document laid out the crux of the problem—revolutionary leadership:

"The history of the last 40 years has driven home the lesson so often repeated by Lenin and Trotsky, that there are no impossible situations for the bourgeoisie.... Even the most desperate situations can be overcome if only the active intervention of the workers as a class for themselves, with a party and leadership with a perspective of overthrowing capitalism, is not prepared in time."

—*The World Prospect for Socialism*, 1961

Resolution of the Socialist Labour League

The Trotskyist movement had great problems explaining the fact that various capitalist regimes had been overturned by the Stalinists. Some at first initially responded with wooden orthodoxy, denying that any sort of social overturn had occurred. Pablo, however—impressionistically viewing the expansion of world Stalinism as evidence of some kind of revolutionary potential—abandoned the historic program of Trotskyism by the early 1950s. He projected the imminent outbreak of a new world war in which the Sino-Soviet states, supported by the colonial masses and much of the West European working class, would emerge victorious over capitalist imperialism and bring "several centuries" of deformed workers states. According to his schema, the mass reformist parties (Stalinist, and in some countries, Social Democratic) would be in the forefront of the new revolutionary wave. The Trotskyist parties would thus lose their independent purpose, relegated to the task of entering the reformist parties and pushing them to the left.

In projecting the Stalinist bureaucracy as the vehicle for anti-capitalist social transformation, Pablo was influenced by the Trotskyist-flavored author, Isaac Deutscher. As a member of the Polish Trotskyist movement in 1938, Deutscher opposed the formation of the Fourth International. Having won prominence as a bourgeois journalist in Britain during the war, he published a biography of Stalin in 1949 which was widely publicized in Britain and the U.S. Deutscher minimized the frame-ups, murders and

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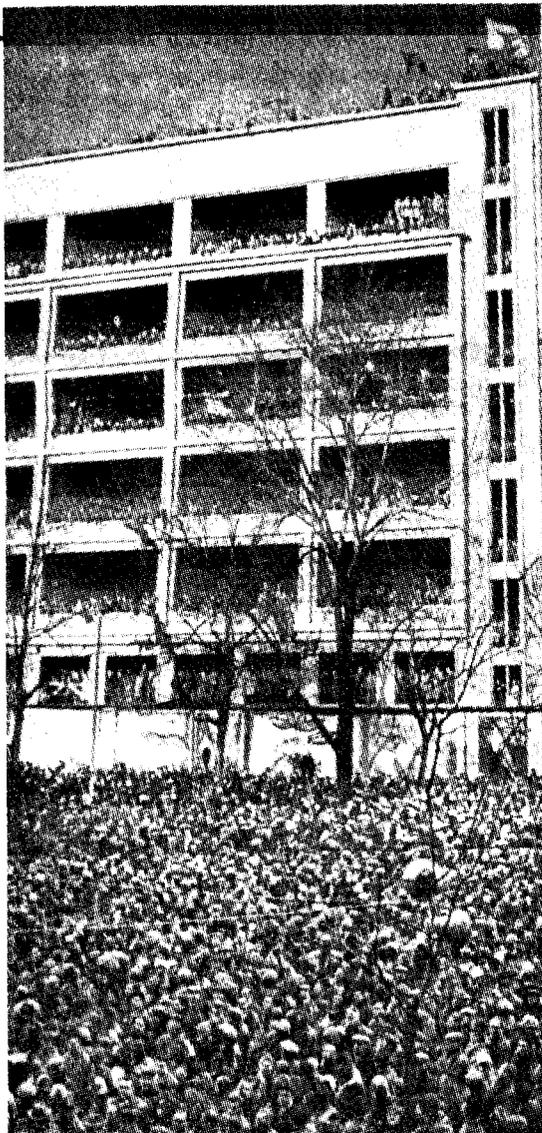
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terror of the Stalin regime in favor of emphasizing the “progressive” historical significance of the Soviet planned economy.

### Opposition to Pabloism

Pablo’s organizational liquidationism and accompanying doctrinal revisionism provoked opposition, though somewhat belatedly, by elements of the International centered on the American SWP. When a pro-Pablo faction formed inside the SWP in 1952, the aging, trade-union centered leadership of the American party woke up to the danger of liquidationism being pushed by Mandel and Pablo in Europe. The SWP issued an open letter opposing Pabloism, broke with the European-based International Secretariat, and joined with the majority of the French and British Trotskyist organizations to create the “International Committee” (IC). Although, criminally, this was never more than a paper organization, it did for a time provide a pole of opposition to liquidationism. We of the International Communist League trace our origins to the anti-Pabloist SWP and IC. For more about this history, see “Wohlforth: Who Is This Road Kill?” on page 24 and also “Genesis of



As massive strikes rocked Belgium in winter 1960-61, social-democratic *La Gauche*, edited by Mandel, called for “structural reforms” of capitalism.

Pabloism.” *Spartacist* (English edition), No. 21, Fall 1972.

Mandel, at first, evinced a more serious bent than Pablo in attempting to deal with these issues within an orthodox, Trotskyist framework. Eventually Mandel acknowledged the fact that bureaucratically deformed workers states had been established in a large part of the globe, but he did not initially draw the false conclusion that Stalinism had thus become a progressive force in world history. Nor did Mandel show an inclination to give in to imperialist Cold War propaganda and abandon the military defense of the Soviet Union—as did the British current led by Tony Cliff.

Mandel took some tentative steps to oppose Pablo’s burgeoning revisionism in 1951. In a veiled polemic known as “Ten Theses” (1951), he correctly asserted: “The historical justification for our movement...resides in the incapacity of Stalinism to overturn *world* capitalism, an incapacity rooted in the social nature of the Soviet bureaucracy.” Yet despite the support of the majority of the French section for the “Ten Theses,” Mandel soon abandoned this semi-oppositional stance. Here he revealed his overriding political weakness.

The veteran Chinese Trotskyist Peng Shu-tse wrote in 1953 with some sadness of the qualities which transformed Mandel from a semi-opponent of Pablo into his chief lieutenant. He noted Mandel’s “lack of penetrating analysis in observing various problems, his impressionist temperament, wavering and conciliationist spirit manifested very often on important problems, and his facility in modifying his own positions” (letter to James P. Cannon, 30 December 1953).

When Mao Zedong came to power in China, Peng had been forced to flee to escape the murderous persecution of the Chinese Trotskyists. He arrived in Europe to discover that Pablo & Co. considered Mao’s Chinese Communist Party (CCP) “centrist” and claimed that it had absorbed the central theses of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. Pablo and Mandel insisted that the Chinese section of the Fourth International dissolve into the CCP.

The open letter which Peng authored to the Mao regime protesting the killing and jailing of Chinese Trotskyists was suppressed by Pablo’s International Secretariat (I.S.). In his letter to Cannon, Peng recounts Mandel/Germain’s denunciation of Peng as a “hopeless sectarian” and Mandel’s cri-



Helena Hermes

**Renault workers demonstrate in Paris, May 1968. Communist Party derailed revolutionary opportunity while USec group tailed illusory “student vanguard.”**

tique that the open letter did not express “total support for the movement under the leadership of Mao’s party.” As Peng noted, Mandel’s capitulation was a key factor in allowing Pablo to gain control of the FI and destroy it politically.

### **Mandel on “Self-Reform” of the Bureaucracy and “Structural Reforms” of Capitalism**

The Pabloites’ capitulation to Stalinism vacated the need for political revolution—i.e., for the working class to mobilize to throw out the parasitic bureaucracies in the deformed and degenerated workers states—in favor of “self-reform” of the bureaucracy. In the debate with the ICL last autumn, Mandel called this charge “a complete distortion” and referred specifically to the 1953 potential political revolution in East Germany. So what did they say at the time? A statement by Pablo’s I.S. in June 1953 included in their “program of the political revolution” the demand: “Real democratization of the Communist Parties,” i.e., bureaucratic self-reform.

This perspective was reiterated in 1956 during the Hungarian workers’ revolt against the Stalinist police and the Russian army. Again looking toward the bureaucrats, Pablo and Mandel wrote that the lack of a political leadership “provoked exactly those flaws and dangers” which Poland had avoided “thanks to the leadership role played by...the Gomulka tendency...a centrist tendency nonetheless evolving to the left” (*Quatrième Internationale*, December 1956).

In 1960-61, when a massive general strike erupted in Belgium posing a potential revolutionary situation, Mandel had a personal role in derailing the struggle. While the workers marched, demanding, “Down with the govern-

ment!” Mandel and his cothinkers argued for “structural reforms” under capitalism. Buried in the reformist Socialist Party, the Mandelites acted as braintrusts for the “left” trade-union leadership. After calling for a workers’ march on Brussels—which would have meant a head-on clash with the bourgeois state—Mandel’s paper, *La Gauche*, withdrew the call when his trade-union sponsors refused to go along. How far Mandel had come from aspiring to play the role he credited to Abram Leon: “He wished to sow that the party would be able to reap when the decisive moment came” (introduction to *The Jewish Question*).

### **Chasing the “New Mass Vanguard”**

With the prerevolutionary explosion in France in 1968, Mandel’s answer was again “anti-capitalist structural reforms.” Ten million workers struck, demanding, “Down with de Gaulle!” Here was a crucial opportunity to break the reformist stranglehold of the Communist Party on the workers and a case of desperate need for a revolutionary party with a program for proletarian power. Far from fighting for such a party, Mandel whined: “There is not yet a sufficiently influential, organized, unified mass vanguard to the left of the CP, that could lead the masses to victory immediately” (*Militant*, 14 June 1968).

This period presented myriad revolutionary opportunities. Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin’s crimes, followed by the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the widening Sino-Soviet split, had weakened the authority of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, impelling some leftists to investigate the program of Trotskyism. In the late ’50s and early ’60s, the Algerian national liberation struggle, the Cuban Revolution and later the escalating war in Vietnam brought to the fore

a new generation of young radicals who were attracted to Trotskyism as well as to the seemingly militant variants of Stalinism—Maoism and Guevarism.

Mandel rode the wave of revolutionary optimism to significant international prominence. His impressionism made him a bellwether of ever-shifting currents of petty-bourgeois radical opinion, both tailing after and proselytizing for whatever was popular in this milieu. Throughout the next decades the USec line also shifted in pursuit of the latest incarnation of the “new mass vanguard.” Early in the 1960s, the Mandelites had adopted the theory that the colonial revolution, under leaders such as Algerian bourgeois-nationalist Ben Bella and later Cuba’s Castro, was at the “epicenter” of world revolution. The American SWP at this time converged with the Pabloites in their capitulation to petty-bourgeois nationalism and rejoined the Pabloites in 1963 in an unprincipled fusion that formed the United Secretariat.

In the '70s, Mandel was a major spokesman for the USec majority’s uncritical cheerleading for petty-bourgeois guerrillism which pushed an entire generation of young Latin American radicals along the suicidal and defeatist path of peasant-based military adventurism. In West Europe around France '68 the Mandelites vocally championed “student power,” writing off the working class as a revolutionary force with the “Strategy of the ‘Red University.’” After 1968, they rediscovered the working class, and wrote in 1972 for their World Congress: “After May 1968 and, more generally, after the revival of workers’ struggles throughout Europe, an irreversible turn has taken place in this milieu everywhere in the world.”

The “irreversible” turn didn’t last long. With the end of the Vietnam War and defeat of the Portuguese revolutionary upsurge in the mid-1970s, the main current of Western petty-bourgeois radicalism moved sharply to the right, and so did Mandel. Embracing the anti-Soviet “human rights” rhetoric of Western imperialism, the Mandelites praised the West European “Eurocommunist” parties which criticized Stalinism from a social-democratic perspective. Mandel then moved to outright support for Cold War Social Democracy. His organization hailed the election of French Socialist Party presidential candidate Mitterrand in 1981, echoing the strident Cold War anti-Sovietism of the Mitterrand government. As ICL spokesman Joseph Seymour noted in the 1994 debate, “Over the decades Mandel has tried literally *everything*, *except* building a proletarian vanguard party.”

### The Long Waves of Ernest Mandel

Mandel first gained renown outside the Trotskyist movement as a popularizer and interpreter of Marxist economics. Mandel’s *Marxist Economic Theory* (1962) was in its time the most widely read textbook on the subject. Compared to many neo-Marxist economists (e.g., Paul Sweezy), Mandel often appeared orthodox, but his works were influenced by the same impressionism and objectivism which turned his political program away from revolutionary Marxism. In fact, much of Mandel’s economic writing was tailored to justify the USec’s political appetites. Thus his rediscovery of the spurious theory of the Russian economist Kondratiev, the “long waves” of cyclical capitalist development elaborated in Mandel’s book *Late Capitalism* (1972), was used to justify in hindsight his actions during

the 1960-61 Belgian general strike. The “long wave” of capitalist expansion from 1945 to 1966, he asserted, precluded revolutionary developments, since the bourgeoisie could easily buy off workers with concessions.

In the 1994 debate with the ICL, Mandel turned this argument on its head. Here Mandel argued that there is now a “long wave” of *depressive* economic development and that “what is on the immediate agenda today is not the struggle for revolutionary conquest of power by the workers, but the need to eliminate unemployment.” For Mandel, the constant was the assertion that revolutionary conjunctures (at least for the working class in the imperialist countries) were *a priori* precluded—whether the world economy was expanding *or* contracting.

The objectivism which Mandel brought to his economic writings was reminiscent of another Marxist economist whom Mandel never saw fit to credit: Nikolai Bukharin. Bukharin’s schema of the “periods” of capitalist development following World War I provided theoretical justification for the anti-revolutionary policies of the Stalinist Communist International in the mid-1920s and early 1930s. Mandel resembled Bukharin in more than his economic methodology, as Peng Shu-tse noted: “In many respects, especially in his temperament, he resembles Bukharin. He often wavers between revolutionary conscience and the momentary consideration of power. When the latter is satisfied for a time, the former is cast aside” (op. cit.).

Many have attested to Mandel’s ability to inspire the young generation he won to the USec in the late 1960s. His political verve transformed him into a leading intellectual figure in the New Left, especially in West Europe and Latin America. During the late 1960s and early 1970s he was banned from entering France, Germany and the United States because of his reputation as a firebrand.

But to what end did Mandel inspire his followers? The impressionism which had the USec chasing each and every political fad meant that the “International” and every section were perennial caldrons for warring factions pursuing varying appetites. After the U.S. imperialists seized on the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 to begin their Cold War II propaganda barrage, the rightward shift in the political climate meant an ever-diminishing tide of petty-bourgeois radicalism and the burgeoning of an outright anti-Soviet tendency in the USec.

### USec as Everyday Social Democrats

The USec is today best known for its ex-members—many of whom staff the apparatuses of the Social Democracy, especially in France. The Mandelites not only nurtured this social layer of ex-'68ers, they remain interpenetrated with it. It is fitting that the obituary for Mandel printed in the London *Guardian* was written by Tariq Ali, for years part of the leadership of the British USec. Ali quit the USec in the 1980s and in 1990 authored *Redemption*, a sometimes biting but mostly sophomoric satire of Mandel’s USec, and indeed of the entire panoply of international organizations associated with Trotskyism. *Redemption* is an explicit paean to the supposed victory of Social Democracy over Leninism. Tariq Ali simply dotted the i’s and crossed the t’s on the USec’s political trajectory during the 1980s. Mandel’s organization shamelessly echoed bourgeois anti-Communist propaganda mills, hailing every



Julienne/Sygnia



AP

**USec factions on opposite sides of barricades in Portugal, 1975. Reformist American SWP backed CIA-supported, SP-led anti-Communist mobilizations (left). Mandelites tailed CP popular-front bloc with left-talking military officers (above).**

counterrevolutionary and nationalist movement in the ex-Soviet Union and East Europe.

A 1989 *International Viewpoint* article took this to its obscene conclusion, praising as “anti-Stalinist fighters” the fascist Estonian Forest Brothers who collaborated with the Nazis in WWII. In an expanded version of his debate presentation published in the *American Bulletin in Defense of Marxism (BIDOM)* (but *not* in the actual debate with us, nor at any other time to our knowledge), Mandel manages a mild criticism, dubbing the Forest Brothers article “not a minor mistake,” and then cynically dismissing it: “Nobody there [in Estonia] knows our press or reads it” (!).

Throughout the 1980s, Mandel made the counterrevolutionary and priest-ridden Polish Solidarność out to be the model of a revolutionary working-class movement and touted Jacek Kuron as a “Trotskyist” adviser to Solidarność leader Lech Walesa. After Kuron had been appointed labor minister in a strikebreaking Solidarność government in 1989, Mandel denounced him:

“As minister of labor in Mazowiecki’s government, he risks becoming the minister of the police and anti-working class, anti-pluralist repression, if he agrees to drink to its dregs the cup of an ‘economy open to the world,’ that is, the rules of the game of international capitalism.”

—*International Viewpoint* No. 172,  
30 October 1989

Mandel broke relations with Kuron. He blamed the *International Viewpoint* writer for the “mistake” on the Forest Brothers. The attempt to wash his hands of the unpalatable consequences of his line in both cases can only be viewed with contempt.

In *BIDOM* Mandel argued regarding the Forest Brothers article that “its effects in our ranks were nearly nil.” To the contrary. The effects of backing these nationalist scum—from the Ukrainian Rukh, to the Lithuanian Sajudis, to Boris Yeltsin’s “democrats”—were profound. USec cadre grew so used to running in step with the propaganda of the imperialists that when the Yugoslav workers state was

destroyed in an orgy of all-sided nationalist bloodletting in 1992, the USec began an “International Workers Aid” campaign which was nothing but a shill for imperialist intervention to support “poor little Bosnia.” With the NATO bombing campaign against the Serbs, the USec has gotten what it pushed for. The USec cadre who have gone along on this ride have ended up the most crass social-chauvinists—far from the youthful enthusiasts for Che Guevara who flocked to Mandel in the late 1960s.

By 1985, most of the USec was happily hailing every extant opposition to the sclerotic Stalinists as “progressive”: from pro-Western “dissidents” to fascistic nationalists. Meanwhile, Mandel and his closest followers turned toward a new chimera: the social-democratizing elements in the Soviet bureaucracy around Gorbachev. Gorbachev’s *glasnost* meant an opportunity for the “Marxist” professor Mandel to give lectures to Soviet academics while begging the bureaucracy to rehabilitate Trotsky. But Gorbachev proved an ephemeral figure; his “new thinking” proved empty except to open the direct short-term course to capitalist restoration.

### Not Trotskyist, Not International

There is some indication that toward the end Mandel was out of step with the rest of his organization—perhaps significantly so. Although he had long since abandoned Trotskyist politics and the building of principled organizations united internationally on a proletarian program, Mandel seemed to want to maintain a pretense of formal Leninism.

The USec’s Fourteenth Congress—Mandel’s last—considered a resolution advocating “broad international regroupment of revolutionary forces” including especially currents which do not consider themselves to be “Trotskyist” and “a new International, qualitatively broader than what we have now.” The resolution, “Building the International Today,” continued: “We hope to carry out a real mutation of the Fourth International.” The dispirited USecers no doubt have

in mind reformist working-class organizations like the German ex-Stalinist Party of Democratic Socialism and Brazilian Workers Party which they have already entered. But bourgeois populist parties are also on the list—the various splinters of the Mexican USec all backed the bourgeois party of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the last elections.

Those who oppose dissolution are grouped around the American organization Socialist Action, which broke from the SWP mainly in order to enthuse without limit over Polish Solidarność and whose first major act was gooning for the union bureaucracy in physically restraining the militant ranks from trying to shut down scabbing in the 1983-84 Greyhound strike. Into the demoralized morass of this Congress, Ernest Mandel introduced an amendment affirming “international democratic centralism” on “questions of war, revolution and counterrevolution.” Mandel’s amendment was rejected (“Opposition Emerges at FI World Congress,” by Barry Weisleder, *BIDOM*, September 1995).

“Democratic centralism”? Indeed, it’s precisely when confronted with questions of “war, revolution and counter-revolution” that the USec for 30 years has displayed its utter bankruptcy. When decisive social struggles are raging—the times when resolute revolutionary leadership can make the difference, the moments for which revolutionists are organized and preparing—the USec has been a seething mass of warring cliques and sections pursuing counterposed lines dictated by conflicting appetites derived from their local terrain.

In Portugal in 1975, while CIA-financed Socialist Party-led mobs trashed CP headquarters and battled the Stalinists in the streets, some USec national sections were egging the SP on while other sections politically tailed the CP. In 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, the USec was split over whether to break out the champagne or the Alka-Seltzer. Who to support in the Angolan civil war? Who to back among Palestinian nationalist factions? You name it, the USec was there on multiple sides. Rotten “fusions” and social upheavals generated countless splits. Some sections were riddled

with permanent warring factions and cliques; in some countries USec supporters were in several competing organizations. Mandel shot down several leftist USec groupings over the years but seemed always eager to embrace state-capitalist tendencies, Maoists, guerrillaists or whatever to prove the USec was broad, influential and above all—not “doctrinaire.”

In a 1976 interview, Mandel was asked if the “existence of the Fourth International is not an obstacle” to the regroupment he sought. He replied that he would discard such “labels” in 24 hours (*Politique Hebdo*, 10-16 June 1976). But the present terms of surrender are far from what he imagined then. The USec once hoped to drown itself happily in a floodtide of vibrant, burgeoning, youthful “new mass vanguards.” But instead the Soviet degenerated workers state has been undone and politics have swung to the right internationally; the “progressive” forces are a motley assortment of bourgeois “greens,” button-down social democrats, demoralized ex-Stalinists and the like.

One of Mandel’s American supporters recently described their International as “a collection of relatively small revolutionary socialist groups in various countries, in tenuous contact with each other, and sharing more or less tenuous contact with the revolutionary Marxist theoretical tradition of Bolshevik-Leninism and the Left Opposition” (Paul Le Blanc, *BIDOM* No. 126, July-August 1995). This is the kind of organization that matches the USec’s program. It’s hardly surprising if most of the USec has come to see the “Fourth International” as simply a useless encumbrance. In the end, it appears that Ernest Mandel was reaping what he had sown.

Of course the need is stronger than ever for a reformed Fourth International that Trotsky would recognize: a world party based on the Leninist program of international socialist revolution which was the banner of those opposed to Stalinist degeneration and which will lead to victory the bolshevik revolutions of the future. This is the Trotskyist party which the ICL is working to build. ■

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# “The Struggle for World Socialist Revolution”

## Spartacist League Debates Ernest Mandel



Workers Vanguard Photos  
**United Secretariat spokesman Ernest Mandel (left) and Joseph Seymour of International Communist League debate before 400 people in New York City, 11 November 1994.**

We publish below the presentations and summaries of Ernest Mandel, leader of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), and of Joseph Seymour of the International Communist League (ICL), at the debate between them which took place in New York City on 11 November 1994. We are also printing some excerpts from the discussion. This debate, on “The Struggle for World Socialist Revolution Today,” attracted an audience of some 400 people—a large gathering for ostensible Marxist revolutionaries in New York City in the 1990s. The interest this event garnered in the left made it reminiscent of other historic leftist debates held in New York: 1,500 came to hear James P. Cannon debate Jay Lovestone in March 1934; some 1,200 heard Max Shachtman vs. Earl Browder in March 1950. We have deposited tapes of the Seymour-Mandel debate in the Prometheus Research Library, archive and library of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League/U.S.

The International Communist League published an account of our debate with Mandel in the newspaper of our

American section, *Workers Vanguard* No. 611, 25 November 1994. Mandel’s supporters also produced an account, written by Paul Le Blanc, a member of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism (BIDOM)* editorial committee, who co-chaired the event along with Frank Hicks of the ICL. Le Blanc’s article was not published in *BIDOM* “due to space limitations.” Instead it was “informally circulated” to those requesting copies. One gets an idea of why from a statement by Mandel that was appended to Le Blanc’s article. It deserves to be quoted:

“The truth of the matter is that I have made it crystal-clear many times that I have no intention to debate the Spartacists, or to have our USA comrades organize a common meeting with them. In retaliation for the harassment they impose on us at some of our public meetings in Europe (and twice in Mexico), I challenged them to let me speak at their audience. They accepted the challenge. The meeting was called by them alone; we didn’t make any public appeal for it.

“We also did not mobilize for it.”

Actually, the debate did not come easily. Comrades of the Spartacist tendency had been intervening in Mandel’s

public meetings all over the world for two decades, not just in Europe and Mexico, but also in North America and Australia. Finally, in response to comments made by our comrades from the floor at a public seminar in New York City in February 1993, Mandel declared that if we organized a meeting, he would come to debate us. We immediately accepted the offer but Mandel's ill health meant that he did not travel to New York again until November 1994.

What Mandel's statement makes clear is that he wanted a one-sided "debate"—a meeting where he got full opportunity to explain his views to Spartacist members but his own supporters weren't mobilized to hear our side! Despite Mandel's intentions, the November meeting was a genuine debate, with each side getting equal time for presentation and rebuttal. While the meeting was built and advertised exclusively by the ICL, many of Mandel's American supporters, grouped around *BIDOM*, did attend. During the discussion period, speakers from the floor rotated in turn among supporters of the USec, ICL and supporters of neither side. Tendencies participating included the Freedom Socialist Party, League for a Revolutionary Party, Bolshevik Tendency and International Trotskyist Opposition.

In the May-June 1995 issue of *BIDOM*, Mandel published a greatly expanded version of his debate presentation—a way to have the last word. At 24 pages of very small print, this is the longest article *BIDOM* has ever printed in one issue (in this case a double one). Surely he would not have chosen it that way, but it appears that this expanded debate presentation, which has a very odd character—rambling, wildly eclectic, even desperate—was the last major article Mandel published in his lifetime. We project making it available as part of our "Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League" bulletin series, which publishes major anti-Spartacist polemics of our opponents.

The debate transcripts have been lightly edited for style and readability. Bracketed inserts are by *Spartacist*.

## Presentation by Ernest Mandel

The birth act of Marxism is the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world. The thing is to *change* it." While a correct theoretical understanding of capitalism is indispensable for its overthrow, it is not enough. This task has to be realized in practice. Only the working class—as it is defined by the first program of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party written by Lenin and Plekhanov, all those who are under the economic compulsion to sell their labor power—only the working class is capable of breaking the hold of the bourgeoisie over the main means of production and exchange.

These expropriations cannot succeed without the destruction of the bourgeois state machine and its replacement by a workers state, by the dictatorship of the proletariat. The workers state is a state of a special type, described by Lenin's classical book on the subject, *The State and Revolution*. It starts to wither away from its very inception. However, the rhythm of this withering away is conditioned by the existence of international threats to these workers states, the fact that the capitalist world market still holds sway, independently from any more precise, material military threats. This means that the process of withering away

is limited and less precise than Lenin projected it.

The building of socialism is a process of trial and error, as Rosa Luxemburg so clearly made precise in her 1918 writings, and Trotsky further made clear in his polemics against Stalin and the Stalinists during the first five-year plan. The process of world revolution has been dominated by the law of uneven and combined development, the discovery of which is one of Trotsky's main contributions to Marxist theory. From the Russian Revolution of 1905 onwards to today, it is characterized by an internationally desynchronized process. Revolutions have not broken out simultaneously in all countries in the world; they most probably never will. To a large extent, the key task for revolutionary Marxists is therefore to forge growing working-class unity and solidarity on a world scale.

Another basic theoretical step forward, realized by Karl Marx, was the definition of social classes as objective realities independently from how these classes see themselves. Slaves were a social class, even if no such thing as "slave ideology" existed. American workers are a working class in function of their being based upon wage labor, even if many of them consider themselves "middle class."

In order to overthrow capitalism, it is not enough to have a correct program; you need also in addition sufficient organizational strength, sufficient implantation in the working class and other mass movements. Let us illustrate that thesis by the balance sheet of Trotsky's political record from 1930 on. It is a magnificent achievement. Trotsky was 100 percent right in his struggle against the Soviet Thermidor, against the usurpation of power in the USSR by an anti-working-class bureaucratic caste. He was 100 percent right in his fight against the rise of fascism in Germany and the terrible threats this would present to the European working class and the USSR itself. He was 100 percent right in pointing out how it was possible to avoid a defeat of the Spanish Revolution. He was 100 percent right in his fight against the disastrous Popular Front policies in France and elsewhere. He was 100 percent right in his fight against Stalin's bloody purges in the USSR from 1934 on, killing nearly one million Communists and the cream of the Red Army's commanders.

But he lost all these fights. Why? Because in order to win, it was not enough to have these correct ideas. It was also necessary to have sufficient numerical strength, with sufficient roots among the masses. These the groups inspired by Lev Davidovich didn't have. Therefore they remained unable even to *begin* to realize the vital historical goals which I just enumerated.

The so-called "Russian question" involves a correct definition of the bureaucratized workers states and of the tasks for revolutionary Marxists evolving therefrom: the struggle to overthrow the bureaucratic dictatorship by a political revolution, the struggle to defend the remnants of the conquests of the October Revolution against attempts of imperialism to destroy them. It raises in addition the question of the correlation of these tasks and world revolution. This implies two questions. First, does the defense of the remaining conquests of October take precedence over tasks of revolutions in other parts of the world, like the Stalinists for a long time asserted, with their theory of the USSR being the central bastion of the world proletariat and proletarian internationalism equaling the defense of that bastion?

Second, can world revolution march forward and achieve victories outside of the so-called socialist camp, through its own momentum in given countries, provided there exists a leadership—not necessarily a genuinely revolutionary Marxist one—ready to lead such a process?

Those who answer “yes” to the first question, whether they are conscious of it or not, defend a pro-Stalinist, pro-Soviet bureaucracy position, with all its implications for current class struggles we have witnessed from the '30s on. Those who answer “no” to the second question—again independently from the fact of whether they are conscious of it or not—in practice adopt a position parallel to the reactionary utopia of socialism in one country. Advances of world revolution are supposed to be impossible without the prior overthrow of the Soviet bureaucracy; everything depends upon what is happening inside the Soviet Union.

We reject both these grave theoretical political errors. And to do that, we can base ourselves on solid historical evidence to prove it. It is just impossible to deny that the subordination of the interests and the movements of the exploited and the oppressed, in various countries at various moments, to the maneuvers of Stalinist diplomacy have had catastrophic consequences both for world revolution and for the USSR itself. The Trotskyist analysis of the bureaucratized—bureaucratically deformed and degenerated if you want, it's all the same—Soviet Union, China, Eastern Europe, implies understanding the double historical function of the Stalinist bureaucracies.

On the one hand, in the long run, historically, they further the restoration of capitalism. But during a concrete, shorter-term period, roughly from 1930 till the late '80s, they basically opposed such a restoration in the USSR and abolished capitalism in Eastern Europe and in China. Anybody who denies this, like the “state cap” sects do, defends the preposterous position that there was no structural difference between Mao's China and Chiang Kai-shek's China, between East Germany and West Germany, between Eastern Europe before and after 1949, between North Korea and South Korea. You will not find a single capitalist anywhere in the world who believes such nonsense. For sure, the bureaucracy abolished capitalism in these countries not because it was in any way pro-socialist in the real historical sense of the word. To use Trotsky's classical formula in that respect, it abolished capitalism in order to expand its own power and privileges at the expense both of the workers and of the capitalists.

One of the most important contributions of Trotsky to the development of Marxist theory is his concept of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a specific social layer, with particular material interests to defend. An important practical conclusion has to be drawn from this analysis. It is particularly relevant today for the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe, as well as for the People's Republic of China. Only the working class can prevent a full restoration of capitalism in these countries. This means that the working class has to reconquer its class independence and its class consciousness. After the disastrous results of Stalinist experience—mistakenly, but it's a fact of life—this working class today tends to identify Stalinism with communism, with Marxism, with socialism, all of which they reject out of hand.

Therefore, revolutionary Marxists in these countries have to help the working class to fight on two fronts: against the privatization of industry and suppression of many

social advantages on the one hand; for the full development of democratic rights, freedom of organization, freedom of the press, the right to strike, and all other trade-union freedoms on the other hand. More generally, after the traumatic experience with fascism, Stalinism, various military dictatorships, the international working class as well as the Soviet and Eastern European and Chinese working classes are in favor of universal human rights, of unrestrained political freedom. This is nothing new in the history of communism. The illegal [Italian] Communist Party, after the beginning of the fascist dictatorship, expressed this idea in the final sentence it added to its traditional song, *Bandiera Rossa*: “Evviva il comunismo e la libertà.” Long live communism and freedom.

The young Communist Party of the United States, under the impulse of our comrade Jim Cannon, applied the same orientation in an admirable way when it organized a worldwide defense campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti. These two anarchists were resolute opponents of communism and of Soviet Russia. But they were workers victimized by U.S. business and its political personnel. Under these circumstances, Jim was absolutely right to organize such a defense campaign which brought millions of people into action throughout the world. Class solidarity should not know any ideological restraints, except in a situation of real—not of so-called “potential”—civil war.

We are facing here a deeper problem. You cannot organize an efficient strike committee without involving all the workers, independently from their often reactionary ideas—with the obvious exclusion of real scabs, not of so-called “potential” scabs. You cannot organize an efficient soviet without involving all the toilers—indeed, practically all citizens—in it, with the exclusion of outright pogromists, fascists. Indeed, the second Russian Soviet Congress, which decided on the transfer of power to the soviets, had in its ranks even bourgeois parties like the Cadets. They were not expelled; they left the soviets by their own volition.

We are dealing here with the dialectics of the united front. Its main task is not to unmask the labor lieutenants of capital, as the American Marxist Daniel De Leon so aptly called them. That educational task of course remains present, is important, but it is a propaganda task. The main task of the united front is to *implement* the united front, to realize it, in the interests of the wage-earners in their totality. So, when we propose a united front from below and from the top, we mean it. What happens when this line is not applied can be studied in the light of the German disaster of 1933.

Like all similar sects, the Spartacists have tied themselves into an inextricable knot of contradictions. These hit them as so many boomerangs. First contradiction: the international Trotskyist movement has existed from 1930 onwards. During the 64 years of its existence, there have been innumerable mass strikes and general strikes throughout the world. There have been a great number of prerevolutionary and revolutionary explosions, as well as a series of real revolutions. If, after more than half a century of revolutions and counterrevolutions, real Trotskyism (which the Spartacists claim to be the only ones to represent) is reduced to a couple of hundred people in the whole world, with no real implantation in the working class of any country, this would prove the basic historical failure of Trotskyism as a political movement, independently of the intrinsic value of

its theoretical contributions.

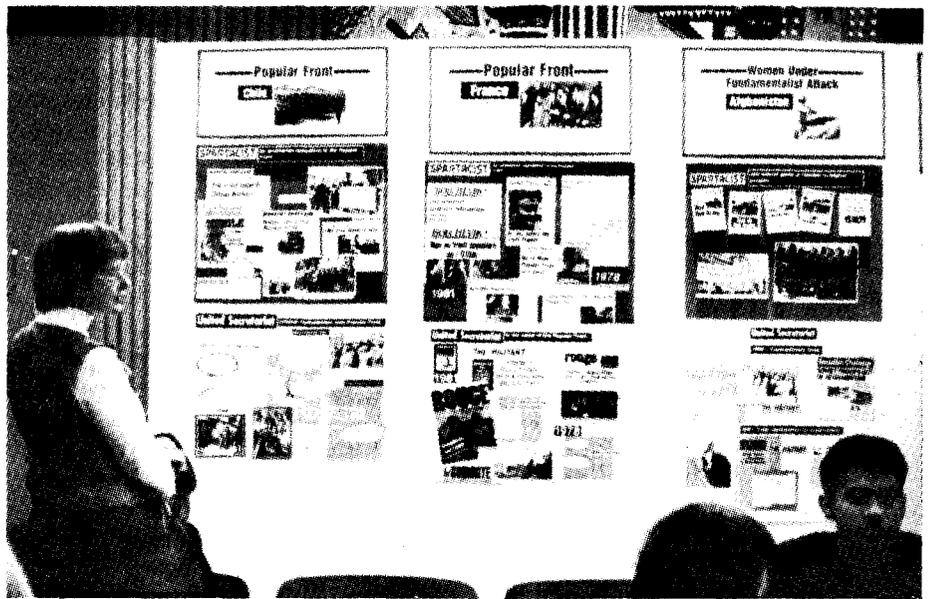
Second contradiction: the Spartacists themselves have existed for many years, yet they have completely failed to build the revolutionary party which, following Trotsky, they correctly claim to be indispensable for solving the burning problems of mankind. Why this obvious failure?

Third: the obsession with correct formulas leads to the pretense of popish infallibility. This in turn implies a break with the Marxist-Leninist tradition of complete freedom of thought. Engels wrote to the leadership of the German Social Democracy when that party was more than a thousand times stronger than the Spartacists are today: the party needs socialist science, which cannot develop under other conditions than those of full freedom of action.

Fourth contradiction: the Spartacists have increasingly been reversing the classical Marxist distinction between objectively progressive mass movements and their treacherous or wavering leaderships. Trotsky gave full support to China's struggle for national independence against Japanese imperialism, even when the struggle was led by the fiercely anti-working-class criminal gang of Chiang Kai-shek. It will be hard to argue that the leadership of the Algerian mass struggle for national independence, the FLN, was worse than the Chiang Kai-shek gang. It would be even more difficult to argue that the mass resistance movements against German and Italian imperialists over exploitation and oppression in countries like Poland, Greece, France, Denmark, Belgium, were not totally progressive and did not merit full support by revolutionary Marxists irrespective of the class-collaborationist policies of their national leaderships. The same remark applies to the national uprisings of the Indian, the Indochinese, the Indonesian, the Filipino peoples, against British, French, Japanese, Dutch, U.S. imperialism.

In that respect, there is a terrible blot on the record of the so-called International Committee of the Fourth International of Healyite/Lambertiste inspiration to which the Spartacist leaders give allegiance to this very day. This blot is not a minor peccadillo. The Lambertistes organized a military operation under one Bellounis in direct cooperation with French imperialism against the FLN. Lambert publicly boasted that these operations were planned in his Paris headquarters by his central committee. We have never seen any self-criticism or correction by the Spartacists of this terrible crime. Lambert, as for him, fell all over himself to correct that crime when Messali Hadj—supposedly the leader of the proletarian wing of the Algerian national movement, as against the petty-bourgeois wing of the FLN—ended up by openly supporting de Gaulle and the Gaullist regime.

Fifth contradiction: there is another grave blot on the Spartacists' record. Under the pretext of defending the Polish bureaucratized workers state against capitalist res-



**SL poster displays at the debate contrast revolutionary program of the SL to the centrist politics of the USec on topics ranging from Afghanistan civil war to Chilean Popular Front.**

toration, the Spartacists supported General Jaruzelski's military coup d'état of December 1981. They supported the Stalinist repression of the Polish working class. Jaruzelski banned the trade union Solidarność, he suppressed the right to strike, he dismissed tens of thousands of trade unionists from their jobs, he clapped thousands of them into jail. Comrades of the Spartacist League, you'll have a hard time defending this anti-working-class repression.

Sixth contradiction: as in Poland, the Spartacists relativize the anti-working-class measures of the post-Stalinist regimes and the terrible consequences of economic stagnation under Brezhnev and Chernenko for the daily lives of female and male workers. The Stalinist labor code was the harshest ever known in the twentieth century. It is sufficient to cite the example of the so-called *ukazniks*. Hundreds of thousands of women workers were deported to labor camps for having stayed away from work for 24 hours because either they themselves or their children were ill and the doctor hadn't shown up in time to give them a certificate. They had no possibility of justifying or defending themselves. They were just automatically deported. But even worse were the objective consequences of economic stagnation and decline for the Soviet working class. Coal miners didn't receive soap; women workers didn't receive sanitary napkins. Only when, under Yeltsin, at the beginning of restoration of capitalism, their situation deteriorated even more, a limited, but largely unpolitical, reaction set in.

The Spartacists try to cover up for this shameful apology by claiming that they after all stand for political revolution, whereas we are supposed to have abandoned that traditional Trotskyist position in favor of supporting self-reform of the bureaucracy. It's a complete distortion of the historical record. Since 1946, in every single one of our writings on the Russian question we clearly rejected the idea of possible self-reform of the bureaucracy. A whole chapter of our book, *Beyond Perestroika*, has as a title, "No Self-Reform of the Bureaucracy Is Possible." We clearly came out in favor of political anti-bureaucratic revolution. We supported every

single working-class action against the bureaucracy, from the East German uprising of 1953, to the Hungarian Revolution, to the Prague Spring of 1968-69, to the workers actions of Tiananmen Square against the post-Maoist dictatorship in the People's Republic of China.

Next contradiction: the Spartacists underestimate the gravity of the current long depressive wave of capitalism. They write, "The present period is marked, above all, by the impact of the counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and the other deformed workers states of Eastern Europe." This is wrong. The principal feature of the world situation is the worldwide offensive of capital against labor, with its main concomitants—the rise of mass unemployment; the development of a growing layer of casual, marginalized, unprotected workers; the development of a growing union-busting offensive; the rise of xenophobia, racism and extreme right-wing tendencies, to which the established parties make constant concessions; the reappearance of openly fascist tendencies; the threats deriving therefrom for the working class' political rights and freedoms.

There is nothing "reformist" in recognizing that under such conditions the workers' struggles are mainly defensive ones, and revolutionary Marxists have to give priority to this, as Trotsky did in Germany from 1929 on. Like at that moment, what is on the immediate agenda today is not the struggle for revolutionary conquest of power by the workers, but the need to eliminate unemployment in a radical way in the West and the East and in a substantial way in the South. It is true that, contrary to the early '30s, the working class of several capitalist countries have launched massive and impressive defensive struggles against the employers' offensive and the state, especially in Brazil, in Italy, in France, and to a lesser extent in Argentina, Greece and Belgium. We shall see what will happen in Germany. But how far these movements have been successful in stopping the capitalist offensive remains an open question.

It is also true that there is an obvious interaction between what we call the worldwide crisis of credibility of socialism, which is a function of a growing number of workers understanding the historical bankruptcy of Stalinism and Social Democracy on the one hand, and on the other hand not seeing any credible alternative for radical, overall social change. The absence of such an alternative gives all defensive workers' struggles a discontinuous and fragmented character; it leaves the historical initiative in the hands of the employers and their states. Revolutionary Marxists try to overcome that handicap; they struggle for the reappearance of class self-confidence and hope in a new socialist society. But at this stage, this is still a long-term process, still essentially a propaganda task.

Next contradiction: the Spartacists do not seem to understand the qualitative grave threats which the survival of decaying capitalism poses for the working class, all the exploited and oppressed, nay, all humankind in its totality. Rosa Luxemburg had coined the formula, either "socialism or barbarism." This formula is now bypassed. The real problem is either socialism or the destruction of all life on earth. The main trends leading in that direction are the growing ecological disasters and the existence of nuclear weapons, nuclear power stations, as well as chemical, biological and other mass destructive weapons.

A change in one of the basic strategies of communism derives therefrom. You cannot turn nuclear weapons against

the class enemy. You have to break totally with the demented Marshall Grechko/Mao concept of trying to win an atomic war. The strategic goal should become the one of avoiding at all costs a nuclear war and suppressing all nuclear power stations. You cannot build socialism with atomic ashes. The Spartacists have never spoken out on this issue. We challenge them to do so now.

Such a view of the new world reality—yes, it is new, compared to the time the Transitional Program was written—is in no way defeatist, demoralizing, or demobilizing for the exploited and the oppressed. Neither was Trotsky's view of the terrible dangers of fascism when he raised the banner of immediate priority to be granted to the struggle against that danger from 1929 on. It doesn't pay to play hide and seek with objective reality. One has to reverse the argument. The existence of these threats for the very survival of human life gives a new and powerful stimulus to the struggle for socialism. Capitalism and the disintegrating bureaucratic dictatorships are utterly unable to eliminate these threats. The building of socialism, the exercise of power by the working class, could.

The world situation remains historically characterized by what you could call, in language of chess, a situation of *pat* [stalemate]. Both basic classes of bourgeois society remain for the time being unable to gain decisive victories. The capitalist class is objectively too weak to inflict crushing defeats upon the world working class and the exploited and oppressed in general. While these have witnessed serious defeats, they have nowhere been crushed like they were in the '30s and the early '40s in most of the countries. On the other hand, the world working class has not yet overcome its crisis of class consciousness and revolutionary leadership. And it does not seem on the point of overcoming it. So the crisis of mankind, of human civilization, will last for a long time.

The objection has been raised: why hasn't the Fourth International itself up to now solved the crisis of revolutionary leadership? Why hasn't it built revolutionary mass parties and a revolutionary mass international capable of leading the world proletariat toward decisive victories? In order to give an adequate answer to that question, one has to make a distinction between what should have been achieved and what has been achieved. We leave aside the slanderous argument that somehow we didn't want to build revolutionary parties and a revolutionary international upon the Marxist program. Since the age of 15, I have devoted my whole life to that purpose. To argue otherwise is to take a leaf out of what Trotsky aptly called "The Stalin School of Falsification."

What we *have* achieved is not insignificant. While we still are nowhere in the leadership of the working class in its majority, while we still haven't led any successful general strikes or successful revolutions, we have already successfully led important partial struggles. A comrade of our French section led the recent Air France strike, which badly bruised the conservative government. A comrade of our Italian section was co-organizer of the best income guarantee for redundant workers anywhere in the world, the famous *cassa di integrazione*, at Europe's largest car factory, the Turin plant. Our comrade Jakob Moneta has been an elected member of the central committee of the PDS [Party of Democratic Socialism] in the ex-GDR, in charge of trade-union work. In that function, he has started to assemble a

**Collapse of Stalinism**  
**Revolution vs.**  
**Counterrevolution**

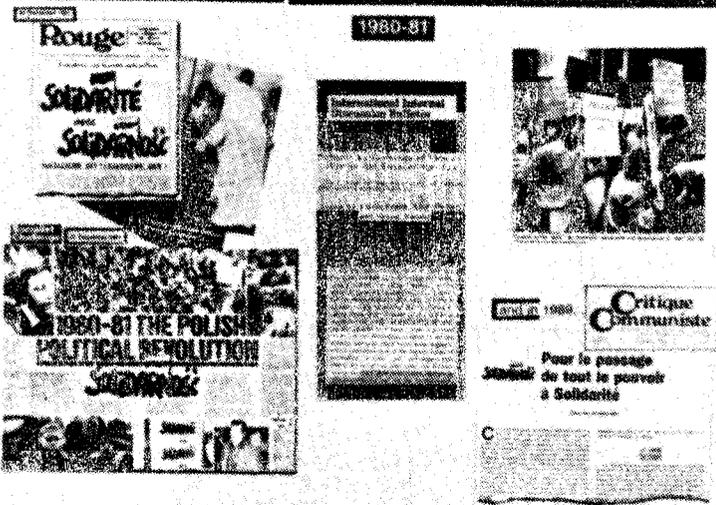
**Poland**



Small details on Warsaw and the Red Cross and Solidarnosc strike



**United Secretariat** enthused over counterrevolutionary Solidarnosc



small but very militant group of independent shop stewards, the first of its kind in Germany since the mid-'20s.

We have two MPs elected in Europe. One of them, comrade Sören in Denmark, is a member of the United Secretariat. A third one will possibly be elected in the coming days in Austria. Comrade Winfried Wolf has been elected MP in Germany as an independent candidate on the PDS slate. Although he has formally resigned from the FI, he promised full cooperation on issues of common concern, above all the struggle against the cities being choked by gas-driven automobiles. We have dozens of municipal regional councilors, among them two in my hometown of Antwerp. We have many MPs in Brazil, and a series of comrades in Third World countries.

The books published by leading spokespersons of our movement, by no means only myself, have passed a circulation figure of two million, and are heading toward three million. They have been published in more than 30 languages throughout the world. With the exception of comrade Winfried Wolf, all the comrades of which I have quoted here publicly, openly, frankly state their membership in the Fourth International. Is this boasting? I don't think so.

We have many weaknesses, of which we are as conscious as other comrades, if not more so than they are. But we have a series of important assets. Our movement is the product of a tough selection process. Here what our opponents considered our weakness has turned out to be our main source of strength. We don't have state power, we don't have mass unions, we don't have mass parties to back us up. Comrades join us not for material advantages, not for careerism, not for positions of power or prestige. They join us just out of deeply felt convictions and unlimited devotion to the cause of the working class and of all the exploited and oppressed. This positive selection turns out to be a basic source of strength. It has created a granite basis on which our opponents will break their teeth.

We have just scored a victory of truly historical dimensions. The Stalinist bureaucracy mounted the most powerful machine of falsification of all times against Leon Trotsky, his followers, and the Russian Old Bolsheviks. But now the tides

Display shows Spartacist tendency's warning against imperialist-backed Polish Solidarnosc. USec supported Walesa's clerical-nationalist company union.

have turned. The Supreme Military Tribunal of the USSR completely rehabilitated all the accused of the infamous Moscow Trials, declared them all, including comrade Trotsky, not guilty of the crimes they had been accused of. At the eve of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of our Old Man, there then came a complete political rehabilitation. The official government newspaper of the USSR, *Izvestia*, published an article stating that Trotsky had been a great and honest revolutionary, second only to Lenin as builder of the Soviet state, undisputed founder and leader of the Red Army, the one person who led that army to victory in the Civil War, thereby assuring the survival of the Soviet state.

In the wake of these publications, I was invited by the Dietz East Berlin publishing house of the ex-CP to write a book with, as title, "Trotsky as Alternative." Without any question marks. I wrote the book; it has already appeared in German, it will appear next spring in English, at Verso Press in London, and we'll make every effort to have it appear in Russia, too.

There are many other forces operating in our favor. On a worldwide scale, the working class is still growing, although not in all countries and in all sectors at the same pace. Internationally it has passed the one billion mark. If you add the semi-proletariat of landless peasants in important Third World countries you'll probably reach the figure of 2 billion.

The great globalization of capital imposes upon militant unionists increasing reactions of worldwide cooperation. It won't be easy to realize them. We have a key role to play in order to go in that direction. Already today, in several important countries, our weight in the mass movement of political initiatives is such that it is increasingly difficult to bypass us. Furthermore, we have attracted substantial personalities to our movement. Dr. Georg Motved, member of the central committee of the Danish Communist Party, worldwide renowned specialist on Lenin. Comrade Axelrod, longtime editor of the Brazilian CP's newspaper, then co-editor of our own paper, *Em Tempo*, and a staunch Fourth Internationalist. Above all, the most brilliant revolutionary intellectual and mass leader in Eastern Europe, comrade Josip Pinior of Poland, one of the historic leaders of the ten million workers working at the first Solidarność congress for a self-managed Poland—not a capitalist Poland, a self-managed Poland.

I believe we have passed the lowest point of retreat of the world working class. Things will be very different in the coming years from what they are today. I have never felt as proud and as confident of that remarkable movement which I contributed to building. Comrades, the future is ours, for the future is with the international working class. Long live the Fourth International! Long live world revolution! To the world socialist federation which will safeguard the physical survival of humankind and open up the new and higher civilization of socialism. Forward! *Vperyod!*

## Presentation by Joseph Seymour

The last time I heard Ernest Mandel speak was in the spring of 1991 at the Socialist Scholars Conference. He was on a discussion panel on the Soviet Union with the right-wing social democrat Bogdan Denitch and the Gor-

batchev supporter Paul Robeson Jr. And in his summary Denitch said that he was both surprised and pleased that there was such fundamental agreement between "we social democrats, we murderers of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, and the communists represented by Robeson and the Trotskyists represented by Ernest Mandel." Now, of course by that time, Denitch said, we all agree that the main thing is to maintain and expand democracy and democratic openness in the Soviet Union. And of course by that time, "democracy" had become a universally accepted code word for capitalist restoration throughout the Soviet sphere. And I watched Ernest Mandel, I watched his face, and he was smiling and nodding, as if to say, "Yes, it's true, how interesting, how ironic."

But it's scarcely surprising that there was a kinship between Ernest Mandel and the self-described heir to the social-democratic murderers of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. For in this period there was a kinship between Mandel and his cothinkers and the Freikorps fascists, who actually killed these great revolutionaries. In 1989, *International Viewpoint* [No. 169, 18 September 1989], the premier organ of the United Secretariat, published, without any critical commentary, an article by one Herbert Lindmae in praise of the Estonian Forest Brothers, under the heading, "The Armed Struggle Against Stalinism in Estonia."

The Forest Brothers were Baltic fascists who fought with the Nazi Wehrmacht against the Red Army, and after the war engaged in terrorist actions against the Soviet government in anticipation of an imminent war between the USSR and the Western imperialist powers. To paraphrase the American humorist Will Rogers, during the period of Cold War II, Mandel and his cothinkers never met a non-Russian, anti-Communist nationalist in East Europe they didn't like, they didn't support, and they didn't apologize for—of course, in the name of democracy, national independence and anti-Stalinism.

At the very height of his fight with Stalin, in the late 1920s, Trotsky insisted that the struggle against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union had nothing in common—*nothing in common*—with the social-democratic program of parliamentary democracy. He wrote:

"The Mandelites..." Sorry....

"The Mensheviks think that the main source of Bonapartist danger is the system of proletarian dictatorship itself, that it is a fundamental error to count on the international revolution, that a correct policy would necessarily be to abandon political and economic restrictions on the bourgeoisie, and that salvation from Thermidor and Bonapartism lies in democracy, i.e., in the bourgeois parliamentary system.

"The Opposition...holds that the greatest failing of the proletarian dictatorship is the insufficiently deep connection with the international revolution, the extraordinary softness [repeat, *softness*] toward the internal and external bourgeoisie. Parliamentary democracy for us is one of the forms of capitalist rule."

And that is really the ABCs, comrades.

Now, we all know Ernest Mandel is a talented singer. He can sing many songs, in many keys, in many directions. He can sing "two, three, many Vietnams" with the idealistic Latin American Stalinist adventurer Che Guevara, who was killed by U.S. imperialism. But he can sing "solidarity with Solidarność" with the Polish anti-communist nationalist who is financed and directed by U.S. imperialism. His supporters can chant "Allah Akbar" with Iranian Islamic fundamentalists who want to enslave women to the veil. But

he can also posture as a militant champion of women's liberation. In the 1960s, when student vanguardism was all the rage among young radicals, the United Secretariat pushed the slogan of the "Red University." But today, when anti-communist Social Democracy is prevalent on the left, Mandel criticizes the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, a genuinely proletarian vanguard, for substitutionism. How terribly original of you!

But there is a consistency in Mandel's constant inconsistencies. He is always fashioning his line to whatever is fashionable on the left, especially among the West European intelligentsia. Mandel has one very useful purpose. Because if you want to know what is trendy in European petty-bourgeois radicalism, you turn to Ernest Mandel and you can't go wrong. One hundred percent.

We have many fundamental differences with the tendency led by Mandel over the years. But at their core is the difference between truth and falsification. We tell the truth as we see it, even when it is a truth which socialist-minded workers and leftist intellectuals do not want to hear and do not at that moment want to believe. By contrast, Mandel has prostituted the moral authority of Trotskyism in the service of an ever-shifting collection of Stalinist, social-democratic, petty-bourgeois radical and bourgeois-nationalist currents. We seek to build the Fourth International as Trotsky conceived it—as a hard, disciplined...

**Mandel:** With 200 people?

**Seymour:** You'll get your rebuttal! Don't interrupt me. I didn't interrupt you. As Trotsky conceived it. As a hard, disciplined, proletarian vanguard, sharply counterposed programmatically and organizationally, to Stalinist and social-democratic reformism, to all manner of petty-bourgeois nationalism, not to speak of bourgeois nationalism, and to centrism. The United Secretariat has always been and only aspires to be a pressure group on various reformist, petty-bourgeois radical and bourgeois-nationalist currents. In fact, over the decades Mandel has tried literally *everything* except, *except* building a proletarian vanguard party.

The International Communist League and the United Secretariat both originated in the early '60s. At that time, under the impact of the Cuban Revolution and the Algerian war of independence, a new generation of young radicals impressionistically viewed the peasant guerrilla road to power as a shortcut to social revolution and national liberation in what today would be called the Third World.



Display illustrates USec support to Khomeini's "Islamic revolution" which meant police-state terror for workers and degradation for women. USec members argued veil was anti-imperialist symbol; Spartacist said "No to the Veil" and fought to mobilize working class in leadership of revolution.

Predictably, Mandel & Co. were gung ho for the Cuban road, the guerrilla road to power, especially in Latin America. A founding document of the USec ["For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement—Statement by the Political Committee of the SWP," 1 March 1963], basically a bloc between Mandel's tendency and the American Socialist Workers Party, stated:

"...guerrilla 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 and 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."

Talk about substitutionalism! This is an outright repudiation of proletarian revolution and leadership in backward countries, which is the core of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. How much more substitutionalist can you get?

In a counterposed document ["Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International," 12 June 1963], our tendency, then an opposition in the SWP, wrote:

"Experience since the Second World War has demonstrated that peasant-based guerrilla warfare under petit-bourgeois leadership can in itself lead to nothing more than an anti-working-class bureaucratic regime.... For Trotskyists to incorporate into their strategy revisionism on the *proletarian* leadership in the revolution is a profound negation of Marxism-Leninism.... Marxists must resolutely oppose any adventurist acceptance of the peasant-guerrilla road to socialism.... This alternative would be a suicidal course for the socialist goals of the movement, and perhaps physically for the adventurers."

And in fact, U.S. imperialism and its local agents wiped out the various leftist guerrilla insurgencies in Latin America fairly easily, exemplified by the CIA's hunting down and killing Che Guevara in Bolivia in 1967.

But to his credit, his great credit, Guevara fought and died for what he believed in. But Ernest Mandel, from the safety and comfort of a Belgian university, encouraged an entire generation of Latin American leftists to engage in suicidal adventurism. There's a cynical aphorism in American courtroom circles: "The lawyer always goes home." Well, that's the lawyer.

While promoting suicidal adventurism in Latin America, the USec, always ecumenical, also endorsed no less suicidal reformism: the Allende Popular Front in Chile in the early 1970s. A leader of the French USec section wrote in 1971: "The Cubans properly hailed the victory of Unidad Popular last year, pointing out correctly the new perspectives it opened for the Chilean masses." Yes, the perspective of bloody counterrevolution. As we wrote, right after the election, not three or five years later [*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 counterrevolution.... 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."

And three years later that's exactly what happened.

By the late 1970s, Western, centrally U.S., imperialism had restabilized after the internal turmoil of the Vietnam War era. And at this point, the U.S. launched a new Cold War offensive against the Soviet bloc in the name of "human rights" and of course democracy. This imperialist offensive conditioned the rise of Polish Solidarność in the beginning of the 1980s. Initially this movement drew on the quite legitimate grievances of the Polish workers against the Stalinist bureaucracy. But from the outset Solidarność was led by a coterie of hardened anti-Communist nationalists, centrally Walesa, with direct ties to the Vatican and to Western imperialist governments. Nonetheless, Mandel and his cothinkers supported Solidarność with a fervor equal to that of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Some pro-USec groups, like Socialist Action in the U.S., even adopted the Solidarność logo as their own. Speaking in Australia, Mandel called Solidarność "the best socialists in the world,"

doubtless because they openly rejected socialism.

In a 1981 article entitled "Stop Solidarity's Counter-revolution!" [WV No. 289, 25 September 1981] here is what we predicted, then—not later, then—would happen if Solidarność came to power:

"...foreign capitalist investment would be invited in on a massive scale.... Wages would be kept low to compete on the world market. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of workers would be laid off.... Certainly the mass of deluded [Polish] workers in Solidarity do not want this. But the restoration of capitalism in all its ruthlessness would follow, as the night follows the day, from Solidarity's program of 'Western-style democracy.'"

Now Mandel and his cothinkers pride themselves on being undogmatic, creative, open-minded, in seeing reality as it is. But what honest and objective person would today deny that what we predicted would happen in 1981, if Solidarność came to power, has in fact happened? If anything, we *underestimated* the economic devastation and social degradation of capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe.

A key battlefield of that counterrevolution was the German Democratic Republic in late 1989 and early 1990 following the fall of the old-line Stalinist Honecker regime. This posed in a direct and immediate sense either proletarian political revolution and its extension East and West, or capitalist reunification leading to an imperialist Fourth Reich. At this point, we mobilized all the resources of the International Communist League to intervene in the DDR against capitalist reunification and around the central slogan of "Workers Soviets Must Rule in All Germany." In January [1990] we were able to initiate a genuine united front, with the Socialist Unity Party, to protest the desecration of a Soviet war memorial by German fascists, a protest which drew a *quarter million* pro-socialist East German workers, intellectuals and others. In the decisive elections to the East German Volkskammer in March of 1990, we were the only party which ran candidates clearly and unequivocally against capitalist reunification.

At this critical historical juncture the United Secretariat was totally politically paralyzed. One of Mandel's comrades, Matti, openly and enthusiastically supported the formation of a Fourth Reich. Mandel himself had no coherent program. I read what you wrote at the time—I couldn't make any sense of it. Eventually, just like the East German Stalinists on the road to becoming Social Democrats, he endorsed capitalist reunification, proposing more favorable terms, which included—guess what?—the complete demilitarization of the German imperialist bourgeoisie. Fat chance that!

Having supported capitalist counterrevolution in the name of democracy and anti-Stalinism, Mandel and his cothinkers now deny that a capitalist counterrevolution has even occurred!—with the puerile social-democratic argument that the economy remains, especially industry, largely nationalized. In some cases, like the Czech Republic, that's not even true. I can envisage an interesting telephone conversation between Mandel and one of his few and mutually hostile Polish supporters: "Ernest, Siemens has just bought out a big electrical products plant. Industry's over 50 percent privatized!" "Okay, it's a capitalist state." "Ernest, the Siemens deal fell through!" "Well then it's a workers state."

Trotsky himself, in the late 1930s, clearly predicted that capitalist counterrevolution would occur on the political

level, at the level of state power, in advance of the subsequent economic transformation. Here is what he wrote:

“Should a bourgeois counterrevolution succeed in the USSR, the new government for a lengthy period would have to base itself upon the nationalized economy. But what does such a type of temporary conflict between the economy and the state mean? It means a *revolution* or a *counterrevolution*.”

Everyone in the world, and not least the working people of East Europe, now understands that under the banner of democracy a capitalist counterrevolution has taken place. A Hungarian woman, who was laid off her job in a textile mill which she had had for 25 years, and is now trying to survive by selling fruit from a street stand, recently bitterly exclaimed: “It’s all thanks to democracy! For us ordinary people, life has got a lot worse over the past four years. We have become poorer and weaker.” Here is a Hungarian working woman, doubtless with relatively little schooling, who understands the reality of capitalist counterrevolution and the reality of so-called “democracy” better than the oh-so-erudite Ernest Mandel.

Now what’s the USec line on the bloodiest “democratic counterrevolution” so far, namely Yugoslavia? We have always insisted that the fratricidal bloodletting between Serb, Croat and Bosnian Muslim nationalists, which ripped apart the Yugoslav deformed workers state, is reactionary and anti-working-class on all sides. That’s the ABCs. Also the ABCs is that we will defend the Serb forces against Western imperialist intervention carried out in the name of defending “poor little Bosnia” against Serb aggression. For over two years, U.S. imperialism and influential sections of the European ruling class, especially liberals and social democrats, have sponsored the Muslim nationalist regime in Sarajevo. And guess what? USec is in the thick of this imperialist campaign. One of its resolutions last year called for a “defence of a sovereign and multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina” and declared that the Western imperialist powers should be “sending arms to the Bosnian forces.”

And in this case they are putting their words into practice. The USec supporters are the leading force in the so-called “International Workers Aid to Bosnia.” Under the cover of international workers solidarity, this is a campaign of direct material support to a bourgeois-nationalist government. In fact, International Workers Aid and Bosnian government officials held a joint press conference—if you like, a united front—in Geneva last year. You want to have another united front? The right-wing government of Croatia, of Franjo Tudjman—this is a man who’s an apologist for the clerical-fascist Ustasha and the Nazi Holocaust—guess what he did? There’s another united front. He allowed the International Workers Aid to open up a semi-official office in the Adriatic port of Split. Now, think about it. Is this how fascist governments normally treat revolutionary socialists? Doesn’t something sound a little fishy here?

The main strategy of the Bosnian nationalist regime is to provoke Western imperialist military intervention against the stronger Serbian forces. And despite its paper opposition to foreign military intervention, the USec’s efforts go in the same direction. In fact, *International Viewpoint* boasts that its supporters have run convoys of trucks into Bosnia protected by the UN imperialist forces. One report even lauds “the genuine efforts of many of the UN staff and soldiers who helped us.” So here you have not only direct

support to a bourgeois-nationalist regime, but direct appeals for military action by its imperialist sponsors.

As is quite clear from the end of Mandel’s long presentation, in the present period the United Secretariat aspires to be the, has liquidated itself into, and seeks to build up international Social Democracy, which now includes the many ex-Stalinist parties which have openly repudiated any pretensions to Leninism. In fact, in Moscow in 1991, Mandel offered himself as a marriage broker between Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand. And given his present infatuation with the Catholic church, doubtless he would like this marriage to be held in, say, Notre Dame. [laughter from audience] No, really, if you read Mandel...I’m struck by this because I’ve been reading his speeches and articles and almost every one has an argument that his program is compatible with Catholic doctrine and theology. I mean, does Tariq Ali know something we don’t? Have you secretly converted? [laughter from audience]

As you can see, Mandel takes pride in the work of his Brazilian comrades as the best builders of the Workers Party in that country. What does that mean in practice? It means they’re apparatchiks and hatchet men for the bureaucrat-in-chief, Lula. The Workers Party is a rapidly rightward-moving social-democratic party which in the last elections ran a typical popular-frontist bloc. In fact, Lula publicly stated his willingness to participate in a government with his bourgeois opponent Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the neoliberal candidate of the IMF, and Mandel boasts that his comrade is on the leadership of the German Party of Democratic Socialism, the ex-Stalinist social democrats who helped sell out the DDR to West German imperialism. He boasts of this!

I think that the real politics of the United Secretariat was stated very clearly by our honorable co-chairman, Paul Le Blanc, a few years ago. He was writing specifically of Italy, but I think it has more general application in the USec worldview. I’ll read it slowly because every word’s a gem.

“[T]here may be a possibility to build a working-class anti-capitalist party, favoring communism, left-reformist in its majority, but with room for a revolutionary current to operate.”

Oh, left-reformists, please let us in, we’ll behave, we’ll be good. A reformist party is by definition a *pro*-capitalist party, a *counter*revolutionary party, openly so in those moments when the working class challenges and disturbs the bourgeois order. Mandel and his cothinkers aspire to become the accepted, respected, recognized left current of social democracy. They long to be comrades with certified war criminals like François Mitterrand, imperialist war criminals. They long to be comrades with the heirs to the murderers of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, who are now joined by the heirs to the murderers of Trotsky. Well, we of the International Communist League have taken a different road, the road laid out by Leon Trotsky in the founding program of the Fourth International. “The Fourth International declares uncompromising war,” repeat, “uncompromising war on the bureaucracies of the Second, Third, Amsterdam, and Anarcho-syndicalist Internationals, as on their centrist satellites.” We aim to reforge a Fourth International that will politically destroy once and for all the heirs to the murderers of Luxemburg, Liebknecht and Trotsky.

## Excerpts from the Discussion

*We are printing below four representative interventions which were made during the debate discussion period. Two of the interventions published here were made by supporters of the International Communist League and two were by supporters of the United Secretariat.*

### Speaker for the ICL, Jan Norden

The policy of Trotsky, of the Fourth International, was to build an independent revolutionary vanguard *against* Stalinism and Social Democracy. The policy of the United Secretariat has been to *tail* after all sorts of anti-proletarian, non-proletarian and non-revolutionary leaderships because it does not believe that the working class can carry out a revolution under a Trotskyist leadership.

In Latin America, what that has meant is that in Cuba the United Secretariat has refused to build a section of its own tendency because it politically supports the Castro Stalinist regime. In Nicaragua the United Secretariat refused to build an organization of its own tendency; and not only that, when some of its supporters were in Nicaragua as part of the Simón Bolívar Brigade, they and Nicaraguan supporters of the United Secretariat were arrested by the Sandinistas—and the United Secretariat *approved* that, because you politically supported this petty-bourgeois nationalist formation.

The star sections in Latin America, supposedly, of the United Secretariat, are Mexico and Brazil. In Mexico, at the last congress of the United Secretariat, you said that this was a party that had hegemony on the revolutionary left, that this was a party of mass influence. Today it has practically disappeared. Its newspaper has not appeared for months; its membership has dwindled to nothing; it lost its major peasant leader because he was bought off by the government, as were numbers of their other leaders. The reason is that they're politically part of the popular front led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, a *bourgeois* populist candidate. Your tendency, the United Secretariat, supported Cárdenas in the last elections. They supported a capitalist candidate. That is the exact opposite of everything that Trotsky stood for, of everything that Lenin stood for, and of everything that Marx and Engels stood for.

That brings me to Brazil. Now, in Brazil, you said that the PT [Workers Party] was *the* great example in Latin America—where you had a great mass workers movement. And you said you were building that loyally. But what that meant is that when there were people who objected to the popular-front program and to the formation of the popular front by Lula's party in 1989, those people had to be removed. They *were* removed by Lula; the Volta Redonda city leadership of the PT was put into receivership by Lula; and the person that they sent in there to do the hatchet job was João Machado, who is a leader of the Socialist Democracy current, which is the United Secretariat group inside the PT. Your idea of socialist democracy is running out and purging those who oppose the popular front, those who in their way were trying to fight for what Trotsky stood for, and that is for the class independence of the proletariat.

### Speaker for USec, Steve Bloom

I would like to pose a problem dealing with the question of Marxist method. The Spartacist current was born in the 1960s and has therefore been around for some 30 years, claims to have *the* revolutionary program and to be *the only* followers of the method of Trotsky, Lenin, Marx and Engels. I think it's safe to say that the basic ideas that the Spartacist League holds today that were presented to us from the podium haven't changed in the last 30 years; they're basically the same ideas that the Spartacists had when their current was formed. At least I've heard nothing new, and I've been listening for 30 years. Indeed I think that's a point of pride with this current: "See how right we've been." And that was the general approach this evening.

I'd like to take a look at the lives and ideas of those the Spartacist claims to follow in their method. Can anyone here in this room find a 30-year period in the lives of Lenin, Trotsky, Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg or any other major leader of the revolutionary Marxist movement, in which their basic programmatic ideas did not change a jot? Can you find a 20-year period or even a 10-year period at the end of which they would have affirmed every word that they said at the beginning? I would suggest that the Spartacists' main point of pride, their steadfastness and unwaveringness on the program, is in fact the clearest indictment of their method.

The Marxist method requires change, growth and development. That was the method of all Marxists historically. It's the inevitable result of real efforts to change the world, which requires contact with the world and contact with the mass movement. We tend to discover things that we didn't know before. We inevitably discover that some of the ideas we had going into the struggle were not right and need to be changed. Inevitably, every Marxist—every serious Marxist—has discovered that; and anyone who chuckles at that idea indicts themselves. I suggest that it was only because Marxists like Lenin and Trotsky followed *this* method that the Russian Revolution was able to be victorious in 1917. Both of them had to change fundamental ideas they had considered essential to their basic programs only months before the revolution itself took place. That was a prerequisite to the revolution taking place.

So I suggest that any current which has had the "right ideas" for 30 years and finds nothing to criticize or correct in its own history and theory condemns itself to sterility, and disproves by this very fact its own claim to follow the method of Marxism and Trotskyism. Seymour's remarks represent therefore a caricature of Marxism, and not the legitimate article. Fortunately the Spartacists have not fooled very many people in their claims to represent the genuine article.

It's certainly not convincing to explain to us how the Spartacists have always been right in their predictions of disaster. I could have done that too. That's easy. It's easy to predict disaster, because most of the time, given the relationship of forces in the world, when workers start to struggle we'll end with a disaster or at least with a defeat. So it's fairly easy to predict that with the relationship of

forces that exist in the world. Please understand the modifier.

The problem is to find a road to the masses and formulate a practical program that can *try* to avoid disaster, that can *attempt* to build the basis for—if not a victory today—at least a victory tomorrow. We won't be successful all the time, and not even most often, in those efforts. But only by making those efforts can we succeed. Measured on that scale, the real efforts to help the workers to make a difference, the Spartacist record is far more dismal than that of the Fourth International.

### Speaker for USec, Paul Le Blanc

One of comrade Seymour's sharpest criticisms of Ernest Mandel is that he's alive. Now the same criticism could be made of comrade Seymour. Whenever someone says workers of all countries unite, and means it, and tries to get that word out to workers, there should be an understanding that there will be people who are hurt and killed in those struggles. Comrade Mandel was part of the Resistance. Comrade Mandel went to a concentration camp and survived. We don't need to be one-upping each other on that. We're all alive here and what we have to do is discuss what to do now.

At the beginning and at the ends and interwoven throughout comrade Mandel's presentation, we were presented with a Marxist analysis of the situation that we face and a strategic orientation for the workers and the oppressed. You may not agree with the analysis and the orientation, but it's there, beginning, throughout and at the end. And there was also a brief accounting of the practical work in the workers movement of comrades of the Fourth International. This did not seem to me to be the case with comrade Seymour. I did not get the same sense of that kind of analysis, strategic orientation and practical work. Comrade Seymour took a quotation of mine about building a labor party and building a revolutionary wing within it as a criticism—he criticized that, although that's based on Trotsky, that's based on Cannon, that's based on Marx and Engels.

**Seymour:** Who? When?

**Le Blanc:** I believe it is, comrade. Building a labor party is part of the Trotskyist arsenal, and building a revolutionary wing within the workers movement and the labor party is part of our arsenal. In any event, you may disagree with that. What I'm interested in, in regard to the comrades of the Spartacist League is: what do you do? What are you doing, in fact? In what way do you offer a genuine, authentic, practical orientation in the active struggles of our time?

I've seen comrades of the Spartacist League do some useful archival work. You published a very fine book of Cannon's writings and speeches. You have been involved in some demonstrations against the Ku Klux Klan, that's been positive. But in terms of the kind of practical work to build a mass workers movement that can win, what are you doing? It's not clear to me that you have an answer to that. I've never heard it, I certainly didn't hear it in comrade Seymour's presentation. And I think it would be most useful, rather than slogging through documents, quoting documents, and for us to be able to either agree with you, or refute you, we would have to slog through the documents,

and that's important, that has value. But if that's all there is, then it doesn't have value. So what we have to do is talk about the practical work of what is to be done by us, the living, now and tomorrow and the next day, and that will advance the discussion, I think, further than the discussion was advanced by the thrust of comrade Seymour's presentation.

### Speaker for the ICL, Keith Anwar

There's a book out in the lobby that you can buy called *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*. Its introduction, full of praise for the ideas of Leon Trotsky and the struggle against fascism, was written by Ernest Mandel. So I'd like to start by asking the United Secretariat just where and when has the United Secretariat ever tried to carry out Trotsky's strategy of proletarian-centered struggle against fascism?

I'm a member of the Amalgamated Transit Union in Chicago. Last January, we organized the labor/black mobilization against the Ku Klux Klan on Martin Luther King's birthday in Springfield, Illinois. The United Secretariat *was not there*. That mobilization involved a struggle to have the Transit Workers Union send a bus down there; it involved those mainly black transit workers in a workers' defense guard, the first that they ever saw. And it involved a political struggle among the unions that have been striking in the so-called "war zone" in central Illinois.

Apparently, the United Secretariat people think that we don't tail the leaders of those struggles enough. But we're the ones that raise a revolutionary program among those workers. We're the ones that call for mass mobilizations and picket lines to shut down the struck facilities and stop the scabbing. And to break with the defeatist strategy of the "corporate campaign." The United Secretariat forces out in Illinois are up to their noses following the betrayals of the trade-union bureaucracy.

On the struggle against fascism. What exactly has the United Secretariat done? During its heyday, it was of basically two political thrusts. On the one hand, you had the Ligue Communiste in France with its strategy of student vanguardism and adventurist confrontations with the police. And on the other hand, you had the Socialist Workers Party in this country calling for the federal troops of the capitalist state to stop racist attacks, at the same time that the SWP itself was debating the Klan. In both cases, what that reflected was a profound lack of confidence in the revolutionary role of the proletariat.

In the late '70s, as has been discussed here, the United Secretariat and all of its tendencies latched on de facto to the anti-Soviet crusade of imperialism. And the mechanism for this political betrayal was the popular front. In 1981, all wings of the United Secretariat supported the election of François Mitterrand in France.

In the aftermath of that election, the fascists in France basically took off. It was the comrades of the Ligue Trotskyiste de France that were the ones that organized united-front action with a core of 200 workers in Rouen against the attacks of the fascists. It was the Spartacist League here in the United States that organized the mobilization against the Klan in Washington, D.C. in November 1982, that stopped the Klan. And where was the United Secretariat? They were nowhere to be seen.

## Summary by Joseph Seymour

I caught four falsifications of our position, two by Mandel and two by the speakers. There are perhaps more.

The speaker from the Freedom Socialist Party says that we never participate in united fronts—and I will define a united front for sister Breitman a little later—unless we initiate and control it. The Freedom Socialist Party has never been known for being a particularly sharp organization, so I will not accuse the speaker of a conscious falsification. But we can indicate dozens of united fronts we participated in. For example, and this would certainly be close to your hearts, the defense of abortion clinics, which were organized by liberal feminists. Time and again we have been there.

The speaker from the Bolshevik Tendency stated that we had a neutral position in August 1991, in the Kremlin coup and Yeltsin's counter-coup. That's not true. We had a position that the workers should have organized to smash the Yeltsin barricades, because Yeltsin was the main agent of the counterrevolution.

Now, Ernest Mandel, I publicly challenge you to substantiate, or as we say in our crude American way, put up or shut up! Find anything where we endorsed the Lamber-tistes' support to the Messali Hadj group! Find it, read it!

Find anything where we endorsed, or said, that socialism can be built through or after a nuclear war. In fact, three or four years ago we put out a bulletin, *Prometheus Research Series* No. 2, which specifically said that a nuclear war would destroy civilization, if not humanity itself. But perhaps what you mean is something else: that of course we did defend nuclear weapons in the hands of the Soviet and Chinese bureaucratically degenerated and deformed workers states. Because if they didn't have those nuclear weapons, they would be nuked. There would be no Vietnamese Revolution; there would be no Cuban Revolution. Korea would be irradiated rubble. And anybody who doesn't think that really has enormous illusions

in American imperialism.

The united front is an *action*, it is not a program. It is not a party, it is not a permanent organization, it is not a political bloc—it's an action—*action*. Strike together and march separately. We "don't participate in united fronts, we do nothing, we're abstentionist"—leitmotif. A comrade gave one example, the Springfield anti-Klan mobilization, involving not only unions but even black bourgeois politicians, because as we all know, we can have a united front "with the devil and his grandmother." Two weeks ago—I live in California, in Oakland—I was involved in smashing up the Nazi apologists. Interestingly, we don't take credit, there were a number of small, ostensible Trotskyist organizations involved. We initiated it, we were the main force. Now, there is a sizable—and I guess you'd have to call it "Socialist Inaction"—United Secretariat group in the Bay Area. Guess what? They weren't there.

We "have nothing to do with the labor movement." Most people know that there's a man called Geronimo Pratt, he was a leader of the Black Panther Party. He was framed up and has been in prison, what now, 22 years? 24 years. So we initiated a united-front protest to free him, and it was supported by a predominantly Latino social employees union in L.A., popularly known as Justice for Janitors.

So, cut the crap! Because what you guys have against us is *not* that we're not engaged in real struggle, *not* that we're not engaged in united fronts, *not* that we don't have anything to do with the labor movement. What you guys have against us is that we're *reds*, and whatever we do, we are known as reds!

Now, as I said before, I think that the heart of USec politics is much better expressed by Paul Le Blanc than the obfuscationist Mandel. And he said, "well, we build a labor party." We all know that the Mensheviks and the Stalinists had a two-stage revolution theory for backward countries. But here we have a two-stage revolution theory for an advanced capitalist country. First, we build a reformist labor party, and then we move it to the left.

No. To begin with, there's not going to be any kind of



Ernest Mandel  
with Pierre Frank,  
around 1980.



labor party in this country unless there are tumultuous class struggles—strikes, protests, an enormous radicalization. What do you think, that you can build a mass labor party in some kind of idiot linear fashion? The conditions which will allow a mass labor party will necessarily be the same conditions which will allow a revolutionary party. Where there's motion to a labor party, in a short time there will either be a revolutionary labor party or a reformist counterrevolutionary labor party. It's not going to be this sort of linear, Kautskyan conception: you know, every day we build this reformist labor party and at some point the workers...No! At best, that's nineteenth century Kautskyanism. At best.

"We have masses, influence, we have MPs in the Brazilian—" You've got nothing! You have nothing!

**Mandel:** Nothing! Zero!

**Seymour:** Let me talk! You know what you have in Brazil? You have a bunch of apparatchiks for Lula! If tomorrow Lula said, "Repudiate the Fourth International, repudiate Trotskyism, repudiate the dictatorship of the proletariat, or you're expelled," you know what would happen? Half of you would be expelled, the other half would repudiate Trotskyism, the guys who were expelled... [Mandel at this point interrupts for a period of minutes before subsiding.] The ones who will repudiate formal Trotskyism will have accused the ones who are being expelled of being ultraleft sectarians, and the ones who are expelled will accuse the other ones of being opportunists.

So, basically, when you strip it clean, all of this stuff is, "Okay you Sparts, you've been around for 30 years, you have 200 people in half a dozen or a dozen countries. So, where are your pretensions?" This is not a new argument in the Trotskyist movement. This is a very old

**Display exposes USec's enthusing over pro-NATO popular front led by rabidly anti-Soviet Mitterrand in 1978 and 1981 French elections. Spartacist intransigently opposed Mitterrand popular front.**



**United Secretariat in the camp of the Popular Front.**



argument in the Trotskyist movement. In the mid-1930s... [Mandel erupts again for several minutes. Shouted exchanges among the speakers, chairman, and audience ensue.]

**Seymour:** I'd hate to see the kind of workers state you would run.

**Mandel:** Or you! It will be like Russia in 1918, exactly like Russia in 1918!

**Seymour:** In the mid-1930s, a significant figure in the French Trotskyist movement split temporarily, to the right. He wrote a letter to Trotsky very critical of the Trotskyist movement, and Trotsky responded [letter to the Political Bureau of the GBL, 13 December 1935]:

"The weightiest argument in the letter, namely, 'Why have the Bolshevik-Leninists remained weak in Germany and in France?' is nothing but an echo of centrist objections, 'Why were you beaten by the Stalinist bureaucracy, by the reactionary coalition in China, etc...?' For quite some time we have been explaining the reasons for these defeats, and we never promised any miracles. Our international work began only in 1929—and not on virgin territory, but on territory saturated with old and powerful organizations, and with new, confused, and often treacherous organizations that claimed adherence to our principles."

Do you know who Trotsky was responding to? A man called Pierre Frank who was an old comrade of Ernest Mandel. Well, our tendency also did not begin and has not operated on virgin political territories. We face powerful Stalinist and social-democratic bureaucracies, petty-bourgeois and bourgeois-nationalist movements, and most of the "Trotskyists" and "revolutionary Marxists" are treacherous opportunists, of which Ernest Mandel's tendency is a good example.

Now I genuinely believe that the tendency led by Ernest Mandel can make a contribution to the building of a revolutionary movement: stop pretending to be Trotskyists! Stop pretending to be revolutionary Marxists! And be honest, that you are left social democrats...

**Mandel:** No, no, no, we are Catholics!

**Chairman:** Stop disrupting.

**Seymour:** Well, if you say so...

**Mandel:** We are agents of the Pope! Everybody knows that!

**Seymour:** The floor is yours.

## Summary by Ernest Mandel

I have a confession to make. I love to speak to hostile audiences. Actually, since more than 60 years I thrive on it. And what happened this evening here makes me very happy. It confirms for me that the great majority of the people here—as I knew before—are completely irrelevant, completely meaningless, completely without any influence on the real process of world revolution, which is the subject of our so-called debate.

So, the only thing I can tell you is, if I would be only addressing this meeting, I would not speak more than three minutes. The useful thing, is that out of this meeting will come a pamphlet, will come a written text which we'll be distributing all around the world, including to your comrades wherever they appear, and give it to them

even free, we won't sell them.

And what we expect, and that I expect even here, is at least two, or three, or four comrades will be a bit shaken up—not convinced, of course you are not convinced by a "traitor"—but a bit shaken up; start to think with their own heads and say, well, perhaps the infallible leadership of the Spartacist League is not so infallible after all. Perhaps they missed some points, perhaps they misrepresented *very slightly, very slightly* the traitor Mandel, and let's think it over. If I have three or four people here on this floor thinking along these lines, I consider the work to have been useful.

There is something strange, you know, which these comrades of the Spartacist League will have to explain to the audience and to themselves. They wrote me five or six letters, with the following words: "Dear comrade Mandel." Signed, "Fraternally yours," or even "Most fraternally yours." What is this? You are brothers with a traitor? Goodness! How can you be? How can you capitulate before "Mandelite revisionism" to that point—being brothers with a traitor! So think it over, think it over. Calmly, calmly, calmly. Perhaps *everything* I said is not so wrong.

On the two key questions which I asked the comrades, and which are not small questions—they are tremendous scandals, crimes. I haven't heard any answer, absolutely no answer whatsoever. On the question of the Lambertiste operation together with French imperialism against the FLN. This was done at the time when the comrades of the Spartacist League were members of the so-called International Committee of the Fourth International. They did not speak out a single moment in public anywhere, anywhere, against that crime, covered up by the so-called International Committee of the Fourth International.

Second, on the question of nuclear weapons. What I heard here is a complete confirmation of what I said. Total confirmation! Comrades say: if there weren't a Russian nuclear bomb, a Chinese nuclear bomb, American imperialism would have nuked Chi... Yes, yes, and if there was a nuclear war, what would have happened? If there was a nuclear war, *mankind would have disappeared*. Disappeared! In nuclear ashes! Frankly speaking, I prefer, I prefer American imperialism not to use nuclear weapons than to destroy mankind! For me, [the question of] the destruction of mankind takes precedence as a goal over any other consideration. And I would like to hear an answer on that argument from the comrades of the Spartacist League.

Now, on a series of facts. I mean, it is difficult to discuss with ignorance. I have heard here the idea that substitutionism is somehow a petty-bourgeois, or god knows what, concept. But how can you deny the historical record that the author of the idea of substitutionism was comrade Leon Trotsky? You want me to quote, you want me to print the quotes of it? It is an absolute, historical known fact.

I say I consider this audience largely irrelevant. Otherwise, there is one point on which I would get a bit angry. When I hear people say here that we are petty-bourgeois middle-class representatives of petty-bourgeois middle-class views. This is an insult to the thousands upon thousands of our trade-union militants throughout the world! Try to deny that they exist! You say that they are treacherous, this, that, but that's not what I'm talking about. I said that they exist, that they have led strikes, that they have defended the workers' rights. Try to prove the contrary. ■

Workers Vanguard



# Wohlforth: Who Is This Road Kill?

Young people surfing the Internet might wonder who is that maniac out in cyberspace cheering “Good Going!” to the NATO forces bombing the Bosnian Serbs, raving cynically that those too squeamish to join him in cheering on imperialist slaughter should go out and “organize militant workers into bomb squadrons, rent some bombers from the local Hertz franchise, borrow some bombs from a local Militia group (or pick up some fertilizer and gasoline for a do it yourself project) and do the blasting in a proletarian fashion.” This isn’t some new Dr. Strangelove. The postings are by Tim Wohlforth, a man with a long, and sordid, political history.

Wohlforth was the leader, indeed the founding leader, of the Workers League, the U.S. satellite of Gerry Healy’s British-based “International Committee of the Fourth International” (IC). Although Healy’s organization spectacularly imploded in 1985 and the “founder-leader” himself died in 1989, “Healyism” as a current remains synonymous with brutal gangsterism against opponents inside and outside his organization; with the most wild-eyed swings of political line and the capacity to make the most shameless dirty deals in the pursuit of opportunist advantage. From the early 1960s to the mid-’70s, Tim Wohlforth was Gerry Healy’s American running dog.

Wohlforth resurfaced plying the Internet and the small book lecture circuit with the 1994 publication of his memoirs, *The Prophet’s Children: Travels on the American Left*. Here Wohlforth portrays himself as a saved-again sinner and repentant ex-Leninist. Sniveling that he was the ultimate victim of the cruel machinations of Gerry Healy—whose brutal “techniques” Wohlforth applied with vigor during his tenure as leader of the Workers League—Wohlforth seeks to hide his crimes in the lying equation of Leninism with Stalinist totalitarianism. Excusing his own eager participation in the cult of Gerry Healy, Wohlforth now argues that all organizations claiming to be Leninist are “cults.”

However dishonest and self-serving, Wohlforth’s amalgams of Leninism with a Stalin-style “cult of personality” are hardly original. In his essay “The Ex-Communist’s Conscience” (*Heretics and Renegades*), Isaac Deutscher incisively captured the consciousness of such “god that failed” anti-communism:

“Having broken with a party bureaucracy in the name of communism, the heretic goes on to break with communism

itself. He claims to have made the discovery that the root of the evil goes far deeper than he at first imagined, even though his digging for that ‘root’ may have been very lazy and very shallow....

“As a rule the intellectual ex-communist ceases to oppose capitalism. Often he rallies to its defence, and he brings to this job the lack of scruple, the narrow-mindedness, the disregard for truth, and the intense hatred with which Stalinism has imbued him.”

Just replace “Stalinism” with “Healyism,” and Deutscher’s perspicacious words perfectly capture the “conscience” of Tim Wohlforth.

Just as the idea that socialism was the “god that failed” served an earlier generation of ex-Communists in their embrace of “democratic” imperialism, Wohlforth is only alibiing his own accommodation to American imperialist rule. In the pages of the U.S. social-democratic paper *In These Times*, Wohlforth hailed the U.S. invasions of Haiti and Somalia and promoted the NAFTA “free trade” rape of Mexico. His unctuous pleas to the imperialists to “Give War a Chance” (*In These Times*, 26 July 1993) in the former Yugoslavia have been answered in the massive NATO bombing of the Bosnian Serbs—and he’s delighted. In this, Wohlforth is just one of many erstwhile American 1960s antiwar activists and New Left radicals who have become “laptop bombardiers” (as Alexander Cockburn nimbly labeled them) urging the military intervention of U.S. imperialism in the name of “democracy.” But that is not all he is.

## Time Wounds All Heels

A man with Tim Wohlforth’s political history ought to keep his mouth shut. But then he never had any sense of shame. In his earlier incarnation, Wohlforth fancied himself a great Trotskyist leader (second, of course, to Healy). With the same sense of modesty, now from the other side of the class line, he chose as the title for his wretched reminiscences *The Prophet’s Children*, an allusion to Isaac Deutscher’s magisterial trilogy on Trotsky: *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed*, *The Prophet Outcast*. Seeking to pose as something other than the political cipher he was, Wohlforth fills his book with irrelevant quotes from his FBI files, noting such world-historic events as his presence at one or another demonstration.

From beginning to end, Wohlforth’s memoirs are a self-serving lie—sometimes outright, sometimes by omission,

often by twisting events to suit his purpose. Wohlforth nonetheless manages to indict himself simultaneously as a bully and as a walking advertisement for the Moscow Trials, i.e., he is a man who, with very little pressure, can be made to say or do anything.

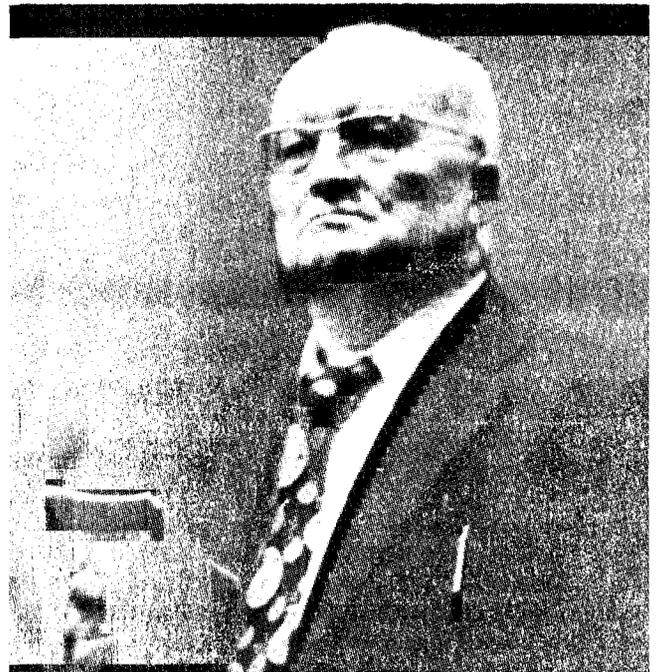
The record of the origins of the Spartacist tendency as a faction in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and our relations with Wohlforth/Healy, which Wohlforth so grotesquely distorts, are fully documented and available in our *Marxist Bulletin* series. Our theoretical journal and documentary repository *Spartacist* and our newspaper *Workers Vanguard*, all available in bound volumes, have covered the subsequent history.

When Wohlforth grudgingly admits that we Spartacists were correct and principled, as he does several times, of course it's because he is so cynical that none of it matters to him in the least. Nor does the fact that his organization was just what we said it was—a fraud which destroyed subjective revolutionaries.

In the early 1960s, we got a firsthand view of Gerry Healy extracting false confessions, glorying in lies and slanders, deliberately forcing poor unfortunates into unprincipled positions. This drove us into hard and prolonged opposition to Healyism more than three decades ago. But not Wohlforth. In the pursuit of supreme authority for himself, he served as Healy's American satrap and in the process did terrible damage to the struggle for revolutionary Marxism in the U.S.

Together with those who went on to found our organization, Wohlforth was a leader of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) in the SWP in the early 1960s. The SWP, then led by Farrell Dobbs, had been the historic organization of orthodox Trotskyism in the U.S., continuing the fight for the Leninist program begun when the founding American Trotskyists (expelled from the CP) published the first *Militant* on 15 November 1928. The nucleus of the RT coalesced in 1961 from the leadership of the SWP's Young Socialist Alliance, founded several years earlier. The RT opposed the SWP's rightward degeneration, in the first instance when the SWP leadership embraced Fidel Castro's peasant-based guerrilla movement as the modern-day equivalent of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks. While defending the Cuban Revolution and hailing the defeat of U.S. imperialism, the RT argued that the outcome of the social revolution as it unfolded in Cuba could only parallel the product of the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution, i.e., a bureaucratically deformed workers state. The leadership of a revolutionary internationalist Trotskyist workers party was necessary to mobilize the proletariat in its own class interests.

In its enthusiasm for Castro, the SWP leadership came to adopt the liquidationist perspective of Michel Pablo, who had emerged as the central leader of the shattered remnants of the Fourth International in Europe at the end of World War II. Impressionistically concluding that the creation of deformed workers states in Eastern Europe was evidence that the Stalinists were capable of playing an "objectively revolutionary role," Pablo argued for the liquidation of Trotskyist forces into the mass Stalinist parties as left pressure groups. This obviated the need for Trotskyist parties to lead the struggle for socialist revolution in the West and for political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracies



Spartacist

**Gerry Healy, Wohlforth's former puppet master makes appearance at January 1977 London meeting called to protest IC's slanderous campaign branding "honest revisionist" Joseph Hansen and George Novack as GPU accomplices.**

in the East and correspondingly destroyed the Fourth International as the nucleus of a disciplined world party of socialist revolution.

In 1953, the SWP had waged a fight, albeit partial and belated, against this revisionism. The SWP broke from Pablo's International Secretariat and formed the International Committee, whose other major components were the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste and Gerry Healy's British Socialist Labour League (SLL). The RT was impressed with the SLL's effective defense, at least on paper, of authentic Trotskyism. The SLL's 1961 document, *The World Prospect for Socialism*, for example, was a powerful argument for the necessity for revolutionary internationalist leadership.

At the time, we didn't know that Healy's Trotskyist orthodoxy was a temporary literary pose quite at variance with his actual practice. In fact, Healy had spent most of the 1950s mired in the Nye Bevan wing of the British Labour Party, following the same Pabloist deep-entry perspective which he later claimed to oppose. His newfound insistence on the necessity for revolutionary leadership had been adopted to attract a layer of talented British Communist Party intellectuals and some trade unionists who were drawn to Trotskyism following the Soviet Stalinist repression of the 1956 Hungarian workers uprising.

In 1962 we got our first taste of Healy's organizational methods when—through the agency of none other than Tim Wohlforth—Healy caused an unprincipled split in the RT. Hoping to keep the SWP in the IC's orbit through conciliatory organizational maneuvers, Healy attempted to coerce members of the RT into repudiating their view that the SWP was no longer a revolutionary party. Wohlforth presented Healy's ultimatum that the RT sign a statement

renouncing its characterization of the SWP as centrist or lose the support of the IC.

The majority of the RT, led by Jim Robertson and also Geoff White, made clear that while they were willing to abide by international discipline and accept the majority decision, they would not repudiate their own political views, recognizing that this would destroy their credibility as revolutionaries. But credibility—revolutionary or otherwise—was never a concern of Wohlforth, whose main animating principle was to be *the* leader, no matter of what. Healy/Wohlforth split with the RT majority. Wohlforth took a handful of people and formed the “Reorganized Minority Tendency.”

This was a criminal blow to the fight for a revolutionary party in the U.S. The left-wing opposition to the SWP’s continuing rightward march was split into two tendencies that had no apparent programmatic difference. This made the opposition look like a bunch of light-minded, inveterate factionalists in the eyes of many SWP cadres and demoralized and drove away some of the tendency’s supporters.

For his next act, Wohlforth set up the RT for expulsion from the SWP in 1963. The SWP was charted on a “unity” course with the European Pabloites. Despite slavish attempts to ingratiate himself with the Dobbs leadership, Wohlforth, who was seen as the personification of Healy’s “anti-Pabloite” IC, came in for a lot of heat. To prove his “loyalty,” Wohlforth (with the spine of an amoeba) submitted a document to the 1963 pre-conference discussion falsely alleging that he had broken with the RT because it had a “split perspective” with the SWP and had advocated acts in violation of party discipline.

The SWP leadership seized on Wohlforth’s lying fabrications to launch a Control Commission “investigation” which led directly to the expulsion of the RT. This bureaucratic political expulsion of the left oppositionists was the organizational handmaiden to the decisive slide of the SWP into abject reformism two years later.

## As Wohlforth Dismembers It

Wohlforth’s role in our expulsion merits not the slightest mention in his “historical memories.” As for Healy’s 1962 ultimatum which divided the RT on a false basis, Wohlforth breezily writes. “Robertson, quite understandably, screamed Stalinism, and his people refused to sign.” You would have no idea that for years afterward it was an article of faith for Wohlforth that our refusal to kowtow to Healy’s techniques of blackmail and false confessions—not only in 1962 but also at the 1966 London IC conference—was the *sine qua non* proof of the “anti-internationalism” of the Spartacists. Wohlforth now presents the difference between Robertson’s principled integrity and his own prostrate opportunism as a triviality.

After we were expelled from the SWP, Wohlforth and his supporters engineered their own expulsion in 1964 and set up an organization called the “American Committee for the Fourth International.” The radical public was confronted with two new, self-avowed Trotskyist organizations. Although we remained wary of Healy/Wohlforth’s organizational practices, we could not be reconciled to a split which was not based on clear *programmatic* differences.

We wrote Wohlforth suggesting unity negotiations. He vacillated for over a year until Healy intervened and forced



Humanities Press

**Origins:  
Wohlforth in  
1950 with  
leading New  
Deal figure  
and 1948  
Progressive  
Party candidate,  
Henry Wallace.**

a unity agreement in late 1965. In his memoirs, Wohlforth more or less admits that his paramount concern was, as always, himself: “I was less than enthusiastic about the idea.... In any unified organization I would find myself a minority in a hostile, cliquish political atmosphere.” In a fit of pique (and in his only known act of defiance of Healy) Wohlforth refused Healy’s direct order to attend the April 1966 IC conference in London where unity was to be consummated. Once again revealing his toady mentality he explains: “I felt I could not openly oppose the unification, but I did not believe in it.”

The keystone of the 1966 conference was Healy’s megalomaniacal declaration that the fight against Pabloism was finished and that he and his “International Committee” were the Fourth International. Thus, Healy went berserk over the statement of the Spartacist delegation made by Jim Robertson contending that the fight against Pabloism had yet to be completed. Noting that “we have not done very well, in our opinion, in smashing the Pabloites,” Robertson pointed to the existence of “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.”

When Robertson missed the next session of the conference due to illness and exhaustion, Healy demanded that he denounce himself as a petty-bourgeois American chauvinist or be expelled from the conference. Robertson refused, declaring: “We believe that it is a violation of Leninist practice to demand that a comrade affirm to his comrades what he does not believe.” The entire Spartacist delegation was then expelled.

Wohlforth denied that there was anything bureaucratic involved in our expulsion and screamed that our refusal to buckle under to Healy was further evidence of an “anti-internationalism” derived “from American conditions of working class passivity.” (A number of years later while still head of the WL, Wohlforth himself was raked over the coals by Healy for being an “American pragmatist” because he bought an American rather than a British offset press).

Now Wohlforth confides, almost 30 years after the fact, that although he thought “Healy had a point” about

Robertson missing a conference session, "I also believe that Healy was just as infuriated by Robertson's political criticisms of his group. He had suddenly become aware that the Robertson group had a mind of its own (to its credit) and did not worship at the feet of the SLL." Wohlforth does not stop to dilate on what this observation reveals about himself.

### A Political Quick Change Artist

In his book Wohlforth offers as evidence of his "theoretical" productivity his authorship in July 1961 of a draft RT discussion document, "Cuba and the Deformed Workers States," which was the first RT document to recognize Castro's Cuba as a deformed workers state qualitatively similar to the Soviet Union and East Europe. Actually, Wohlforth's document was his episodic response to collective discussion and debate within the tendency. In his document Wohlforth simply tried out the views held by the then-evolving majority of the RT—only to drop them a few months later.

While flawed methodologically, "Cuba and the Deformed Workers States" was a valuable contribution to the RT discussion leading to an understanding of how the Cuban Revolution—and by extension the peasant-based social revolutions in Yugoslavia and China—led to a deformed workers state. In exceptional historical circumstances such as when the bourgeois state is already shattered or significantly weakened by other forces and where the working class is unable to act as an organized contender for power because of the absence of an authoritative Leninist vanguard, forces under petty-bourgeois leadership can smash capitalist property relations. Far from negating the need for Trotskyist leadership, as the Pabloites saw it, these postwar social overturns were a vindication of the revolutionary Marxist understanding laid out in Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution that: 1) in backward and colonial countries democratic tasks such as national independence could not be

realized short of smashing the rule of capital; and 2) only under the leadership of the working class led by a Bolshevik Party could the door be opened to genuine socialism through the international extension of that revolution, particularly in the advanced capitalist countries.

The public expression of the evolving views of the RT in 1961 was the resolution, "The Cuban Revolution," submitted to the December 1961 convention of the Young Socialist Alliance—published in *Young Socialist Forum* No. 15 (December 1961). Both documents are available today as part of our *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8, "Cuba and Marxist Theory," which details the development of the Cuba discussion within the RT.

As *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8 notes (but Wohlforth fails to) Wohlforth renounced "Cuba and the Deformed Workers States" soon after he wrote it. In the introduction to his 1964 "magnum opus," *The Theory of Structural Assimilation*, Wohlforth asserted: "The first discussions of this document immediately convinced me that I was utterly and totally on the wrong track." Hardly. Wohlforth's change of heart on Cuba had absolutely nothing to do with his own intellectual ruminations. On the contrary his about-face was a direct reflection of his obedience to Healy who inanely insisted that there had been no social transformation in Cuba.

This was part of Healy's method of "fighting" revisionism by simply putting a minus where the Pabloites put a plus. To prove their "orthodoxy" against the Pabloites' view that Cuba was a "healthy workers state," the IC simply denied reality and insisted Cuba remained a "weak capitalist state." As we noted in our statement to the 1966 IC conference, "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."

For his 12 years as head of the Workers League, Wohlforth adamantly peddled the line that Cuba remained

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26 September 1966

adventurism now - opportunism later?

Red Guard Frenzy Reflects Growing Crisis Within China

by Fred Mueller

The Chinese Revolution removed one quarter of humanity from the orbit of imperialism. Its development is of the most crucial significance to the world. The Chinese Revolution is a decisive step towards the final victory of the proletarian revolution. The Chinese Revolution is a decisive step towards the final victory of the proletarian revolution.



From criticism to adulation. *Bulletin* initially supported neither side in Chinese "Cultural Revolution," a vicious interbureaucratic conflict. Then enthused over Maoist "Red Guards" after Healy cracked the whip.

.....No Neutrality! Defend Red Guards.....

by Moby Jones

Hands Off China!

10 April 1967



It is the task of every revolutionary to take sides and participate fully in every manifestation of the international class struggle. Rather than to stand by and comment on the struggle in the Chinese revolution, as we have seen, there can be no neutrality. We must see every struggle within the context of the international situation. The role of the Soviet bureaucracy and the Chinese bureaucracy must be assessed in relation to imperialism and the working class.

and the bureaucracy on the other. But openness to the struggle to build a revolutionary leadership is essential. At such times it is not a question of seeking ideal answers in the books or in historical precedents, but of analyzing the actual struggle objectively and maintaining the class line in conflict. For the Workers League and the International Committee of the Fourth International the choice is clear: the Red Guards and their workers allies are fighting to defend and to extend the gains of the Chinese Revolution. The youth, as elsewhere, have begun the fight in China. They have led the way for the entire working class in a new era. However, to go on to call the workers, peasants and students behind a revolutionary party.

capitalist. Yet in his memoirs he relegates his political prostration before Healy on this question to one footnote which says laconically, "I accepted Healy's view on the matter."

Wohlforth and Mao's Red Guards

Wohlforth's capacity for quick and complete political reversals in obeisance to the dictates of the IC's "founder leader" can also be seen in the case of Mao's Cultural Revolution in China. At first, the WL's *Bulletin* (26 September 1966) had run an article quite correctly opposing both sides in this sordid and violent battle between two wings of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy. Yet one week after Healy's SLL had published an article supporting Mao's Red Guards, the *Bulletin* (30 January 1967) was singing the same tune.

As Wohlforth dismembers it in his memoirs, the WL had no position other than support to the Red Guards, which he now tries to alibi as the result of political naiveté:

"Also it appeared to us that Mao was utilizing the students as a battering ram to reform the bureaucratized party and apparatus. Mao was certainly doing this, but (and this is a huge 'but,' which we blindly overlooked) his aim was to regain his own personal power over Chinese society."

Nonetheless, Wohlforth writes that "the Red Guard campaign did give the Workers League a bit of color," adding, "It is too bad that we were so politically wrong, as it was a very exciting and effective campaign!" Who cares if it is right or wrong as long as it's "fun"?

For us, the Healyites' embrace of the Red Guards and the other serious departures from Trotskyism during this period resolved what we had seen as the longstanding contradiction of the IC between a formally correct program and an abusive bureaucratic regime. The SLL and WL simultaneously began to voice support for an utterly fictitious, classless "Arab Revolution," which soon led them to embrace despotic bourgeois-nationalist regimes throughout the Middle East. From here the IC subsequently evolved into the chief publicity agents, apologists and fingermen for these same murderous regimes—a source of considerable cash benefits for Healy's organization (see "Healyism Implodes," *Spartacist* No. 36-37, Winter 1985-86).

Intellectuals With the Whip

In line with his new "democratic" persona, Wohlforth does not portray the RT fight over Cuba as motivated by



Workers Vanguard

Spartacist contingent in 1972 Boston antiwar march on Charlestown Naval Yard. During Vietnam War, SL put forward revolutionary internationalist perspective, calling for military victory to NLF and North Vietnamese DRV and agitating for labor strikes in the U.S.

revolutionary opposition to the liquidationist course of the SWP. Rather he writes: "Our main concern was the lack of democratic forms of rule in Cuba." His book is riddled with pronouncements that Trotskyism was "consistent with, was actually the fulfillment of, the democratic ideals of the American nation." This is, of course, consistent with Wohlforth's current view of blood-drenched U.S. imperialism as the vehicle for the realization of those "democratic ideals" from Haiti to Somalia to Bosnia.

Wohlforth opens his memoirs noting that a critical examination of the history of American Trotskyism is vital to "help us extract the kernel of valid thought from Trotskyism's encrusted Leninist shell." But what connection is there to even a kernel of Trotskyism in Wohlforth's social-democratic loyalty oath, "I continue to believe in the socialist ideal, which I see as the fulfillment of the American democratic dream"? Where does the most elementary Marxism figure in this? The answer is that it plainly doesn't.

Indeed, Wohlforth's description of what attracted him to the "communist ideal" leaves one wondering if he was ever a Marxist. He did join the Marxist movement, but evidently with the mindset of a liberal who thought he was joining a mafia-like conspiracy. One is reminded of Theodore Draper's description of the former anarchist Robert Minor after he joined the Communist Party: "If as an anarchist he had believed that politics was a filthy business, as a Communist he still seemed to believe it was—only now it was his business."

In one section of his book, Wohlforth describes the Stalinists as "seekers of power for their own purposes" and recalls George Orwell's phrase about "intellectuals with the whip." These are apt descriptions of Wohlforth himself. Even now when he is trying to pose as a kinder, gentler '90s kind of guy (who couldn't even kill a tree to print his book but rather had it published on recycled paper and printed with "soy ink"...but naturally with no union bug), he can't restrain his glee for violence against those who get in his way.

Wohlforth fondly recalls as "great fun" the 1971 conference of the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) where

the WL joined the SWP in a vicious and prolonged violent physical attack against Progressive Labor/Students for a Democratic Society (PL/SDS) and the SL for protesting the presence of Democratic Party Senator Vance Hartke.

The SWP's policies in the antiwar movement exemplified its rightward degeneration into the most abject reformism. Pushing slogans like the social-patriotic "Bring Our Boys Home," the SWP consciously sought to be the "best builders" of the right wing of the "movement." Their strategy was to play to that section of the American bourgeoisie which was growing increasingly uncomfortable with the U.S.' losing war and waning prestige. Through "coalitions" such as NPAC, the SWP provided platforms for capitalist politicians and other spokesmen for "America's best interests."

Thus, the *sine qua non* of SWP policy was to *hide* the truth about the nature of the U.S. imperialist war in Vietnam, *never* linking it to the capitalist system. They worked hard to maintain "respectability," protecting their bourgeois-liberal allies against the young militants of the burgeoning New Left. The SWP disdained the latter as "ultraleftists," baited them as "violent" and even collaborated with the cops against them.

The SWP was rightly scorned by these youth, many of whom moved rapidly from initial pacifist, antiwar sentiments to support for the other side—the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF). This propelled sections of them toward a militant, if vague, opposition to "the system" as a whole. Within this wing, the Spartacist League (SL) sought to and did win radicalizing youth to a broader proletarian revolutionary perspective through our interventions in antiwar conferences and demonstrations. We championed military victory to the NLF and the defeat of our "own" bourgeoisie. "Our boys" were the heroic Vietnamese workers and peasants who were waging a revolutionary war against Yankee imperialism. We argued that to end imperialist war required bringing down the whole system of rapacious American capitalism through a workers revolution led by a Leninist vanguard party.

While Wohlforth grudgingly acknowledges the SWP's



Bulletin

Young Socialist

1971 NPAC conference (left). Workers League joined with SWP in violent physical attack on SL and PL supporters protesting keynote speaker, Democratic Senator Hartke. SWP honcho Fred Halstead, who led the attack, shown at right sporting social-patriotic "antiwar" placard.

utter reformism, he declares that “on the whole” the SWP’s “strategy was principled and successful” and that the WL “ended up tailing the SWP-YSA.” This brings us to the 1971 NPAC conference.

The SWP thought it had made the big time when Hartke signed on to the NPAC Steering Committee and was billed as the featured speaker at the 1971 NPAC conference. They were determined to prove their reliability to their newly won bourgeois ally. Two weeks before the conference the SWP had assembled and trained a goon squad numbering 200 to 300 people.

Spartacists and members of the PL/SDS opposed Hartke’s presence and effectively shouted down this representative of the imperialist bourgeoisie that was bombing Vietnam. Wohlforth writes that the WL was also “opposed to Hartke’s presence.” They had a funny way of showing it! Far from raising a peep of protest, Wohlforth was right in there with SWP honchos like Fred Halstead throwing punches against those who did oppose Hartke.

Wohlforth says that what really got his dander up was “the attempt to disrupt” a speech by social democrat Victor Reuther. Reuther was a Cold War anti-Communist union bureaucrat whose “opposition” to the war was designed to prevent any radicalization in the ranks of labor against U.S. imperialism. We countered Reuther with several chants of “For Labor Strikes Against the War!” In any case, all protest had long ended by the time Fred Halstead walked down the aisle and grabbed a young, slightly built SDS member in a choke hold from behind. We moved to defend PL/SDS but when it became clear that they were being excluded en masse we attempted to leave the hall in protest. All of us were repeatedly and gratuitously attacked *while trying to get out*.

Wohlforth positively reveled in this bloody assault: “We, as well as others in the audience, happily joined in the action and started moving the PLers and Sparts out. It was great fun, and those in the audience were so unanimous in their hatred of this attempt to break up a democratic conference that the hall was clear in ten minutes....” The attack actually lasted far longer. As for the audience support this is simply a lie. Every other tendency tried in some way to

distance themselves from the SWP’s gangsterism. Even a Communist Party-dominated workshop held the following day put forward a motion condemning the goon attack. In the aftermath of the NPAC conference, the SWP’s *Militant* could point to only one tendency that wholeheartedly supported the actions of their marshals—Wohlforth’s Workers League.

Wohlforth so thoroughly enjoyed violence that it became a trademark of the Workers League, just as it was of Healy’s SLL. In 1967, when the WL was in the throes of its campaign for the Red Guards, the *Bulletin* (25 September) alibied a thug attack by PL on members of the SWP, writing that PL “are not incorrect in assuming that these are people who are scabbing on the Chinese Revolution. Their hostility is quite understandable.” Four years later, longing for a piece of the reformist action in NPAC, the WL joined the SWP in attacking PL.

The one constant is that for Wohlforth’s WL the fist was the means for imposing “the line.” Incredibly, Wohlforth writes that he was unaware that Healy practiced such thuggery internally. As we wrote in a 1967 article protesting the vicious beating in London of Ernie Tate, a supporter of Ernest Mandel’s United Secretariat, by goons from Healy’s SLL:

“Such tactics applied internally are not new to Healy. We have not previously spoken of the atmosphere of physical intimidation that surrounded the April London Conference, but it was present. We have since heard well-authenticated accounts of the use by the SLL leadership of calculated violence (‘punch-ups’) to silence internal critics.”

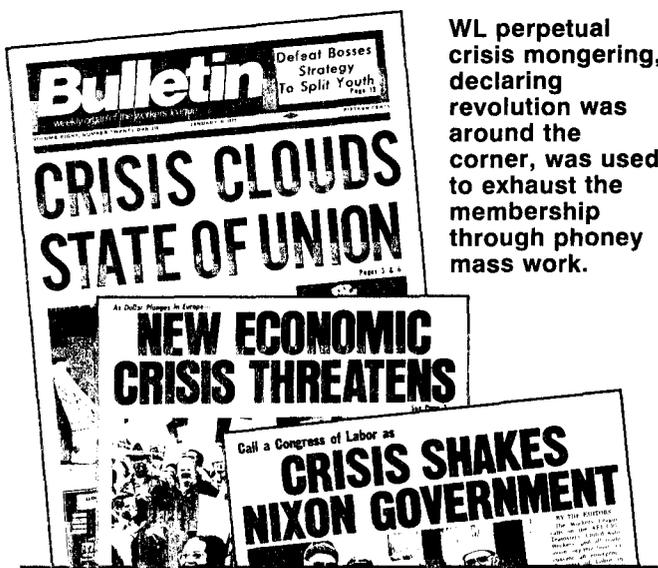
—“Oust Healy!” *Spartacist* No. 9,  
January-February 1967

If we Spartacists, who were not privy to the internal goings-on of the International Committee, had heard such accounts, can anybody really believe that the leader of the IC’s American section had not? Wohlforth *had* to have heard the stories, and if he didn’t try to confirm them it was only because he didn’t care.

## The “Ant Theory” of Party Building

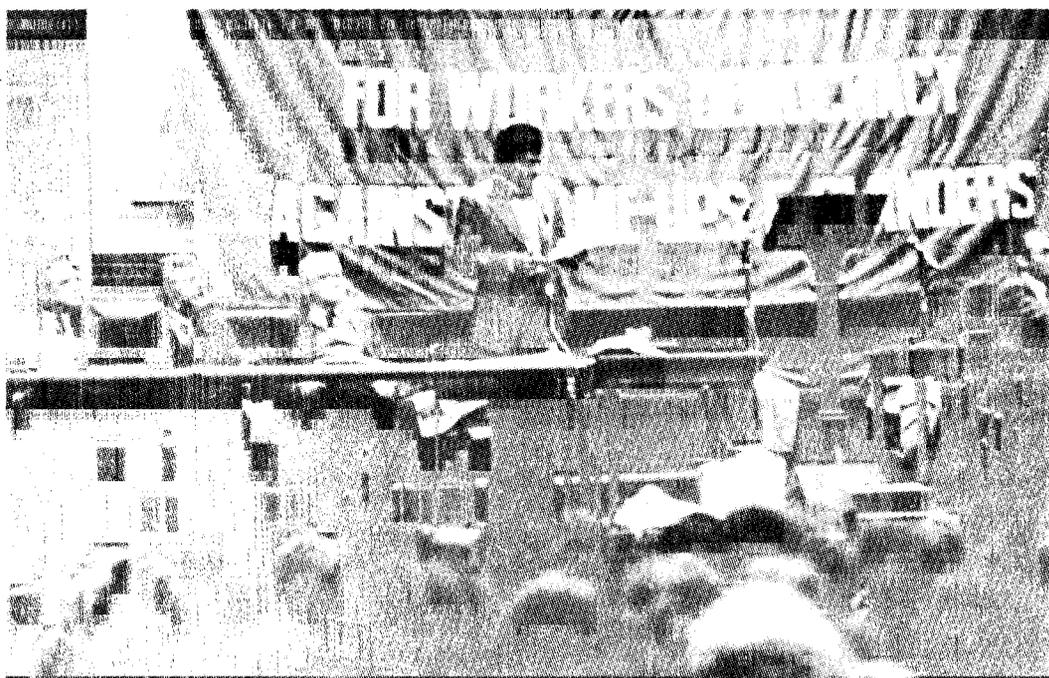
Modeled on Healy’s SLL, with its over-frequent press and phony “mass youth work,” the WL squeezed its members dry, both financially and politically. The membership was driven to exhaustion with the constant refrain that the “crisis” of capitalism meant that revolution was just around the corner; they were also kept scared and confused through the combination of Healy/Wohlforth’s phony “dialectics” shell game and a deranged security fetishism in which anyone and everyone could be a potential “agent.” We used to say that Wohlforth had the ant theory of party building—he just kept climbing over the dead bodies.

Wohlforth is compelled to acknowledge some of this in his memoirs with the following description of WL branch meetings: “Each branch meeting was dominated by attacks against comrades who failed to sell sufficient tickets to an event or to sell papers or subscriptions, or who failed in some other fashion. The comrades were forced to confess their own middle-class weaknesses.” What is left unsaid is that he was the enforcer of all this. Yet while Wohlforth thought he was the “intellectual with the whip,” the reality was that he was the wimp under the whip of Gerry Healy. The background to Wohlforth’s demise as head of the WL is particularly instructive.



**WL perpetual crisis mongering, declaring revolution was around the corner, was used to exhaust the membership through phoney mass work.**

Spartacist



**1977 London family reunion of fake-Trotskyists protesting IC slanders against SWP leaders. On podium from left: Ernest Mandel, Tim Wohlforth (who spoke for SWP), George Novack and Tariq Ali (speaking).**

Things were not going well for the WL in the early 1970s. Their fraudulent "mass youth work" under which boot-camp discipline was imposed on politically raw ghetto youth who had been hoodwinked into attending WL conferences and events with promises of dances, sports and talent shows, was a disaster. Walking the other side of the street, the WL's "union work" consisted mostly of crude calls on the Cold War AFL-CIO bureaucracy to form a "labor party." At the height of the antiwar movement and in the immediate aftermath of numerous ghetto explosions, the WL's program for a "labor party" said *not a word* about the Vietnam War or the struggle for black liberation. In short, it was an open accommodation to the racist, anti-communist labor bureaucracy.

This profile was not very attractive to the New Left collectives moving toward proletarian revolutionary politics who were seeking discussions both with the SL and the WL. At one meeting with the Buffalo Marxist Collective in 1972, Wohlforth raved, "The working class hates faggots, women's libbers and hippies, and so do we!" (Quite a contrast to his present oh-so-politically-correct "sensitivity" to feminism.) Mostly he simply refused to talk with groups who were also investigating the SL. Several of these were won to the SL, tripling our membership in the early 1970s.

Our success and Wohlforth's failures obviously created some pressure within the WL. Suddenly in 1973, the WL reversed its longstanding policy of forcibly excluding us from their public events and we were allowed to engage in political debate at a WL public class series in New York. According to Wohlforth's book, this drove Healy into a rage. Wohlforth was ordered to London, almost deposed as head of the WL, and then finally ordered to clean out the "centrists" from his organization. Ever willing to serve, Wohlforth spent the next year purging almost the entire leadership of the Workers League. In a 1974 article titled "Whatever Happened to the Workers League?" we listed 17 prominent cadre who seemed to have disappeared and figure tangentially, if at all, in Wohlforth's memoirs.

Finally Healy hypocritically stepped in to try to stop the hemorrhaging. Wohlforth was terminated as the leader of the WL at the organization's August 1974 summer camp, when Healy charged that Wohlforth's companion, Nancy Fields, was a CIA agent. Stalin is reported to have told the Lovestoneite leaders of the early American Communist Party when they were in Moscow, "By the time you get back only your wives will support you." After 12 years as head of the WL, that's all Wohlforth had left. In the end even his long-time sycophant Freddy Mazelis wouldn't support him, and Healy forced Wohlforth to nominate Mazelis as his successor.

In politics you have to be pretty inept to lose the support of an entire organization of which you were the established leader! Yet throughout his whole political career, in each and every case where he was the principal leader or spokesman for a tendency, Wohlforth emerged from the factional battlefield with a minority of support. A few years after getting dumped from the WL, Wohlforth crawled back into the SWP. Here he was little more than an artifact for the Barnes leadership to put on display as a horrible example of what would happen to anyone who considered fighting for orthodox Trotskyism.

In his memoirs Wohlforth nauseatingly emotes over an incident, which he says led him to again leave the SWP. Describing Clifton DeBerry trying to kill a butterfly in an SWP meeting Wohlforth writes: "It was Stalinism to crush the butterflies of the world, the beautiful but perhaps not always practical and, occasionally, very utopian thoughts and dreams of men and women in the interests of apparatuses." Obviously Wohlforth thinks of himself as that "butterfly." In reality, he was the ultimate rat and toady for the Stalin-style apparatus of Gerry Healy.

### **The Cult of Gerry and Its Real Victims**

Wohlforth wrecked dozens of potential communist cadre the WL won out of the New Left in the late 1960s and early 1970s and convinced hundreds of young black and

Hispanic youth that "Trotskyism" was nothing but a cynical con game. Doubtless, the scores of former WL members who were chewed up and spit out by Healy/Wohlforth's machine would take great exception to Wohlforth's whining statement at his book talk at New York's Tamiment Library in October 1994 that he was the ultimate victim: "The victim of the cult, the worst victim of the cult, is the cult leader. Because everyone believes in him, everyone agrees with him, and that destroys his moral fibre, it destroys his rationality."

Wohlforth's loathsome self-pity is a sniveling alibi for his own sordid political past. The whole rationalizing premise of his memoirs, his bridge to embracing "democratic imperialism," is simply a variant on the old anti-communist canard that Leninism equals Stalinism equals fascism. To this end he devotes some five pages to the rather inconsequential figure of Lyn Marcus (a.k.a. Lyndon LaRouche) who degenerated in the 1970s from an ostensible, albeit crackpot Marxist into a paranoid, raving, fascistic fanatic.

Marcus was at one time a member of the SWP, then of Wohlforth's American Committee for the Fourth International and very briefly a member of Spartacist. (We parted ways when Marcus declared that everything he wrote was sacrosanct and could not be edited by anyone.) Now Wohlforth writes of Marcus/LaRouche: "The old Trotskyist, a member of my own small organization, had emerged as a Fascist! Shocking as the political evolution has been, I am most struck by the elements of *continuity* in LaRouche's thinking."

In the service of boosting his current "anti-cult" pretensions, Wohlforth claims that he was "disturbed by LaRouche's thinking process" way back when and was the first to think that something "was amiss." Yet here is what Wohlforth thought of LaRouche's "thinking process" in the 1965 discussion between Spartacist and ACFI: "We have 99 percent political and theoretical agreement with Marcus on all questions." In response to Wohlforth, Jim Robertson noted: "I can only say that if you are 99 percent in agreement with it, I will make the prediction that before long you will find that the 1 percent is an extremely large 1 percent.... Basically it is a right-wing and objectivist document" (see "Conversations with Wohlforth," *Marxist Bulletin* No. 3, part iv).

In the mid-1960s, Marcus' deranged economic ravings dovetailed with Wohlforth/Healy's own insistence that capitalism was in its final "crisis." Now, Marcus as fascist serves Wohlforth in tarring the entire left with the brush of LaRouchism and Healyism. Lamenting that "There have been far too many Healys in the Trotskyist movement," Wohlforth lists "Juan Posados, Nahuel Moreno and James Robertson" and argues that "Pierre Lambert, Ted Grant, Tony Cliff, Michel Raptis (Pablo) and James P. Cannon" all "shared at least some of Healy's characteristics."

This pretty much exhausts the list of the leaders, past and present, of virtually every international tendency which has claimed any allegiance to Trotskyism! Notably absent is David North who became leader of the Workers League following Wohlforth's demise and who has since grabbed Healy's former seat as head of the "International Committee." But perhaps that cuts a little close to the bone for Wohlforth, as North is Wohlforth's heir in carrying forward

the despicable record of Healyism.

As we wrote in our article "Healyism Implodes" (*Spartacist* No. 36-37, Winter 1985-86) following the spectacular collapse of Healy's organization:

"There are two kinds of ostensibly socialist organizations in this world. There are those where, if you read the group's paper and find yourself in agreement, and go and join the organization, it turns out to be pretty much what you expected. As examples: the Communist Party, the American SWP (until fairly recently, at least), the Democratic Socialists of America, the Spartacist League.

"The Healyite organization is of a different kind. It is a political cult. Formations of this sort can come into existence in the workers movement under conditions of a low level of class struggle, where there is therefore a considerable separation between socialist organizations and the movement of the masses, and little chance of corrective interaction. But these objective conditions are not sufficient in themselves. Also required is a leader with the appetite for cultism."

In this respect we cited James Cannon's observation on the cliquist formation around J.R. Johnson (C.L.R. James):

"In order for a cult to exist, it is not enough for a leader to have personal followers—every leader has personal influence more or less—but a cult leader has to be a cultist himself. He has to be a megalomaniac who gets revelations outside the realm of reality. A megalomaniac cult leader is liable to jump in any direction at any time, and all the cultists automatically follow, as sheep follow the bellwether, even into the slaughter house."

—"Factional Struggle and Party Leadership,"  
3 November 1953

The only one who fits this bill on Wohlforth's list of "cult" leaders is Nahuel Moreno who was indeed a charlatan and adventurer much like Healy.

In 1967, after several years of close examination of Wohlforth's political evolution, we made the following evaluation:

"Wohlforth himself is a left-wing intellectual technician—energetic, personally ambitious, short-sighted and unstable. He has now been hired by Healy, reportedly an uneasy relation, Healy knowing something of the low calibre of hireling. But Healy is only the most recent of Wohlforth's mentors and masters. Leaving the Shachtmanite movement for the SWP, Wohlforth fell under the influence of Murry Weiss, then flirted with Pablo, then in 1959 came under the sway of Arne Swaback, as the latter was discovering the virtues of Mao and the 'Great Leap Forward.' Wohlforth then moved to the left for a time, principally under the influence of Shane Mage. Then he took a step to the right, under the tutelage of the state capitalist, Art Philips, as well as the Britisher Healy, and, rationalizing the attempt to draw close to the central leadership of the SWP, declared on breaking with the Spartacist tendency in 1962 that 'the main political fight of the tendency must be directed against the right-wing elements in the Party, the Weiss group and the Swaback tendency.' Throughout, Wohlforth has maintained an underlying elitist, manipulative outlook, hostile and contemptuous of workers democracy."

—"What Is the 'Workers League'?" (SL leaflet)

Wohlforth is now purportedly at work on a book about political "cults." Always a restless pen for hire, he perhaps has high hopes that Christopher Hitchens, Todd Gitlin, Bogdan Denitch and the rest of the social-patriotic crowd cheering U.S. intervention in Bosnia will hail his shallow anti-Leninist ravings at the next "Socialist Scholars" conference. It's unlikely that Wohlforth will get far. As former Spartacist leader Geoff White noted years ago, "Wohlforth is living proof that crime doesn't pay." ■

# For a Bolshevik Workers Party in South Africa!



Spartacist

Striking municipal workers demonstrate in Johannesburg, September 1995: Combative workers movement must break with ANC/SACP nationalist popular front in the fight for black-centered workers republic.

## Letter to the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action

*The following letters from the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) were sent to the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) in Johannesburg, South Africa in Spring 1995. They have been lightly edited and some bracketed insertions have been made by Spartacist.*

9 March 1995

Dear comrades,

Over the past several years, and particularly as historic developments have taken place in South Africa, we have carefully read your materials. As you are aware, in the April 1994 elections the International Communist League called for critical support to the candidates of the Workers' List Party. On a number of issues we have taken up the positions of WOSA in our press, as well as seeking substantive exchanges with representatives of your group when they were in the U.S. or Europe. In particular, we had an exchange of views on the questions of the workers party and permanent revolution when comrades Prof Ndlovu and Neville Alexander were on tour here in late 1993 and 1994.

This letter attempts to go into what appear to us to be some of our principal differences, and more generally to discuss our different strategies for building a revolutionary

workers party in South Africa. These differences derive in part from a different assessment of what is likely to happen in the "new" South Africa, and in part they reflect an underlying strategic-programmatic divide going back to the split in the workers movement at the time of the 1917 October Revolution and to the heritage of Lenin and Trotsky, on which we stand today. We undertake this in the conviction, as we have expressed since the inception of the Spartacist tendency, that the fight to reforge the Fourth International will necessarily involve a revolutionary regroupment of cadres from different currents, through a process of programmatically based splits and fusions.

When representatives of the ICL visited South Africa last fall [1994], they were asked repeatedly by the comrades of WOSA why we call them "left-reformist." Actually, it was not WOSA but the platform of the Workers' List Party which we characterized as left-reformist, in outlining the reasons for our critical support to the WLP in the April 1994 elections. We emphasized the importance of running a working-class party in opposition to the ANC:

"The question of political organization of the proletariat, independent from and in opposition to the nationalist ANC, is a key strategic question for South Africa today. In this regard, the WLP does draw a crude class line and a vote

for it will be seen in South Africa as a vote for a workers party rather than the ANC.”

However, we also spelled out our criticisms of the WLP election manifesto:

“*Never once* does it define itself in reference to the ANC, nor even mention it, which takes some doing in South Africa today. Nor does it raise the need for a *socialist revolution* against the neo-apartheid ANC/NP capitalist regime. While calling for ‘self-defence and a workers’ militia,’ the WLP platform does not call for smashing and replacing the existing capitalist state machine which is the direct continuity of the apartheid state....

“While the WLP speaks of ‘a socialist democracy’ and ‘democratic planning process,’ this is in the spirit of European social democracy rather than the kind of revolutionary regime based on workers councils (soviets) that would be needed in order to expropriate the wealth of the Randlords and crush the bitter-end resistance of the apartheid racists backed by international imperialism.”

—“ANC/De Klerk Deal Is Betrayal of Black Freedom,” *WV* No. 599, 29 April 1994

This article is reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12 (February 1995). Since the April elections, WOSA, which had seemed to us a formation marked by the characteristic contradictions of centrism, appears to have for all practical purposes liquidated its public face into the Workers’ List Party.

We have raised the slogan of a Bolshevik workers party for South Africa in a way clearly and sharply *counterposed* to a reformist party such as the Brazilian Workers Party. The reformist character of a party based on the working class is in no way determined by whether or not it formally claims to stand for socialism as an ultimate goal. The British Labour Party [at the time this letter was written] retains Clause IV, advocating the nationalization of industry, in its constitution. The South African Communist Party (SACP), which is now playing a major role in administering the neo-apartheid capitalist state, has not (yet) formally re-

nounced “Marxism-Leninism.” Nonetheless, both of these parties are manifestly reformist.

We reject the notion that the South African working class must pass through the experience of a mass reformist party before a revolutionary party can develop out of it—a kind of two-stage theory of party building. In the current South African situation key to building a revolutionary party of a mass character is effecting a *left split* in the SACP, which has become the dominant party of the organized proletariat and is rife with inner contradictions.

There is a widespread belief, extending from the Western imperialists to most of the left, that South Africa is now a stable bourgeois democracy. Political conflicts will supposedly be resolved through compromises and deals in the coalition government and parliament and through future elections. Especially on the left, it is assumed that a strong, legally recognized trade-union movement has become a permanent feature of South Africa’s economic and political life.

Contrary to such a view, we believe that the present period of political openness and a coalition government ranging from black African union bureaucrats to Afrikaner bankers is unstable and transitory. Sooner rather than later the Government of National Unity is going to fracture, and South Africa will be thrown into a period of violent political turmoil and conflict. If these conflicts do not center around a class axis, they will be fought along racial, ethnic and tribal lines. When the current, fragile neo-apartheid order breaks down—and it will break down—if the workers movement does not seize state power, various sectors of the desperate non-white population will compete with each other over available scarce resources. Thus the black working class and plebeian masses *cannot simply defend* the gains and positions of organizational strength achieved during the struggles of the 1980s.

A revolutionary workers party must be built to lead the working class in the struggle for state power, drawing in the rest of the oppressed black African, “coloured” (mixed-race) and Indian masses, along with anti-racist whites, with the program and perspective elaborated by Trotsky as the *permanent revolution*. We elaborated such a program for workers revolution in the four-part series on the “South Africa Powder Keg” we ran last July-September in *Workers Vanguard* (and reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12).

This program raises a number of transitional measures such as factory occupations, workers control and workers militias, leading to a black-centered workers government based on workers councils to expropriate capital without compensation, crush the inevitable bourgeois reaction and fight to extend the revolution internationally, particularly to the advanced capitalist, i.e., imperialist, countries. This reflects our underlying strategic perspective of permanent revolution, elaborated by Trotsky on the basis of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and

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- The “Bell Curve” and Genocide U.S.A.
- Save Mumia Abu-Jamal!
- L.A. Unionists Demand: Freedom for Geronimo!
- Port Chicago, 1944: U.S. Navy’s Racist Frame-Up



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Spartacist

**Nurses in September 1995 wildcat strike. Reflecting growing working-class discontent with ANC front for neo-apartheid exploitation, striking nurses carried signs reading, "Away with Mandela."**

1917. This holds that in the imperialist epoch a simply bourgeois-democratic revolution in the backward capitalist countries is not possible, and that to achieve even democratic demands such as agrarian revolution and national independence it is necessary for the proletariat, led by its communist vanguard, to take power, proceeding from democratic to socialist tasks and seeking to take the revolution to the imperialist centers. This was, in fact, the program of the early Communist International, which was then renounced by the conservative bureaucracy that coalesced around Stalin and his nationalist watchword of building "socialism in one country." The bankruptcy of that policy, fought against by Trotsky and the International Left Opposition, is today manifest with the collapse of the Stalinist-rules states of East Europe and the USSR.

In our reading of materials published by WOSA, we find no mention of the program of permanent revolution, which Trotsky laid out in his 1934 comments on the theses by some of his South African supporters. And on a number of issues where we have differed with WOSA, underlying the differences is your rejection of this perspective in practice. For example, on the issue of the constituent assembly, while we raised this democratic demand as part of a program to lead the South African masses fighting against apartheid to a struggle for workers power, the way WOSA presented this was to pressure the bourgeoisie to grant a constituent assembly which is "synonymous with the demand for unfettered democracy" (*Workers' Voice* No. 2, March 1991). This goes back to the classic "revolution in stages"—first (bourgeois) democratic, later for socialism—that was characteristic of the Stalinists and the Mensheviks. We commented on this in our articles, "WOSA: Constituent Assembly Fetishism" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 548, 3 April 1992), and "South Africa: ANC Pushes 'Post-Apartheid'

Swindle" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 532, 2 August 1991), which are attached to this letter. The fundamental issue of permanent revolution is also reflected in the question of what kind of workers party we seek to build.

### **A Revolutionary, Not A Reformist, Workers Party**

Our central criticisms of the Workers' List Party are programmatic. The WLP election manifesto contains but a single, oblique sentence against the ANC/SACP for administering the neo-apartheid capitalist state: "We reject the idea of a Government of National Unity that includes the racists." The implication here is that the main source of your opposition to the ANC stems from its present political bloc with the National Party. For proletarian revolutionaries, opposition to the ANC is in no sense derived from Mandela's current cohabitation with De Klerk. It would be unprincipled to give electoral support to the ANC, which has become a bourgeois-nationalist formation, even if it ran independently of and against the National Party. And it would be unprincipled to support the SACP as long as it remains allied to the ANC. Yet these basic political positions, which go back to Marx's struggle for the political independence of the proletariat, are nowhere stated in the WOSA/WLP literature which we've read.

Your current, central agitational slogan is that of "Mass Workers Party," not a revolutionary workers party—a significant difference, for the former implies that numbers and influence are to be valued above programmatic principle and political combativity. And, indeed, you advocate a party that would be broader, more inclusive, more heterogeneous than the SACP. A statement on the background to the Workers' List Party, included in a publication on its founding

conference in April 1994, proclaims: "It is hoped that at this historical cross-roads looming on the horizon, all pro-worker, pro-democracy and pro-socialism forces will converge in order to establish an independent mass party of the workers which will be able to defend and promote the interests of the workers politically and at other levels" (*Workers' List Party National Conference* [May 1994]).

When in 1993 the reformist union leader Moses Mayekiso (currently an SACP parliamentarian) spoke favorably of forming a new workers party, he, too, put forward a so-called broad church conception bringing the SACP "together with left sections of the ANC as well as other left forces like WOSA and many independent socialists and social democrats" (*South African Labour Bulletin*, July/August 1993). Such a party could include, for example, the likes of Jeremy Cronin, the leading ideologist of the SACP right wing. And what about the current [SACP-allied and former MK commander] defense minister Joe Modise?

Understandably, the role and nature of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), which arose out of mass trade-union struggles in the late 1970s-early '80s, has loomed large in discussions of a new workers party in South Africa, including among the comrades of WOSA. Like South Africa, Brazil is a relatively industrialized Third World country, which, moreover, has the largest black population outside of Africa. Because of its recent origins, the PT has appeared to stand outside the historical division of the workers movement between social democracy and Stalinism. Additionally, the Brazilian supporters of Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat have played an active role in the PT since its inception. Indeed, Mandel & Co. love to boast of their comrades' influence in the mass party of the Brazilian workers.

We note that an official representative of the PT, Beti Burigo, was invited to the 1993 WOSA National Conference, and her address was a major focus of discussion. She presented a classic statement of social-democratic reformism, that the PT would achieve governmental power through bourgeois-democratic means and then gradually introduce socialism:

"The general platform was anti-monopolies, anti-imperialism and anti-latifundio (anti-large landed property), building links between immediate workers' demands and the socialist perspective.

"The implementation of the reforms would depend on workers' organisation and consciousness, readiness to fight and defend the [PT] government. But the government would have a decisive role in dismantling bourgeois mechanisms of rule, propelling the reforms and stimulating workers' self-organisation."

—WOSA 3rd National Conference April 1993

In an introduction to the conference proceedings, the WOSA editors commented: "The experience of the PT was repeatedly shown to be relevant both as an example to be emulated (inner-party democracy, the right to tendencies, etc.) and as a warning of difficulties ahead (the pitfalls of parliamentarism, the dangers inherent in the social contract, etc.)." This evenhanded evaluation obscures the basic fact that the PT is a reformist, i.e., counterrevolutionary, party, whose central aim is to *administer the capitalist state* while claiming to represent the workers' interests.

Such reformist parties lull and disarm the workers, deflecting proletarian struggle from the necessary goal of revolution. To justify their trampling on the workers' aspirations when they are in power, these parties usually actively



Reuters

**Mandela addressed Johannesburg Stock Exchange on eve of April 1994 elections to reassure racist rulers of ANC's commitment to capitalism.**

seek to govern in coalition with bourgeois parties. For the sake of maintaining such "popular front" coalitions, the workers are urged to temper their demands. Meanwhile, the ruling class gathers its forces. Either the workers are demoralized and demobilized by the popular front, or the ruling class moves when it is ready to crush the workers organizations as happened in Chile in 1973 when the bloody Pinochet coup against Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular government murdered 30,000 workers and leftists.

The PT's Lula ran in last year's Brazilian presidential elections explicitly as the candidate of a popular-front coalition of the PT with the smaller bourgeois parties. During the campaign Lula even indicated his willingness to "participate" in a government with the rival bourgeois candidate, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who is an old friend of his. We do not doubt that the comrades of WOSA condemn Lula's abject class collaborationism, but this stems from the very nature of the PT which is described by its secretary general, José Dirceu, as "a left social-democratic party" (*Folha de São Paulo*, 5 October 1994).

We refer you to our article on the Brazilian elections ("Brazil: IMF Candidate Wins Elections," *Workers Vanguard* No. 608, 14 October 1994) and the declaration of fraternal relations with Luta Metalúrgica (Brazil) in the same issue [reprinted here on page 43]. The comrades of Luta Metalúrgica give vivid testimony as to the bureaucratic internal regime of the PT, despite its talk of "inner-party democracy" and the "right of tendency," since they were purged in 1989 as the leadership of the PT in the steel-making center of Volta Redonda for opposing Lula & Co.'s formation of the Frente Brasil Popular with bourgeois forces.

While a Leninist party based on democratic centralism includes the right to form tendencies and factions, the existence of permanent, diverse political tendencies is *not* a virtue in a *revolutionary* workers party, which is based on *agreement on programmatic principles*. WOSA appears to be advocating a South African version of "the party of the whole class," a concept developed by Karl Kautsky in the decades before World War I. Kautsky maintained that there should be only one party based on the working class in

every country, embracing *all tendencies* however antagonistic their programs and policies, which supported such a party. Thus the pre-World War I German Social Democracy encompassed the avowed reformist Eduard Bernstein and strident German chauvinist Gustav Noske on the one side and such outstanding revolutionary internationalists as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on the other. Kautsky played a centrist role, preaching the "doctrine of the golden mean" as Lenin later described it. A few years later, in the German Revolution of 1918-19, Noske engineered the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht while Kautsky engaged in impotent moralizing against political violence.

From its inception in 1903 the Bolshevik party was based on a selection of committed revolutionaries, excluding reformists, opportunists and dilettantes who were concentrated in the Mensheviks. And it's worth pointing out that many of the leading Mensheviks were far to the left of Jeremy Cronin, not to speak of the PT's Lula. However, at the theoretical level, before 1914 Lenin accepted or, at any rate, did not challenge the Kautskyan doctrine of "the party of the whole class." He had not yet drawn general programmatic conclusions from the split and subsequent political antagonism between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Russia.

But when at the outbreak of World War I the German Social Democrats voted for war credits, Lenin repudiated the program of a workers party "uniting" reformists and revolutionaries, chauvinists and internationalists:

"In the past, before the war, opportunism was often looked upon as a legitimate, though 'deviationist' and 'extremist', component of the Social-Democratic Party. The war has shown the impossibility of this in the future. Opportunism has 'matured', and is now playing to the full its role as emissary of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement.... Today *unity* with the opportunists *actually* means subordinating the working class to their 'own' national bourgeoisie, and an alliance with the latter for the purpose of oppressing other nations and of fighting for dominant-nation privileges; it means *splitting* the revolutionary proletariat of all countries." [emphasis in original]

—V.I. Lenin and G. Zinoviev, *Socialism and War* (July-August 1915)

The Communist International, founded in 1919, drew the

lesson that a separate organization of the revolutionary vanguard is everywhere necessary. We have published a pamphlet, *Lenin and the Vanguard Party* (1978), which traces Lenin's development from a revolutionary social democrat to the founding leader of the modern Communist movement. We are sending you a copy of this pamphlet.

The Bolsheviks were from their inception a workers party, exercising leadership over politically advanced and strategically key sections of the Russian proletariat. However, when the Trotskyist movement emerged in the 1930s the workers movement in almost all countries was dominated by powerful and entrenched social-democratic, Stalinist and bourgeois-nationalist bureaucracies. Thus almost all organizations claiming the Trotskyist tradition have been *propaganda groups* rather than workers parties. How to go from the revolutionary propaganda group to a revolutionary workers party? This is a legitimate and, indeed, decisive question. Such a transformation may well entail various *tactical maneuvers* including, under certain conditions, entry into a reformist party. However, the entry tactic can easily degenerate into an opportunist adaptation to the reformist host.

Here the experience of the so-called "French turn" of the Trotskyist movement in the mid-1930s is instructive. Under the impact of the Great Depression and the victory of fascism in Germany, leftward-moving centrist currents, especially among the youth, emerged in a number of social-democratic parties (e.g., France, Spain, the United States). In order to more effectively intersect and win over such leftward-moving elements, Trotsky proposed that his small groups of followers go into these social-democratic parties. This tactic was first applied in France, hence the term "French turn." While the Trotskyists made appreciable organizational gains in the SFIO (French Section of the Second International), many of them quickly became comfortable in the role of left opposition in a mass reformist party. Thus a year or so after urging his followers to enter the SFIO, Trotsky was pressuring them *to leave* since they were becoming conciliatory to the social-democratic bureaucrats and their centrist hangers-on. In an article, "Lessons of the SFIO Entry" (December 1935), Trotsky wrote: "Entry into a reformist centrist party in itself does not include a

The "new" South Africa: racist cops unleashed against July 1994 strike by Pick 'n Pay grocery workers.



long perspective. It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode" (*The Crisis of the French Section 1935-36* [1977]).

WOSA is not proposing to enter an already existing mass reformist party but rather advocating the formation of a broad-based workers party in which it would be a current. For this reason we believe that looking at the discussions between Trotsky and his American followers of the Socialist Workers Party in the late 1930s on a labor party in the U.S. is highly germane. The leftward radicalization of the American working class in the 1930s led to the formation of mass industrial unions for the first time in U.S. history. The greatly strengthened trade-union movement, in which the Stalinists played an important role at that time, acted as a left pressure group on the liberal bourgeois government of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In order to break the organized working class from its political allegiance to the bourgeoisie (i.e., Roosevelt's Democratic Party), Trotsky proposed that the Socialist Workers Party agitate for a labor party based on the trade unions. But he clearly *differentiated* such a party from a reformist, union-based party along the lines of the British Labour Party, advocating that a labor party be formed on the basis of a series of transitional demands (e.g., union-based workers' militias) culminating in a *workers government* (i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat).

Had a labor party emerged in the U.S. at this time, it would have been an amorphous, undefined movement with the Trotskyists vying against the Stalinists, social democrats and liberal union leaders to determine its program and leadership. Thus Trotsky maintained: "The Stalinists and liberals wish to make of this movement a reformist party but we have our program.... I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible" ("How to Fight for a Labor Party in the U.S." [March 1938]). Moreover, Trotsky emphasized the *transitional* character of such a labor party movement:

"In its very essence the labor party can preserve progressive significance only during a comparatively short transitional period. The further sharpening of the revolutionary situation will inevitably break the shell of the labor party and permit the Socialist Workers Party to rally around the banner of the Fourth International the revolutionary vanguard of the American proletariat."

—"The Problem of the Labor Party" (April 1938)

Clearly, WOSA's agitation for a "mass workers party" in South Africa differs from the Trotskyists' advocacy of a broad-based labor party in the U.S. in the 1930s in two fundamental respects. One, you are calling for such a party to be based on a left-reformist program as expressed in the WLP's election manifesto and its subsequent propaganda and agitation. And two, you see such a workers party not as a brief transition to a revolutionary vanguard but rather as the highest form of working-class political organization at least in the present period.

Here again let us consider the Brazilian PT, which leftist advocates of a workers party in South Africa usually hold up as a model. When Lula—then a trade-union bureaucrat—first launched the PT in the early 1980s, a revolutionary propaganda group in Brazil could effectively have intervened in it. Lula had not yet built up an effective bureaucratic apparatus in the embryonic PT. The future course of the party was relatively open and fluid, since it did not have a generally accepted program and ideological

doctrine. Many members and supporters of the PT were raw workers engaging in political activity and struggle for the first time. The *aim* of an entry tactic by a revolutionary group would have been either to win the leadership of this fledgling workers party through principled political struggle against Lula & Co., or to bring about a left split separating the revolutionary-minded workers from the reformists, opportunists and careerists. But that is not the course chosen by the Brazilian supporters of Mandel, who have become part of the apparatus of the PT, and indeed its hatchet men against the left.

Moreover, there is an important difference between Brazil in the early 1980s and South Africa today which bears directly on strategy and tactics for building a revolutionary workers party in the latter. When the PT was formed, there was no sizable workers party of any kind in Brazil. The pro-Moscow Communist Party was relatively small and unimportant. However, in South Africa there does exist a mass reformist workers party, namely the SACP. Especially since the COSATU "workerists" like Mayekiso joined the party around 1990, the SACP has been the dominant party of the most politically advanced and strategically key sections of the South African proletariat. In major industrial centers the SACP and COSATU offices are often in the same building.

Despite the SACP's decades-long cohabitation with the petty-bourgeois ANC and its present key role in the neo-apartheid capitalist state, many of its cadre still take the party's "Leninist" pretensions as good coin. They believe their party is or should be a communist party. Of course, their concept of Marxism-Leninism and a Leninist party is thoroughly confused, distorted and perverted by Stalinism (e.g., the two-stage revolution). Nonetheless, the fact that Jeremy Cronin, the chief ideologist of the SACP right wing, polemicizes against Leninist doctrine indicates that leftist elements in the party consider themselves Leninists.

*The African Communist* (Fourth Quarter 1993) published a resignation statement (since reportedly withdrawn) by the party's Cape Town branch secretary, Theo Molaba, protesting "the abandonment of a PROLETARIAN ATTITUDE towards armed struggle, negotiations, the alliance and the role of the party...." "What has happened to the DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT?" he asked rhetorically. The editors of *The African Communist* indicated that they published this statement because Molaba's views were shared by a large section of the Cape Town branch. Key to building a revolutionary workers party in South Africa is winning over those elements of the SACP who want to build a Leninist vanguard party by breaking them from Stalinism. Instead the kind of "mass workers party" you are advocating would be seen and opposed by many SACP cadre as a *social-democratic liquidation* of the communist vanguard.

### Whither the "New" South Africa?

Our differences over a "mass workers party" stem in part from differences over the future course of developments in the "new" South Africa. A clear and cogent statement of your views on this question is found in the 1993 WOSA conference "Resolution on the International and National Situation":

"While we accept that the historic compromise between white and black (more specifically Afrikaner and African)

Weinberg/New York Times



**Black family's home destroyed after eviction by white landowner. Bolshevik party fighting for permanent revolution must champion the cause of all the oppressed.**

nationalism will be found within the framework of the capitalist system, we do not support the fairy tale that the deracialisation of the system will take place 'peacefully'. Indeed, more blood has flowed in South Africa during this so-called transition to democracy than in almost any other period of our history. Instead, we believe that it is necessary for those on the Left to prepare themselves for a period of authoritarian and repressive rule. The capitalist class will not be able to manage the transition from overtly racist rule to a limited bourgeois democratic order without an interim period of severe repression of both left and right wing rebellion. In particular the rulers may want to ensure the weakening or, if necessary, the destruction of the independent mass organisations of the working class such as the trade unions. The strategy of the Left has to be based on this assumption."

So in the short run, you see a period of violent political turmoil, revolts by right-wing whites and in the black townships, government attacks on the trade unions and civics, etc. But in the *longer run*, you foresee the development of a *multiracial* South African bourgeoisie and consequently also a *multiracial* petty bourgeoisie which would allow South Africa to have "a limited bourgeois democratic order." Hence, you project a lengthy period of *defensive struggles* by the non-white toilers against, in your view, a racially and nationally united, and therefore strengthened, capitalist class.

The way in which you conceive and motivate the "mass workers party" is as an agency to defend the workers and plebeian masses *within the framework of neo-apartheid capitalism*. Thus a leaflet put out last fall titled "Workers' List Party Supports Demands of Residents," concerning the struggles over rents and utility rates in the townships around Johannesburg, concludes: "The struggles of different sections of workers and the unemployed must be co-ordinated so that they are not hijacked or defeated. This can only be accomplished through the formation of a MASS WORKERS' PARTY!!" This leaflet stops short of the necessary demand for a black-centered workers government, which alone could provide decent housing and services for the impoverished non-white populace.

A central tenet of reformism is that it is always possible for the working class to maintain its *existing* economic conditions, democratic rights and organizational strength *within the framework of capitalism*. But that is not true. Conditions of a deep economic depression generating widespread bankruptcies invariably result in mass unemployment. To think otherwise is to maintain that the workers movement can effectively control the capitalist economy. In this regard, "*the campaign for the constitutionalisation of the right to work*," launched by the National Coordinating Committee of the WLP last May, can only sow reformist illusions. Indeed, only the most politically naive and backward workers could believe that such a constitutional amendment would have any real effect in a situation where *half* the black urban labor force is unemployed and, moreover, capital is flowing *out of*, not into, South Africa.

Nor is it always possible for the working class to simply defend the bourgeois-democratic status quo. A right-wing military coup aimed at destroying the workers movement, such as Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973, can be defeated only through a *civil war* which would necessarily pose proletarian revolution.

In the present South African context, the predominantly black working class must either go forward to state power or it will be thrown very far back. The mass struggles against the white-supremacist regime, beginning with the Durban strikes of 1973 and greatly accelerating with the township revolt of 1984-85, have produced conditions *incompatible* with a stable bourgeois order in South Africa. COSATU has developed into one of the most powerful and combative trade-union movements in any Third World country. Partly as a result of this, industrial wages in South Africa are now appreciably higher than in East Asia and Latin America. In the black townships rents and utility rates went unpaid for years while effective control passed into the hands of the civic associations—a partial fragmentation of bourgeois state power. Now the Government of National Unity has launched a campaign to collect rents



**Federation of South African Women in Johannesburg, 1954. Black women played leading role in the struggle against apartheid.**

and regain control over the townships.

We disagree that the Government of National Unity represents a "historic compromise" between Afrikaner and black African nationalism. Such a historic compromise has not occurred and cannot occur. There will be no multiracial or "non-racial" bourgeois order in South Africa. Rather the ANC/SACP/National Party coalition represents an *unstable and momentary* compromise between the white capitalist class and its would-be junior partners, the black bourgeois nationalists and labor reformists. The ANC/SACP cannot deliver on their part of the deal which is to dampen black unrest. Black unrest is bound to grow as economic and social conditions do not get better and in some respects will probably get worse (e.g., downward pressure on union industrial wages).

At the same time, whites will feel increasingly threatened as petty-bourgeois blacks seek to displace them in positions of influence and wealth. While a few thousand ANC/SACP leaders can get on "the gravy train," the South African economy obviously cannot support a large black middle class (e.g., civil servants, corporate bureaucrats, small businessmen) enjoying the same "First World" living standards as the whites. The interests of the different social bases of the ANC/SACP and the National Party are antagonistic.

So the fragile neo-apartheid arrangement is going to break down. From the side of the whites one can expect capital flight and large-scale emigration as well as right-wing terrorism extending into the military/police apparatus of the state. Among the non-white, predominantly African, masses increasing disillusionment with and hostility toward the Government of National Unity can go in one of two basic directions: either toward proletarian revolution leading to a black-centered workers government or toward fratricidal nationalist and tribalist conflict such as we've seen throughout the rest of post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa. And the wave of "ethnic cleansing" sweeping East Europe and the former Soviet Union in the wake of capitalist counterrevolution provides a powerful lesson in the nature of "nation building" in the imperialist epoch.

In determining the outcome in South Africa the difference between a revolutionary and a reformist workers party is crucial and obvious. The black toilers must see the trans-

formation of South Africa along democratic and egalitarian lines as a prospect for the here and now, not the goal of some remote future. They must see a party that does not simply defend the particular interests of the working class, especially its unionized sector, but is fighting to eradicate *all forms* of national and social oppression—the mass homelessness in the black townships, the hideous conditions of the millions of Africans still trapped on the "tribal homelands," the degradation of women (e.g., polygamy) in rural villages where tribal traditions remain strong. To unite all of the oppressed, a workers party must staunchly champion the democratic rights of those who have cause to feel threatened by the ANC's brand of nationalism—e.g., coloureds, Indians, Zulu villagers, immigrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other neighboring African states.

In the absence of a viable proletarian revolutionary alternative, impoverished and desperate black Africans, incited by nationalist demagogues, will turn against the better-off coloured and Indian communities. One will see violent clashes between Zulus and Xhosas on a far greater scale than before. While the ANC currently draws support from all sections of non-white populations as well as liberal and leftist whites, its strongest and most consistent base of support has been among the Xhosas. Some backward Zulu workers and rural villagers view the ANC as basically a Xhosa tribalist movement behind the façade of "non-racialism."

In a series on the "new" South Africa last summer, we wrote: "As the black African masses find that they continue to live in poverty and degradation despite the promises of 'non-racial democracy' and 'national unity,' some ANC leaders will doubtless resort to nationalist demagoguery and even tribalist appeals" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 605, 2 September 1994). WOSA members who spoke with the ICL comrades in South Africa last September repeatedly denied the possibility of ethnic and tribalist conflict within the South African working class. But we have already seen the ANC leadership join with home secretary Buthelezi in agitating for action against the recent flood of immigrants from neighboring African states looking for work. And we have also seen the ANC premier of the PVW region, Tokyo Sexwale, try to whip up sentiment against the coloured

community among Africans over the issue of writing off back unpaid rent in the townships.

The WLP leaflet on the rent struggles mentioned above rightly denounces anti-coloured demagoguery by ANC officials and states: "We appeal to our people not to allow those who want to use ethnicity to exploit our problems and divide the working class, to succeed." But it is not enough to deplore these divisions as false consciousness—they must be actively combatted by more than moralizing appeals for "unity." Who can do this? Obviously not the ANC and not any type of reformist workers party either, but only those who raise a revolutionary program of transitional demands to unite all the exploited and oppressed in struggle against the capitalist system.

By their very nature reformists base themselves on the momentary and partial interests of sectors of the working class and on the false (i.e., bourgeois) consciousness prevalent among the masses, such as nationalism. Hence a reformist party accepts the limits of what is "possible" under capitalism, seeking only to wrest more crumbs from the rulers' table. Such a perspective guarantees that different sectors of the oppressed will see their interests as mutually counterposed as each fights to increase its share of the crumbs. This can only deepen and reinforce the divisions between ethnic groups, between unemployed youth and unionized workers, between native-born workers and immigrants, etc. The struggle to overcome such divisions must be based on the struggle to overthrow the international capitalist system, which necessarily exploits and intensifies national, racial and ethnic divisions among the oppressed classes. Only a Leninist vanguard party, part of a revolutionary international, can effectively mobilize the workers movement against the forces of fratricidal nationalism.

### For Complete Independence of the Workers Movement From the Bourgeois State

We also wish to raise a serious criticism of a different nature concerning the Workers' List Party election campaign. The South African government provided funds for all duly registered parties in the election, and the WLP accepted these funds. We consider it fundamentally wrong for a workers organization, much less one claiming to stand for the abolition of the capitalist system, to receive money from the bourgeois state or other institutions. Such a practice produces an inner pressure on that organization not to provoke the bourgeois authorities to cut back or cut off its funds. Conversely, the government has a potent weapon of political blackmail by threatening to withhold future funds from any organization which does something it really doesn't like.

We note that the "Resolution on the International and National Situation" adopted by the 1993 WOSA National Conference states: "WOSA calls on all mass organisations of the workers to ensure their independence from ruling-class influence by maintaining a vigorous culture of workers' control. For this reason we call on all workers to firmly resist all attempts to entrap the workers' movement in any social contract with the capitalist class and state." How can the above principles be squared with accepting funds from the capitalist state, whether on a one-time or an on-going basis?

Furthermore, the mere act of accepting government funds opens up a workers organization to charges of corruptibility.

Thus our representatives encountered the view from other leftists in South Africa that the Workers' List Party and its campaign were a mere maneuver on WOSA's part to get the election money. It is unfortunate that the class line which we believe was drawn by the Workers' List Party in the election has been muddied by this accusation.

Also, there is a related point. When our comrades visited South Africa, they were told by other leftists that WOSA had supported a 1993 Supreme Court suit by members of the Witwatersrand regional leadership of SACCAWU against the national union. If so, this would constitute another real difference between our two organizations.

It has become common in the United States (where union leaderships are generally very bureaucratic and in many cases corrupt and even criminal) for left oppositional groups to sue the union and its leadership in the capitalist courts. The Spartacist League has vigorously fought against this practice, which is antagonistic to workers democracy, strengthens government control over the labor movement and enhances illusions in bourgeois "justice." A few years ago, when the U.S. government in effect took over the Teamsters (truckers) union in the name of protecting the membership's rights, we wrote:

"Workers democracy is not going to come to the American labor movement as a gift from the bourgeoisie. It will be won by the working class through struggle—struggle which will inevitably, and in the case of the Teamsters immediately, come up against the capitalist state. Opposition to intervention by the bosses' state into the affairs of the workers movement should be elementary for any class-conscious worker."

—Workers Vanguard No. 530, 5 July 1991

The leadership which came to power in the Teamsters through government intervention (supported by most of the so-called left in the U.S.) sold out last year's national truckers strike. In South Africa, the bosses and their government are currently engaged in a campaign to destroy the WOSA-supported Turning Wheel Truckers Union—yet another graphic example of why we oppose *all* intervention,

## Women and Revolution

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whatever the pretext, by the capitalist state in the workers movement.

We hope this letter has clarified some of our important differences with WOSA.

We would also like to bring to your attention the views outlined in the attached letter we wrote a year ago to the New Unity Movement. This letter centers on our differences on the national question in South African and Third World countries in general. The published views of Neville Alexander on this question have much in common with those of the New Unity Movement, in both cases deriving from the doctrines of the Non-European Unity Movement of the 1940s-'50s. We intend shortly to publish that letter in our public press in the hope of engaging more discussion on the subject among militants in South Africa. To date the New Unity Movement has not replied to our letter.

Comradely,  
Joseph Seymour  
For the International Secretariat of the  
International Communist League

\* \* \* \* \*

9 April 1995

Dear comrades,

In subsequent discussion within the International Communist League concerning our letter to your organization of March 9, we felt that it omitted a crucial factor defining a revolutionary perspective for South Africa. While this letter elaborated on the internal dynamics of permanent revolution as concretely applied to South Africa today, there was no discussion of the necessary *extension* of proletarian revolution from backward countries to the imperialist centers of North America, West Europe and Japan.

This is a fundamental element of Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution, which has become much more immediately acute in the present period. For much of the post-World War II period, the existence of the Soviet Union allowed a certain degree of autonomy to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist regimes and movements like the ANC, and made possible deformed social revolutions in countries like Vietnam and Cuba. Now capitalist counter-revolution in East Europe and the destruction of the Soviet Union have greatly strengthened imperialist domination over the so-called Third World. This "New World Order" was signaled by the U.S. military's devastation of Iraq, a former Soviet client state, in the 1991 Gulf War. A prole-

tarian revolution in South Africa would immediately face the determined efforts of Western, centrally U.S., imperialism to crush it in the egg by all available means, from an economic blockade to direct military intervention. An isolated black-centered workers government in South Africa would not long survive.

To recognize this truth is not to argue, as does the South African Communist Party, that the South African workers movement and oppressed non-white masses must accept and operate within the framework set by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Rather, the victory of a workers government in South Africa would reopen a desperate global struggle in line with that which began when Lenin's Bolsheviks took power in central portions of the Russian tsarist empire in 1917. Such a struggle would range far beyond military confrontations across black Africa. The decisive issue would turn on the confrontation between labor and capital in the key advanced capitalist powers on their own terrain.

We made this point in the conclusion of our four-part article, "South Africa Powder Keg":

"The consolidation, or simply the survival, of a socialist revolution in South Africa *requires* its international extension. This was the core of the Bolsheviks' program. But the world situation today is very different from that facing the Russian October Revolution of 1917—precipitated by the mass slaughter of the first imperialist world war—which set off revolutionary struggles throughout Europe, centrally Germany. A proletarian revolution in South Africa today would confront relatively strengthened and emboldened Western imperialist powers determined to obliterate any obstacles to their proclaimed 'new world order.'

"For the moment South Africa is a weakened link in the chain of the world capitalist system binding the neocolonies of the Third World to the imperialist states of North America, West Europe and Japan. It is necessary to mobilize the forces of the proletariat to *break* that chain at its weakest links, and then fight like hell to take the battle to the imperialist centers, seeking allies against the vicious enemy of all the oppressed—international capital. Thus, the fight to build a South African Bolshevik Party is inseparable from the struggle we in the International Communist League are waging to reforge an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International.

"A socialist revolution in South Africa would find *strategically powerful allies within the imperialist centers*. In particular, it would have an enormously radicalizing impact on blacks in the United States, who have strongly identified with the struggle against white supremacy in the apartheid state. And it would reverberate in particular among the non-white masses throughout the Western Hemisphere (notably the millions of black people in Brazil), West Indians and South Asians in Britain, and North Africans and black Africans in West Europe." [emphasis in original]

— *Workers Vanguard* No. 606, 16 September 1994, reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12

Precisely because a nationally isolated proletarian revolution in South Africa could not survive, there can be no nationally limited revolutionary workers party in South Africa. The struggle for world socialist revolution, wherever the first breakthrough occurs, is inseparable from the struggle to build an international communist vanguard, i.e., reforging a Trotskyist Fourth International.

Comradely,  
Joseph Seymour  
For the International Secretariat of the  
International Communist League

### Selected ICL Material on South Africa

Material referred to in the letter to WOSA is available in a special packet:

- "South Africa: ANC Pushes 'Post-Apartheid' Swindle," *Workers Vanguard* No. 532, 2 August 1991
- "WOSA: Constituent Assembly Fetishism" and "For Workers Revolution to Smash Neo-Apartheid!" *Workers Vanguard* No. 548, 3 April 1992
- Letter to the New Unity Movement by the ICL, 28 February 1994 (photocopy, 16 pages)

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# Declaration of Fraternal Relations Between Luta Metalúrgica (Brazil) and the International Communist League

*The following declaration is the result of intensive discussions indicating wide-ranging programmatic agreement between the International Communist League and the Luta Metalúrgica (Metalworkers Struggle) group of Brazil. Luta Metalúrgica broke from Causa Operária, which is part of the tendency led by Jorge Altamira's Argentine Partido Obrero. The initial basis for these discussions was a common principled programmatic position of proletarian opposition to popular fronts, including calling for no vote to any candidates of such class-collaborationist formations. Another key issue bringing our two organizations together was the Leninist understanding of the role of the revolutionary party as a "tribune of the people" in fighting all forms of special oppression.*

\* \* \* \* \*

"The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.... [T]he crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind's culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International."

—Leon Trotsky, "The Transitional Program" (1938)

The Luta Metalúrgica group of Volta Redonda, Brazil and the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) concur in this declaration of fraternal relations as part of the urgent struggle to overcome the crisis of proletarian leadership through reorganizing the Fourth International as the democratic-centralist world party of socialist revolution.

## I

"The question of questions at present is the People's Front. The left centrists seek to present this question as a tactical or even as a technical maneuver, so as to be able to peddle their wares in the shadow of the People's Front. In reality, the People's Front is the *main question of proletarian class strategy* for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism."

—L. Trotsky, Letter to the Dutch RSAP (July 1936) [emphasis in original]

Ever since Marx and Engels' struggle for the basic principle of the revolutionary independence of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie, genuine Marxism has fought against class collaboration. The fight by Lenin and the Bolsheviks against Kerensky's Provisional Government (which Trotsky later called the greatest historical example of a popular front) culminated in the most important victory of the world proletariat: the October Revolution of 1917. In opposition to the betrayal of the Stalinists, social democrats and cen-

trists, the Fourth Internationalists under Trotsky's leadership fought head-on against all support to popular fronts, which in France and Spain led to terrible defeats for the proletariat, thereby paving the way for the second imperialist world war.

In our times, the struggle against popular-frontism draws a line between revolutionary Marxism and all variants of opportunism. In Chile, Allende's Unidad Popular tied the combative proletariat to the institutions of the bourgeois state, preparing the bloody outcome in Pinochet's 1973 military coup. Already in 1970 at the time of Allende's election, when all the fake-Trotskyist tendencies advocated one or another type of support to the popular front, the Spartacist tendency (today ICL) warned:

"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."

—[Spartacist No. 19, November-December 1970]

With the election of Mitterrand's popular front in France in 1981, once again the Spartacists warned against any support to this class collaboration, while pseudo-Trotskyists (from Mandel and Moreno to Lambert and Altamira) hailed it as a "victory" of the working class. The politics of popular-frontism led to more defeats from Bolivia to El Salvador, Nicaragua and many other countries.

Today in South Africa, the nationalist popular front around the African National Congress led by Nelson Mandela ties the black workers to the bourgeois state apparatus which maintained the murderous regime of apartheid. It is the duty of revolutionaries to urgently warn against any political support to, or confidence in, the "power sharing" government, which is already attacking the black and "coloured" [mixed-race] workers. We note the importance for revolutionary workers in South Africa of the struggle against the popular-frontism of the reformist Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT—Workers Party), and of the events in South Africa for the workers and radical youth in Brazil.

In Brazil the left is impregnated with nationalism and popular-frontist reformism. At present its various tendencies are competing with each other to see who can best capitulate to the Frente Brasil Popular (FBP), the open coalition of Lula's PT with bourgeois politicians. This front does everything possible to demobilize the exploited and oppressed, in this country which has a highly combative proletariat and is experiencing deep social unrest. The trade-union bureaucrats and their leftist advisers insist that instead of fighting, the working people must "wait" for



AP

**Volta Redonda, Brazil, November 1988—army tanks attack striking metal workers. Four strikers were killed.**

Lula to be elected and not “frighten” his bourgeois allies. The Stalinists (PPS and PCdoB [People’s Socialist Party, formerly the pro-Moscow CP, and Communist Party of Brazil, formerly pro-Albania]) with their doctrine of class collaboration—who supported the bourgeois governments of Sarney, Collor and Itamar Franco—are now part of the popular front led by Lula. While the Mandelites of Democracia Socialista and the Lambertistes of O Trabalho [Labor] revel in their by now traditional role as faithful servants of the leadership of Lula & Co., the Morenoites of the PSTU [United Socialist Workers Party] strike a hypocritically “critical” posture at the same time as they have openly joined the FBP.

To the left of these tendencies are the centrists of Causa Operária (CO) [Workers Cause, aligned with the Argentine Partido Obrero of Jorge Altamira]. The comrades of Luta Metalúrgica were originally recruited to CO because they believed it represented a revolutionary, Trotskyist opposition to the popular front. But already in the 1989 elections, at the same time as it “criticized” the popular front, CO voted for the popular front’s candidate, Lula. Thus its “criticism” had no consequences in deeds, serving only as a fig leaf for its vote *in favor of* class collaboration.

Facing the 1994 elections, CO has been spinning around, first seeking to make a “distinction between supporting Lula and campaigning for him, and possibly calling for a vote to the candidate of the PT” (*Circular Interna* [Internal Bulletin], 1 April 1994), later feigning a position of “no vote to the candidates of the Frente Brasil Popular” (*Causa Operária*, 12 June), only to wind up with the call to “vote for Lula and the worker and peasant candidates” (*Causa Operária*, 1 August). CO thereby reproduces the fake

Trotskyists’ typical trick of arguing that a vote for the “workers candidates” of the popular front (in this case including its presidential candidate) is somehow “different” from voting for the popular front as such.

For these petty bourgeois who peddle their wares in the shadow of the popular front, “leftist” phrases are not to be taken seriously but serve only to prettify tailing after their reformist masters! Their line has *nothing* to do with that of Trotsky, who characterized the support by Andrés Nin’s centrist POUM to the Spanish popular front as a *betrayal* and stressed, regarding the popular-front government: “It is necessary to openly and boldly mobilize the masses against the Popular Front government” (“Is Victory Possible in Spain?” April 1937).

We note that this “national-Trotskyist” tendency [of Altamira] has traditionally justified its betrayals through Menshevik stageism and references to the “anti-imperialist united front,” the formula used by Guillermo Lora (former ally of Jorge Altamira’s Partido Obrero in Argentina and CO in Brazil) in Bolivia to justify his shameful capitulation to a whole series of popular fronts.

Against this Menshevism, in a document (April 1994) opposing CO’s line, the comrades of the Volta Redonda cell (Luta Metalúrgica) characterized the FBP as “a class-collaborationist front,” a popular front. They demanded “that Causa Operária break with the PT and the popular front in all its variants.... The elementary duty of all revolutionary Marxists is to irreconcilably struggle against the popular front in the elections and to have absolutely no confidence in it.” The CO leadership *suppressed* this clear denunciation, together with the entire last part of the document, in CO’s *Circular Interna*. A subsequent document (July 1994) that

the comrades wrote against CO's capitulation ended with the clear slogan: "For a revolutionary workers party—No vote to the popular front and Lula." The International Communist League has raised the same position of intransigent proletarian opposition to the popular front.

## II

The world situation today has been profoundly affected by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states of East Europe. Far from representing a "victory" or mere "episode" as the fake Trotskyists claim (including CO, which virtually kept its members away from all discussion of the Russian question), the restoration of capitalism in the USSR—resulting from the encirclement and enormous pressure of imperialism and prepared by decades of Stalinist betrayals—represented a great *defeat* for the workers of the world. Its repercussions for the semi-colonial victims of imperialism are very clear from Iraq to Haiti, with the growing military adventures of Yankee imperialism, which today threatens to strangle the Cuban deformed workers state (undermined from within by the Castro bureaucracy).

In the present "new world *disorder*" there are growing interimperialist rivalries, fratricidal inter-ethnic wars, fascist attacks against immigrants and dark-skinned workers in Europe, assaults against the rights of women. At the same time, unrest throughout the world—symbolized by the revolt of Indian peasants in the south of Mexico, the victorious Air France strike, youth mobilizations against fascists in Europe and many other events—brings opportunities for revolutionary intervention by the proletariat. It is more urgent than ever to forge the international Leninist vanguard party.

Trotsky, founder of the Red Army, taught us that those who do not defend conquests already won will never be able to win new conquests. He showed the dual character of the [Stalinist] bureaucracy, a narrow nationalist caste resting atop the gains of October: at times it was obliged to defend these conquests in its own partial and contradictory way, while undermining them through betraying the world revolution and trampling proletarian democracy.

Trotsky and James P. Cannon, founder of North American Trotskyism, compared the revolutionary policy toward the USSR to the situation of a bureaucratized trade union. Conscious workers defend the union against the capitalist government and the bosses, while fighting for a revolutionary leadership to throw out the treacherous bureaucrats. Likewise, it was the duty of the world proletariat to give unconditional military defense to the USSR, while fighting to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy through proletarian political revolution, indispensable for preventing capitalist restoration. During the entire period of the Left Opposition and the struggle for the Fourth International, Trotsky emphasized that "*Defense of the Soviet Union* from the blows of the capitalist enemies, irrespective of the circumstances and immediate causes of the conflict, is the elementary and imperative duty of every honest labor organization" ("War and the Fourth International," June 1934).

The CO leadership never talked about such classic works by Trotsky as *In Defense of Marxism* (written against Shachtman's petty-bourgeois opposition, renegades from

the defense of the USSR), because it has had a neo-Shachtmanite position toward all the conflicts between the capitalist enemies and the USSR. After the Altamiraites hailed the Islamic "revolution" of the feudalist hangman Khomeini in Iran, they opposed Soviet intervention in Afghanistan against the "holy warriors" who were fighting to overthrow the left-nationalist regime for the "crime" of legislating education of women and agrarian reform. The CIA armed the anti-communist fanatics with enormous amounts of weapons and money so that they would kill Soviet soldiers on this battlefield of Cold War II. In Brazil the ultra-reactionaries of Family, Tradition and Property staged marches to the cry of "Russians out of Afghanistan," and the fake Trotskyists had the same position! The Spartacist tendency, following the principles of Trotsky's Fourth International, defended the USSR and the women and oppressed of Afghanistan, saying "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!"

When in Poland Solidarność consolidated as a clerical-nationalist movement for capitalist restoration under the aegis of the Vatican and Reagan, the Brazilian PT praised the "example" of Walesa; Lula in particular sought to identify himself with this puppet of imperialism. The question of Solidarność was an acid test for every tendency which called itself Trotskyist. The pseudo-Trotskyists shouted their "solidarity with Solidarity." While Moreno called for "All power to Solidarity," Altamira called for "the seizure of power by Solidarity." In contrast the Spartacists said, "Stop Solidarity's counterrevolution!" As the Luta Metalúrgica comrades stated in their July document, "the worker" Walesa whom the fake Trotskyists followed "was the best and principal instrument of imperialism and the Vatican for counterrevolution." As the ICL warned, the victory of this anti-communist movement has brought terrible suffering to the working people of Poland.

The CO leadership had the gall to attack the Luta Metalúrgica comrades for daring to tell the truth, evident to millions of class-conscious workers, that the destruction of the deformed workers state of East Germany through its annexation by German imperialism was a defeat for the workers of the world. While the ICL threw itself into fighting against capitalist unification and for a red Germany of workers councils as part of a socialist Europe, Altamira claimed that "the phony 'unification' of Germany must... open up, sooner rather than later, a great mass mobilization and a revolutionary situation from which no country of Europe will be exempt" (*Prensa Obrera*, 3 July 1990). Far from producing a "revolutionary" situation, German reunification brought a rise in racist terror, unemployment for millions with the closing of factories, destruction of conquests for the working people, with especially brutal results for working women.

Whereas the Spartacists organized a protest in New York against Gorbachev and Yeltsin's 1991 withdrawal of the Soviet brigade [from Cuba], which gave imperialism a green light for a possible invasion, CO's newspaper (12-18 October 1991), far from protesting, proclaimed that the event had no importance because "the presence of Soviet troops has nothing to do with defense of the island...." Today CO publishes a resolution (17 July 1994) of its national congress, on Clinton's threat to invade Haiti, which *does not even mention* the urgent danger facing the Cuban Revolution.

The low point came when Yeltsin seized on the failed coup by the "Gang of Eight" in August 1991 to launch a campaign to completely destroy what remained of the gains of October and the Soviet state. In the USSR the ICL distributed thousands of leaflets with the urgent call, "Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!" While the Morenoites hailed the "new Russian revolution," the absurd line of Altamira was that U.S. imperialism gave its support not to its man Yeltsin but to the "Gang of Eight"—in other words, that for the Soviet workers the basic thing at that time was to fight against these Stalinist has-beens and *not* against Yeltsin, Bush's man and the spearhead of open capitalist counterrevolution. CO repeated the phony propaganda that a "mass mobilization" defeated the Gang of Eight's botched coup.

It is obvious why Altamira and CO don't want their members to find out about Trotsky's line on the Russian question! It is no accident that a tendency which capitulates to class collaboration with its "own" bourgeoisie capitulated to the imperialist campaign against the conquests of the October Revolution, a campaign which culminated in the destruction of the USSR.

### III

The Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky proclaimed that "The black question has become an integral part of the world revolution." Brazil has the largest black population in the world after Nigeria, and as part of the Brazilian working class, black and mulatto workers have enormous potential power. The struggle against the oppression of blacks in Brazil is a *strategic* question of the proletarian revolution. As Cannon noted in his essay on the Russian Revolution and blacks in the U.S. (1961), it was Lenin and the Bolsheviks who insisted that black oppression is a special question which requires special attention and work by the revolutionary party.

As Lenin said in *What Is To Be Done?* the vanguard party must be the "tribune of the people," fighting to mobilize the power of the working class against every kind of oppression. The urgency of this is seen in Brazil, where death squads constantly kill black "street children." In the steel mills, black workers are condemned to die from leucopenia.<sup>1</sup> But the attitude of the fake left in Brazil, which follows the social-democratic PT and the bureaucracy of the CUT [pro-PT labor federation], is the narrow "trade-unionist" and economist position which Lenin's Bolsheviks fought against.

This is seen in the most scandalous way in the case of Causa Operária, which, as the Luta Metalúrgica comrades have noted, has been willfully *blind* to black oppression. CO did not even take up this question in the 6,600 lines of its collection of basic documents from 1979 to 1988 (*Bases Programáticas*). This collection was published just when tens of thousands of blacks were marching through the streets during the centenary of the abolition of slavery, shouting slogans against the brutal racism of present-

<sup>1</sup>[Disease caused by the reduction in white blood cells due to inhalation of benzene gas (a by-product of steel plants' coke ovens). The National Steel Company in Volta Redonda says leucopenia is a "genetic black disease." —Translator's note.]

day Brazil and trying to pull down the statue of the racist mass murderer Caxias!<sup>2</sup>

In an important effort to confront this strategic question, Luta Metalúrgica wrote a document in August 1993 for the meeting on "The CUT's Role in the Struggle Against Racism." In this document, which reflected a transitional period in the group's development and was marked by some important weaknesses (such as the slogan for black fractions in the unions), the comrades called for worker-peasant militias for self-defense in the struggle against racist terror, denounced forced sterilization of black women and criticized the fake left's silence on black oppression, which went hand in hand with the fact that the bulk of the "left" voted for a starvation minimum wage (less than 100 dollars a month) that condemns millions of blacks to super-exploitation. In the recent period, in a significant internationalist effort, the comrades translated the document "Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom" (1967), in which the Spartacist League/U.S. elaborated the program of revolutionary integrationism.

As the tribune of the oppressed, it is indispensable that the Leninist party raise the banner of struggle against the oppression of women, rooted in the institution of the bourgeois family—a question of utmost importance in Brazil—as part of the program of permanent revolution. The defense of the rights of Indians and homosexuals is an important element in the fight against the bourgeois prejudices that poison the consciousness of the working people and against the nationalist fake left which reproduces the social values of "its own" bourgeoisie.

What Trotsky said in 1939 about blacks in the U.S. applies today as well:

"We must say to the conscious elements of the Negroes that they are convoked by the historic development to become a vanguard of the working class.... If it happens that we...are not able to find the road to this stratum, then we are not worthy at all. The permanent revolution and all the rest would be only a lie."

—[Leon Trotsky, "Plans for the Negro Organization" (April 1939)]

The black question in Brazil, as in the U.S., is not a national question, and the fantasies of black nationalism regarding "self-determination" are an obstacle to the struggle against oppression. The only road for black liberation is that of the socialist revolution, carried out by the proletariat under the leadership of a multiracial Leninist party. This means that it is indispensable to forge black cadres of the internationalist Trotskyist party. Inspired by the heroism of such fighters as Zumbi, João Cândido, Toussaint L'Ouverture, Frederick Douglass, John Brown and Sojourner Truth, the beginning of joint study on the black question is an important element of these fraternal relations.

### IV

The comrades of Luta Metalúrgica ended their April document against the popular front by citing what Trotsky wrote on Spain in the 1930s: "For a successful solution of all these tasks, three conditions are required: a party; once

<sup>2</sup>[Founder of the Brazilian army, who won the 1864-70 war against Paraguay (thereby depopulating that country) and bloodily suppressed black and peasant rebellions. —Translator's note.]

more a party; again a party!" Calling for "a revolutionary regroupment that takes the form of the construction of a Trotskyist party with a firm Marxist programmatic base," they emphasized: "The key to a well-founded revolutionary regroupment is therefore a deep-going struggle for internationalism and the transitional program."

Essential to this effort is the fight to *forge cadres* of a Leninist nucleus. The party is built, in Lenin's words, "from the top down," on the basis of the Fourth Internationalist program. In its beginnings—in contrast to the fake left's hollow "mass" pretensions—such a nucleus has to be a *fighting propaganda group*. In Brazil it is a priority to publish a Trotskyist journal in line with the real size and work of the group, in order to carry out propaganda for the revolutionary program. With the authority earned in years of bitter working-class struggles, the comrades of Luta Metalúrgica face the need to polemicize against those who besmirch the name of Trotskyism—in the first place the centrists of Causa Operária; to seek the possibility of regroupments through splits and fusions; and to recruit youth so that a new generation of revolutionaries may enter the struggle against capitalist barbarism. The effort to build a propaganda group will certainly involve difficult decisions on priorities, which will need to be resolved through collective discussion.

The rotten values of semi-social-democratic groups like the PSTU and CO are shown not only over such issues as their support to "strikes" by the police (the professionals of anti-worker and racist repression) and calls for a more "people's" police. They are shown as well in the open disdain of CO's leaders toward the revolutionary workers of Luta Metalúrgica, whom they defame as "ignorant" and backward. We jointly declare a pitiless struggle to politically unmask these petty bourgeois who tail the popular front and lose no opportunity to keep their mouths shut regarding the oppression of blacks and women.

For us internationalism is not a pretty sentiment for Sunday speechifying and resolutions. It is the struggle to build a world party based on revolutionary democratic centralism, quite opposed to the national federations of innumerable nationalist opportunists. Luta Metalúrgica's record of struggle against the popular front and for finding a proletarian program against black oppression has a deep-going parallelism with the struggle of the Spartacist tendency since its foundation, and provides a solid basis for going forward together. We underline the need to carry out joint work, in full consciousness of the difficulties posed by geographic distance and other obstacles; overcoming these difficulties will require conscious, mutual efforts. We note as an urgent task the study of Portuguese by the comrades of the ICL, and of Spanish and English by comrades of Luta Metalúrgica.

Our perspective is for these fraternal relations to be a step toward the fusion of our organizations, uniting our efforts in the struggle for communism throughout the planet. The realization of such a fusion would represent an important extension of the ICL. We fight to reforge the Fourth International on the basis of the communism of Lenin and Trotsky and the rules set forward in the "Transitional Program":

"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

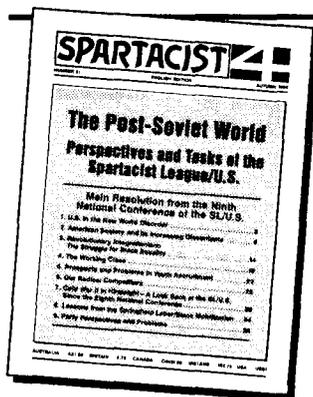
20 September 1994

- Approved by Luta Metalúrgica, 22 September 1994.
- Approved by the International Secretariat, International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), 26 September 1994.

# SPARTACIST

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## Quebec...

(continued from page 56)

apartments, rounded up hundreds of trade unionists and left-wing activists at gunpoint and threw them in prison where they were held incommunicado. Their "crime": an association with the belief that the oppressed Québécois nation had the right to determine its own fate. Thus martial law starkly exposed the enforced subjugation of Quebec, which is a foundation stone of the Canadian capitalist state.

The existence of two separate and increasingly divergent nations, one oppressing the other, continues to define the political landscape in this country, and has terribly undermined working-class struggle. As revolutionary Marxists, we unconditionally defend the national rights of the Québécois people and at the same time oppose all manner of nationalism and chauvinism, which strangle the fight against capitalist exploitation. We seek to advance the cause of all working people through building a revolutionary workers party that is a tribune of the oppressed. The forcible confinement of Quebec within Canada has poisoned relations between the English Canadian and Québécois working class. The recognition by the workers of each nation that their respective capitalist rulers—not each other—are the enemy can only come through an independent Quebec.

In the late 1960s/early '70s, opposition to the suppression of national and language rights fueled militant proletarian struggle in Quebec. The Québécois working class emerged as the most combative in all North America. This was underlined in the near-insurrectionary general strike of 1972, which saw whole towns taken over and run by striking workers. But in English Canada, the anti-Quebec chauvinism of the trade-union officialdom and the NDP [the social democratic New Democratic Party] served to tie the workers to their "own" bourgeoisie in the name of "Canadian unity." This Anglo chauvinism helped impel the Québécois workers increasingly into the arms of the Parti Québécois, the political representative of Quebec's newly emergent francophone [French speaking] bourgeoisie.



Canadian Press

**Bigots trample Quebec flag in Brockville, Ontario. Nationalism and chauvinism are poison to class struggle.**

Since our inception, the Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste has actively championed Quebec's right to independence. As we wrote in 1978, when Trudeau again threatened to "use the sword" against Quebec:

"Labor must proclaim its unconditional support for the Québécois' right to self-determination...."

"The Quebec working class is today the most combative on the North American continent. This gives burning importance to the defense of Québécois national rights by English-Canadian and U.S. labor. Such a revolutionary program which combats all forms of social oppression, including the national oppression of the Québécois, is essential to truly unite the English- and French-speaking proletariat of North America."

—"Trudeau Threatens War on Quebec,"

SC No. 23, February 1978

While unconditionally defending Quebec's national rights, we did not then advocate the separation of Quebec. Our perception was that national antagonisms had not yet become so intense as to make Quebec independence the only means of cutting through these hostilities and bringing the class struggle against capitalism to the fore.

But within the context of an Anglo-chauvinist unitary Canadian state, the national divide *has* poisoned relations between the working class of English Canada and Quebec. The depth of this schism can be amply seen in the parties that currently occupy the opposition benches in parliament. On the one side is the rabidly Anglo-chauvinist Reform Party. On the other is the *indépendantiste* Bloc Québécois. The long-ruling federal Tory party has been obliterated, and the Liberals rule only by virtue of having swept Ontario in the last elections.

The same mutual national suspicions and hatreds which led to this parliamentary shake-up reach deep into the working class. Hundreds of thousands of unionists and other working people in English Canada, disillusioned at the NDP's wholesale capitulation to Bay Street's austerity dictates, abandoned "their" party and cast their votes for the unvarnished chauvinism of Preston Manning's Reform Party in 1993. In Quebec, working-class militancy and combativity has been dampened, submerged into support for the PQ, which was elected for the third time last fall pledging to hold an early referendum on independence.

These events only confirm that nationalism and chauvinism are, and have long been, a decisive brake on the workers' struggle in both nations. Through an extensive internal discussion on the Quebec national question, the Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste re-evaluated our previous position. A motion adopted at a July plenum of our Central Committee noted in part:

"As revolutionary Marxists who seek to advance the cause of proletarian internationalist class struggle, the Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste advocates independence for Quebec. Our historic position of upholding Quebec's right to self-determination, while not advocating independence, was at best based on a superficial appreciation of the evolution of a self-conscious Quebec nation and the class struggle within it. Although the question of independence has yet to be put to a referendum vote of the Québécois population, the question was effectively resolved with the implementation of French-only language laws in the 1970s (i.e., the choice of assimilation or separation was decided in favor of the latter)...."

"For Leninists, the advocacy of an independent Quebec is the means to get this question 'off the agenda,' particularly to combat the orgy of Anglo chauvinism in English Canada, but also to foil the aims of the bourgeois nationalists in Quebec who seek to tie the historically combative Québécois

proletariat to their coattails. This is the only road to bringing to the fore the real social contradictions between the working class and their 'own' bourgeoisie in either nation, and thereby laying a genuine basis for common class struggle in the future.

## The Development of the Quebec Nation

Quebec was forcibly incorporated into British North America following the defeat of the French garrison on the Plains of Abraham [below Quebec City] in 1759. The British conquerors, who had expelled the French-speaking population of Nova Scotia (the Acadians) some years earlier, subjugated the rest of New France through a deal with the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Centuries of dynastic and commercial warfare between France and England made anti-French chauvinism a defining feature of the consciousness of the English ruling class. Thus the true founders of the Anglo Canadian state—counterrevolutionary British Loyalist refugees fleeing the American War of Independence—poured into Ontario and the Maritimes with truly hard-wired arrogance and bigotry toward the conquered French.

Isolated from the rationalism and anti-clericalism of the Enlightenment, and from the French Revolution of 1789, for well over a century Quebec remained largely a priest-ridden rural backwater. Any indigenous French-speaking bourgeoisie was eliminated as a factor. In 1837, a national-bourgeois revolt, the *Patriote* rebellion, was brutally crushed. Through the nineteenth century, Anglo Canadian (later joined by American) capital gradually displaced the British overlords.

Significant industrialization and urbanization began to change the character of Quebec society by the end of the century, but it took many decades for these developments to find political expression. The weak francophone bourgeoisie was thoroughly integrated with dominant English Canadian capital, while the petty-bourgeois elite remained tied to the church.

The Catholic hierarchy maintained an iron grip on Quebec society, including the working class. For a period in the late 1800s, membership in the Knights of Labour union organization was even declared to be a "mortal sin." The church continued to exercise direct or indirect control over much of the labor movement right up to the 1950s.

Throughout the long rule of Maurice Duplessis beginning in the 1930s, a period known as the "Great Darkness," virtually all social discontent was met with state repression. But from World War II on, a series of strikes—notably the illegal five-month battle by 5,000 miners in Asbestos and Thetford Mines in 1949—showed that the proletariat was beginning to stir. Then the death of Duplessis in 1959 gave rise to a sea change in Quebec society.

With the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, a Québécois bourgeoisie emerged, striving to cohere an autonomous political economy of which they would be the apex and chief beneficiaries. The Liberal government of Jean Lesage carried out a series of major nationalizations. Hydro-Québec in particular became the symbol of the growing power of Québécois capital. The new Caisse de Dépôt et de Placement state pension fund created a huge capital pool to invest in building up Québécois-owned industry. Socially, the dominance of the Catholic hierarchy was broken. Birth rates plummeted, from one of the highest in the world to one of the lowest. French-language education was secularized and



Sperling/APC

**Union hall in Asbestos, Quebec, 1949. With the asbestos workers' strike, the proletariat decisively entered Quebec political life.**

vastly broadened, including new francophone universities and CEGEP junior colleges.

Politically, two distinct trends emerged, reflecting the choices confronting the rapidly modernizing Quebec society: toward assimilation (leading to the eventual disappearance of the nation) or toward separation and the creation of an independent state. The chief representative of the former trend, Pierre Trudeau, sought to use the federal government in Ottawa to incorporate and submerge Quebec into the rest of Canada. Trudeau couched this program in "liberal" trappings of "bilingualism and biculturalism," necessarily weighted in favor of the economically and politically dominant English-speaking people. While government services in French became available for the first time in much of the country, the mere appearance of French in everyday life (e.g., French translations on cereal boxes) drove English Canadian bigots into a frenzy. Meanwhile, Trudeau's answer to *indépendantiste* agitation in Quebec was to send in the army in 1970 and to threaten again in later years to invade Quebec. Today, this legacy is carried forward by his lieutenant, Jean Chrétien [current prime minister].

The key weapon of those who sought to counter the assimilation of Québécois society became language legislation. A common political economy requires a common language, which is also then the vehicle of the culture. Beginning in the late 1960s, the Quebec National Assembly began to pass a series of ever more discriminatory laws, culminating in the PQ's 1977 Bill 101 which declared, in effect, a unilingual French Quebec. French was made the official language of work, while "foreigners," including English speakers from elsewhere in Canada, were required to send their children to French schools.

Large sections of Anglo Canadian capital and hundreds of thousands of English speakers decamped down the highway to Toronto and beyond. Not only did the historic anglophone population, centered on the West Island of Montreal, decline sharply, but new immigrants began to be assimilated into French-speaking society. In 1971 only 15 percent of children whose mother tongue was neither French nor English were registered in Quebec public schools where French was the language of instruction. Around this time,



Robson/Montreal Star

**May 1972: Sept-Îles strikers block roads into the town during Quebec general strike.**

there were significant protests among immigrant communities, notably Italians in the Montreal suburb of St-Léonard, for the right to continue to send their children to English schools. But by 1989, over 70 percent of such allophone children were in French-language schools.

In the decades since the Quiet Revolution, Quebec society has been reshaped. The decisive pinnacles of industry and finance are no longer in Anglo Westmount. As the Québécois bourgeoisie continues to consolidate its own separate political economy, the logical end product is the creation of an independent state, a new minor imperialist power à la Austria or Denmark.

### **National Chauvinism: Poison to Class Struggle**

The utterly anomalous situation where Canada is split on national lines while Quebec has not yet separated produces deep nationalist animosity. The workers in both nations have been driven ever deeper into the clutches of their respective bourgeoisies, undermining the class struggle against capitalism.

The Quebec General Strike of 1972 was the most explosive class conflict in the Canadian state since 1919. Yet it was *opposed* and *denounced* by the leadership of English Canadian labor. In the midst of the strike, the Canadian Labour Congress executive waved the flag of Anglo chauvinism against Quebec labor militancy, declaring:

"It is, therefore, essential that the Congress and its affiliated unions oppose those elements, in any part of Canada, which advocate the destruction of Confederation or a reduction of the federal powers as a means of pursuing selfish regional aims."

—quoted in *Globe and Mail* [Toronto],  
15 May 1972

As for the NDP, federal leader David Lewis publicly applauded the jailing of the Common Front strike leaders. Betrayed and abandoned in that pivotal struggle by the leadership of English Canadian labor, the militancy of Québécois workers was channeled toward the bourgeois nationalists, leading to the election of the first *péquist* [PQ] regime of René Lévesque in 1976.

Six years later, Québécois workers got a taste of mass

union-busting from their "own" PQ government, which slashed wages and ripped up union contracts in the public sector. Fifty thousand angry unionists demonstrated outside the National Assembly with signs reading "Duplessis-Lévesque: Like Father, Like Son." In an article entitled "For a Quebec General Strike!" (printed in French and English in *SC* No. 57, March 1983), we wrote: "This critical showdown between Quebec labor and the PQ provides an unprecedented opportunity to win this militant labor movement to a perspective of multinational revolutionary class unity where it is destined to play a *vanguard* role." But the nationalist union tops called off the strikes and the PQ was able to carry through its sweeping attacks, dealing Quebec labor a blow from which it has yet to recover.

Today all three Quebec labor federations are locked in a deadly nationalist embrace with the *hauts bourgeois* Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard. In rallying round the PQ and Bloc, Québécois workers are responding to the pervasive, ugly Anglo chauvinism that dominates English Canada. Five years ago, the Meech Lake Accord collapsed amid ranting and raving in English Canada against the simple statement that Quebec is a "distinct society." Then came the federal Tories' Charlottetown Accord, supposedly the final attempt to resolve the "constitutional crisis" and end the "Quebec problem." It was rejected by majorities in both nations.

Following the election of the latest PQ government last fall, another upsurge of bigotry has erupted in English Canada. A Québécois woman tourist whose car broke down in an upscale Vancouver neighborhood was brutally beaten by thugs who spotted her Quebec license plates. This summer in Owen Sound, Ontario, a Québécois woman and her family were virtually driven out of town when their home was pelted with eggs and defaced with "Frogs Go Home" written in excrement on the living room window.

While there have been episodic examples of common class struggle, for example in the federal public-sector strike of 1991, the national divide goes very deep in the organized working class. The vast majority of unions in Quebec are either entirely separate from those in English Canada, or exercise nearly complete autonomy. And it speaks volumes that during this year's rail strike, former Tory cabinet minister Bouchard could get away with grandstanding as a "friend of Quebec workers" by initially opposing federal strikebreaking legislation.

National animosity cripples working-class struggle. As Karl Marx said a long time ago, a nation which oppresses another cannot itself be free. Marx's arguments for Irish independence from England, despite the different particulars, are instructive for the situation in Canada today:

"...it is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland.... The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland.... The English reaction in England had its roots (as in Cromwell's time) in the subjugation of Ireland."

—Letter to Engels, 10 December 1869

### **Leninism and the National Question**

Twentieth-century capitalism has intensified national oppression and exacerbated reactionary national conflicts. Nationalist reaction was a driving force for capitalist restoration in the former workers states of East Europe and

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# Quebec Native Peoples Caught in Nationalist Crossfire

*Reprinted from Spartacist Canada No. 105 (September/October 1995).*

In 1990, the Quebec Sûreté police staged an armed assault on Mohawks seeking to protect an ancestral burial ground near Oka. Native defenders fought back and drove off the cops. Liberal premier Robert Bourassa, supported by the Parti Québécois, then appealed for federal military intervention. The army deployed thousands of soldiers backed by armor and air support, surrounding the Mohawk community of Kanestetake for weeks. While Ottawa's army laid siege to Kanestetake, howling mobs of up to 5,000 gathered in Châteauguay, near another Mohawk community, Kahnawake, on Montreal's South Shore. Egged on by racist demagogues including Klansmen, this pogromist *racaille* hurled rocks, burned Natives in effigy and shouted nationalist slogans like "Québec aux Québécois!"

Five years later, the same racist capitalist rulers in Ottawa who sent the army against the Oka Mohawks, who created and maintain the brutal reservation system and the dehumanizing Indian Act, are now trying to manipulate the Native peoples of Quebec as a chauvinist wedge against Quebec independence. For their part, Quebec's nationalist leaders intend to forcibly incorporate "their" Native peoples into an independent Quebec. They have particularly asserted "national" claims to vast areas of northern Quebec which were never part of the historic territory of the French-speaking population.

Both Quebec City and Ottawa, from mutually hostile perspectives, understand the basic economic fact that the rivers of northern Quebec are the lifeblood of modern Quebec industry, feeding the power generating stations of the James Bay basin. And this land has been occupied for centuries by Native peoples, today scattered in small communities across the Northern Shield. Thus, inevitably, they have become a football in a cynical, high stakes, chauvinist game. No matter who wins it, the Native peoples will surely lose.

To sweeten the pot, Ottawa continues to hold out the promise of "Native self-government." Coming from those who have crushed the aboriginal peoples underfoot since before Confederation, this can in most cases only mean "transforming" the barren reserves into South Africa-style bantustans. Such "self-governing homelands" will still be stalked by the poverty and unemployment, the disease, alcoholism and early death which have been the fate of Native peoples under racist Canadian capitalism. Yet, grotesque as it seems just five years after Oka, some aboriginal leaders have bought into Ottawa's fraudulent "liberalism" toward Native demands, suggesting that in the event of Quebec separation they would appeal for intervention by the Canadian army. Trotskyists, of course, would adamantly oppose this.

Almost all major Native groups—among them the Inuit, Cree, Mohawks and Montagnais—plan to hold



Rob Galbraith/Reuters

**26 September 1990: military police arrest a Mohawk Warrior in Kanestetake.**

referendums on whether or not to remain in an independent Quebec. The Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste upholds the right of the Native peoples to decide their own fate. In areas where they are the concentrated population, we assert their right to the fullest possible regional autonomy, i.e., the genuine right to govern their territories and to control the land and resources therein. These rights may run up against developments—railways, hydroelectric projects, oil pipelines—which are in the broader interest of working people in society at large. In such cases, the Native peoples should receive generous compensation based on their completely consensual agreement.

However, in addressing the current, concrete "choice" between being part of an independent Quebec or remaining a part of English Canada, our primary point of departure is to underline that within the framework of racist capitalist rule this simply means the "right" of the aboriginal populations to determine by whom they will be oppressed and brutalized. In fighting to build a revolutionary party that acts as the "tribune of the people," we seek to mobilize the proletariat in both English Canada and Quebec in defense of Native rights. Ultimately, only socialist revolution can shatter the heavy chains of racist capitalist oppression which have dragged the Native peoples into degradation and misery, and usher in an egalitarian socialist society which can redress centuries of injustice.

## Quebec...

(continued from page 50)

the Soviet Union. At the same time, in the wake of counter-revolution, nationalist hostilities have exploded worldwide, along with an escalation of interimperialist rivalries.

The drive by major powers to redivide the world into regional trade blocs and the increasing offshore production in low-wage "Third World" countries underscores the need for communists to champion the rights of oppressed nations. Only by standing forthrightly against the nationalism of an oppressor nation can the proletarian vanguard claim the moral authority to call on workers of an oppressed nation to fight their "own" nationalist leaders, who seek to solidify their place among the exploiters and oppressors.

In a series of major writings, Russian Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin developed the Marxist approach to the national question in the epoch of imperialism, i.e., the epoch of capitalist decay. The tsarist empire was a prisonhouse of peoples, the Great Russian autocracy lording it over millions of Ukrainians, Poles, Georgians and a multitude of other oppressed nationalities. In his "Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (February-May 1914), Lenin wrote:

"In this situation, the proletariat of Russia is faced with a twofold or, rather, a two-sided task: to combat nationalism of every kind, above all, Great-Russian nationalism; to recognise, not only fully equal rights for all nations in general, but also equality of rights as regards polity, i.e., the right of nations to self-determination, to secession. And at the same time, it is their task, in the interests of a successful struggle against all and every kind of nationalism among all nations, to preserve the unity of the proletarian struggle and the proletarian organisations, amalgamating these organisations into a close-knit international association, despite bourgeois strivings for national exclusiveness.

"Complete equality of rights for all nations; the right of nations to self-determination; the unity of the workers of all nations—such is the national programme that Marxism, the experience of the whole world, and the experience of Russia, teach the workers."

While upholding the right to independence, Lenin emphasized that the question whether or not to advocate separation can and must be judged only in the concrete: "The party of the proletariat must decide the latter question quite independently in each particular case, having regard to the interests of social development as a whole and the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat for socialism" ("Resolution on the National Question," May 1917). In Russia, it was clear that national separation or the attainment of any other substantial democratic demand was inconceivable without a thoroughgoing revolution. Thus Lenin advocated to the non-Russian nationalities a course of common struggle against the tsarist autocracy.

Marxist revolutionary Leon Trotsky took a similar position in Spain in 1930-31, where again the possibility of revolution was rapidly unfolding. While upholding the right of Catalonia to self-determination, Trotsky noted that even the most fervent Catalan-separatist worker would find it acceptable to not "divide their forces in the present crisis, which opens such sweeping opportunities to the Spanish proletariat...since it is completely obvious that in the event of the victory of the revolution, it would be ever so much easier than it is today for Catalonia, as well as for other regions, to achieve the right of self-determination" ("Tasks of the Spanish Communists," May 1930).

But there was a sharp change in the situation a few years later when a new rightist government in Madrid began moving against the Catalan Generalitat regional government. Seeing Catalonia as a crucial bastion against the growing Spanish reaction and fascist danger, Trotsky then called upon his followers to go over to agitating for the proclamation of an independent republic of Catalonia and to demand, in order to guarantee it, the immediate arming of the whole people. This was the way that the proletariat could gain leadership of the oppressed masses, exposing the hesitations of the Generalitat, and thus deal a defeat to reaction. In this specific situation advocacy of independence was a powerful lever to advance the class interests of the proletariat.

In each case the question for Marxists is: how best, under the given historical circumstances, to break the hold of nationalism and chauvinism and turn the workers against their own bourgeoisie, opening the road to revolutionary struggle. The answer is not the same at all times and in all places, nor can a policy for one country be mechanically transposed to another. The differences between English Canada and Quebec are much greater, for example, than those between the Swedes and Norwegians, who separated peaceably in 1905, or between the Russians and Ukrainians, whose Slavic languages are largely mutually intelligible (not to mention the Croats and Serbs who speak the *same* language!).

The closest contemporary parallel would appear to be the Walloon-Flemish division that is Belgium. National/linguistic antagonisms in that country have significantly deepened over recent decades, and are today a strategic obstacle to working-class struggle against capitalism.

In Canada and Quebec, the experience of at least the past two decades demonstrates clearly that successful proletarian struggle demands separation into two independent nation-states. Thus regardless of the outcome of the coming referendum, and in general in the future, we will continue to advocate Quebec independence. At the same time, we recognize that self-determination is a bourgeois-democratic right and as such is subordinate to the broader interests of proletarian revolution. Thus our position advocating Quebec independence could dramatically change in any case or at any juncture where this would cut against the historic interests of the proletariat.

For example, in 1916 Lenin, who had fought Rosa Luxemburg's rejection of the slogan of Poland's right to self-determination, opposed calling for the independence of Poland in the context of World War I. He emphasized that Poland's "independence today is 'impracticable' without wars or revolutions. To be in favour of an all-European war merely for the sake of restoring Poland is to be a nationalist of the worst sort..." ("The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," July 1916).

Later, following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the newly independent bourgeois regimes in the Caucasus secured direct imperialist military backing, posing a mortal threat to the new Soviet workers state. The Bolsheviks eventually took power in the region through a combination of local uprisings and Red Army intervention, over the opposition of "nationalist" counterrevolutionaries. As Trotsky wrote two decades later, "Forceful sovietization was justified: the safeguarding of the socialist revolution comes before formal democratic principles" ("Balance Sheet of

**Demonstration  
of 50,000 workers in  
Quebec City against  
union-busting by  
nationalist PQ  
government,  
January 1983.**



the Finnish Events" [April 1940] in *In Defense of Marxism*.

Another example is provided by the Ukraine on the eve of World War II. In the spring and summer of 1939, Trotsky proposed the slogan of an "independent Soviet Ukraine." Through this, he sought to undercut and reverse the growth of right-wing Ukrainian nationalism, while at the same time believing that the fight against national oppression could serve as a stimulus for workers political revolution in the Ukraine in advance of the Russian core of the Soviet degenerated workers state. But this was the moment when the fate of all the peoples of East Europe was about to be decided by the looming war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances, there was simply no room to create an independent workers and peasants Ukraine—giving Trotsky's proposed slogan (which he dropped with the Stalin-Hitler pact and the onset of the Second World War) an unreal quality. (See "On Trotsky's Advocacy of an Independent Soviet Ukraine," *Spartacist* No. 49-50, Winter 1993-94.)

### Quebec and the Left

The history of the left in Canada vis à vis Quebec is not a good one. The founding Canadian Communist Party, which had essentially no roots among Québécois workers, failed to assert the right of self-determination for Quebec. After its Stalinist degeneration, the CP thoroughly embraced Canadian nationalism, and today its rump remnants in English Canada continue to proclaim the need for a "united" Canada.

The Mao-Stalinist organizations which grew explosively in Quebec in the 1970s—and blew apart just as explosively a few years later—also capitulated to the unitary Anglo-chauvinist state. Their Canadian nationalism flowed from the anti-Communist position that the Soviet Union was the "main enemy" of the oppressed. Thus, they fell right into the arms of their own "democratic" imperialist rulers. The grievously misnamed Workers Communist Party went so far as to call for strengthening the Canadian armed forces to counter the "Soviet threat" to Canadian sovereignty!

"Canadian unity" has of course long been the cry of the wretchedly right-wing social-democratic NDP and its Cooperative Commonwealth Federation predecessors. And "left"

social democrats like the International Socialists (I.S.) follow in the wake of their NDP big brothers. Three years ago, the I.S. actually called for a Yes vote to the Tories' Charlottetown Accord, the only ostensibly Marxist group to rally around this defense of the status quo in imperialist Canada. Not surprisingly, the I.S. today denies that national antagonisms are of much consequence, blithely declaring that "anti-Quebec sentiment in English Canada is wide, but not deep" and similarly, "Nationalism has wide appeal among Québécois but the roots don't run deep" (*Socialist Worker*, October 1994). Their pompous and empty "unite and fight" rhetoric merely covers their capitulation to the Anglo-chauvinist status quo.

Beginning in the 1930s, the Trotskyists in Canada did uphold Quebec's right to self-determination, though the national question was far from the center of their propaganda and agitation. By the 1960s, when a serious reassessment of the question began in the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière (LSA/LSO), the organization had undergone political degeneration in the direction of tailing non-proletarian forces, denying the necessity of building a Leninist revolutionary party. In the ensuing splits, unifications and re-splits, all sides embraced Québécois nationalism.

The LSA/LSO proclaimed that, at least for Quebec, "consistent nationalism leads to socialism." But Marxists understand that nationalism is a bourgeois ideology which asserts that one's own people has special, pre-eminent rights over others. Thus, in fact, consistent nationalism leads to fascism. In Quebec this century, this is personified by figures like the anti-Semitic bigot and clerical-nationalist Abbé Lionel Groulx, and Adrien Arcand, an intimate of Duplessis who led the fascist Blueshirt bands in the 1930s. And while Arcand may be currently out of favor in leading Quebec nationalist circles, Abbé Groulx retains an honored place in the bourgeois-nationalists' pantheon.

The LSA/LSO championed mainstream Quebec nationalism, centering their agitation on the call for a unilingual French Quebec. Their factional opponents [in the '70s] in the Revolutionary Marxist Group and Groupe Marxiste Révolutionnaire (RMG/GMR), aligned with the centrist

European majority of the United Secretariat, chased after more left-wing elements within the nationalist movement. Both wings supported the anti-democratic French language laws, and often denounced the PQ for not being nationalist enough. The RMG in English Canada and the GMR in Quebec were completely separate organizations, an open repudiation of Lenin's fight to build one, *multinational* revolutionary party to take on and defeat the existing capitalist state power.

Today, with any "radical" edge to the Quebec national movement long a thing of the past, the GMR's descendant, Gauche Socialiste, has abandoned its rhetorical references to revolutionary class struggle. Three years ago, Gauche Socialiste even tried to build a joint youth group with the bourgeois PQ. And now they have thoroughly submerged themselves into the social-democratic nationalist Parti de la Démocratie Socialiste (formerly the Quebec NDP).

From the origins of our tendency in Canada in the early 1970s we correctly attacked the fake-Trotskyists' capitulation to nationalism, counterposing the struggle for Marxist proletarian internationalism. Our 1976 document "Quebec Nationalism and the Class Struggle" (see *SC* No. 12, January 1977) unconditionally defended Quebec's right to self-determination, upheld equal language rights for all including francophones in English Canada and anglophones in Quebec, and asserted the need for common class struggle pointing toward North American socialist revolution.

Throughout, we have sought to chart a course of revolutionary class struggle for the proletariat in both nations, emphasizing that this required a hard fight against chauvinism in English Canada and a break with bourgeois nationalism in Quebec. However we erred in not recognizing, from the outset, that it was in fact necessary to call for the independence of Quebec. We tended to slip into accepting a false equation of advocacy of independence with our fake-Trotskyist opponents' political support to nationalism. And we underestimated the sheer depth of the national divide separating the working class of English Canada and Quebec.

### Quebec Independence and Canada's Future

There is much speculation that Quebec's separation could accelerate already strong centrifugal forces, leading to the breakup of English Canada and its unification in whole or in part with the U.S. We are strategically indifferent to such a development, and certainly think it has absolutely no bearing on the question of advocating independence for Quebec.

The unification of English Canada with the U.S. poses no particular question of principle for Marxists other than it be democratically arrived at. We are far from indifferent, however, if the principal aspect of such an act is to strengthen American imperialism, particularly in the face of the sharp rise of inter-imperialist rivalries. In this regard, the statement in the document adopted by the Second International Conference of the International Communist League that "we are opposed to the disintegration of English Canada which at present could only strengthen the power of U.S. imperialism" is truncated and correspondingly potentially one-sided.

In the 1970s, American ruling circles expressed concern about the instability which could be ushered in by the creation of an independent Quebec. While Washington hardly considered René Lévesque a Fidel Castro of the north, it

was worried by the widespread labor and leftist radicalism which was shaking Quebec at the time. More broadly, in the context of international Cold War, the U.S. sought to maintain Canada as a reliable forward base for war against the USSR.

Now, with the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state, this is no longer so important, especially as Parizeau, Bouchard & Co. have sworn fealty to NATO and other military pacts. Additionally, the North American Free Trade Agreement creates a framework for continued and strengthened economic ties whether Quebec is independent or not—not least, access to relatively cheap hydroelectric power.

Nonetheless, during his recent visit to Canada, U.S. president Clinton again made clear Washington's preference for a "united" and independent Canada. Ottawa has proved extremely useful over the years as a soft cop for American imperialism, the "peacekeepers" who have provided a front for the U.S. from Korea to Vietnam to Africa and the Middle East. But in the end, Wall Street could care less whether Montreal bankers and industrialists speak French or English—as long as the dividends and interest payments are in convertible currency and are paid.

### For North American Socialist Revolution!

As in 1980, there has been much jockeying and maneuvering among Quebec's separatist leaders over the wording of the question to be put to a referendum vote this fall. Not surprisingly, the Québécois are a bit ambivalent about departing—especially with one-quarter of the Canadian national debt as their inheritance from having been under the English for so long. Comedian Yvon Deschamps captured the contradiction in his famous quip that what the Québécois really want is "an independent Quebec within a strong and united Canada."

But whatever the conjunctural sentiment, the fact remains that Quebec has, in all concrete ways, insisted on *la survivance* (survival), necessarily through compacting an insular francophone culture and society. And in English Canada, the chauvinist outcry against Quebec's assertion of national sovereignty erects profound barriers to proletarian class struggle. It is necessary, and has been for quite some time, to cut the Gordian Knot.

Nationalism and chauvinism have been the key strands in the ropes which bind the English-speaking and French-speaking workers to their "own" capitalist enemies, setting them against each other, and against anyone else who is "not us." Thus French-speaking Haitians in Montreal, English-speaking Jamaicans in Toronto, Asians in Vancouver, aboriginal peoples struggling to assert their rights, are all victims of racist abuse and open state terror "justified" in large part by the vicious logic of nationalism which currently defines and bedevils this country.

We advocate independence for Quebec to help clear the way for united struggle by the racially integrated working class of the whole continent against the system of exploitation and oppression that threatens the future of all humanity. For an independent Quebec! For class struggle against *all* the capitalist exploiters, from Bay Street and Ottawa, to Rue St-Jacques and Quebec City, to Wall Street and Washington! Forward in the fight for North American socialist revolution! ■

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# National Chauvinism Is Poison to Class Struggle

## Independence for Quebec!

On October 30, the population of Quebec voted narrowly against secession from Canada in a referendum organized by the Parti Québécois (PQ) government. In heavy voting, about 60 per cent of French-speaking Québécois cast Yes votes for "sovereignty," while the English-speaking and immigrant minorities overwhelmingly voted No.

The prospects for working-class struggle in Canada are deeply poisoned by chauvinism and nationalism, spawned by the historic oppression of the Quebec nation under the heel of a unitary Canadian state and fueled by the bourgeois-nationalists of the PQ who seek to be exploiters of their "own" working class. With the No side having won by the slimmest of margins, the Anglo-chauvinist Canadian government in Ottawa insists that Quebec's place within Canada is effectively resolved.

But the outcome will only deepen the national rift in Canadian society, spurring on a chauvinist backlash against Quebec in English Canada. And in Quebec, immediately after the vote, PQ premier Jacques Parizeau (who has since announced his resignation) launched a vicious attack on immigrants, telling his followers they had been beaten "by money and the ethnic vote."

Against the chauvinist divide which sets worker against worker, poisoning the prospects of united anti-capitalist class struggle, Marxists call for an independent Quebec. Thus the ICL called for a Yes vote in the referendum.

The following article, written just before the referendum was announced, was first published in English and French in Spartacist Canada (SC) No. 105 (September/October 1995), the newspaper of our comrades of the Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste. Bracketed insertions are by Spartacist.

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Twenty-five years ago, in October 1970, Quebec Liberal cabinet minister Pierre Laporte and British diplomat James Cross were kidnapped by a small group of Quebec separatist militants, the Front de Libération du Québec [FLQ]. Using the "FLQ Crisis" as a pretext, the federal government under Pierre Trudeau imposed the War Measures Act and sent the army to occupy Montreal. Ottawa's troops stormed houses and

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Remiorz/Canadian Press



Canadian Press

**Pro-independence demonstrators in Montreal, June 1995 (top). Anglo-chauvinist Canadian government troops guard Montreal City Hall during 1969 social upheaval. Trotskyists advocate Quebec independence to open road to anti-capitalist class struggle.**

