

# 1917

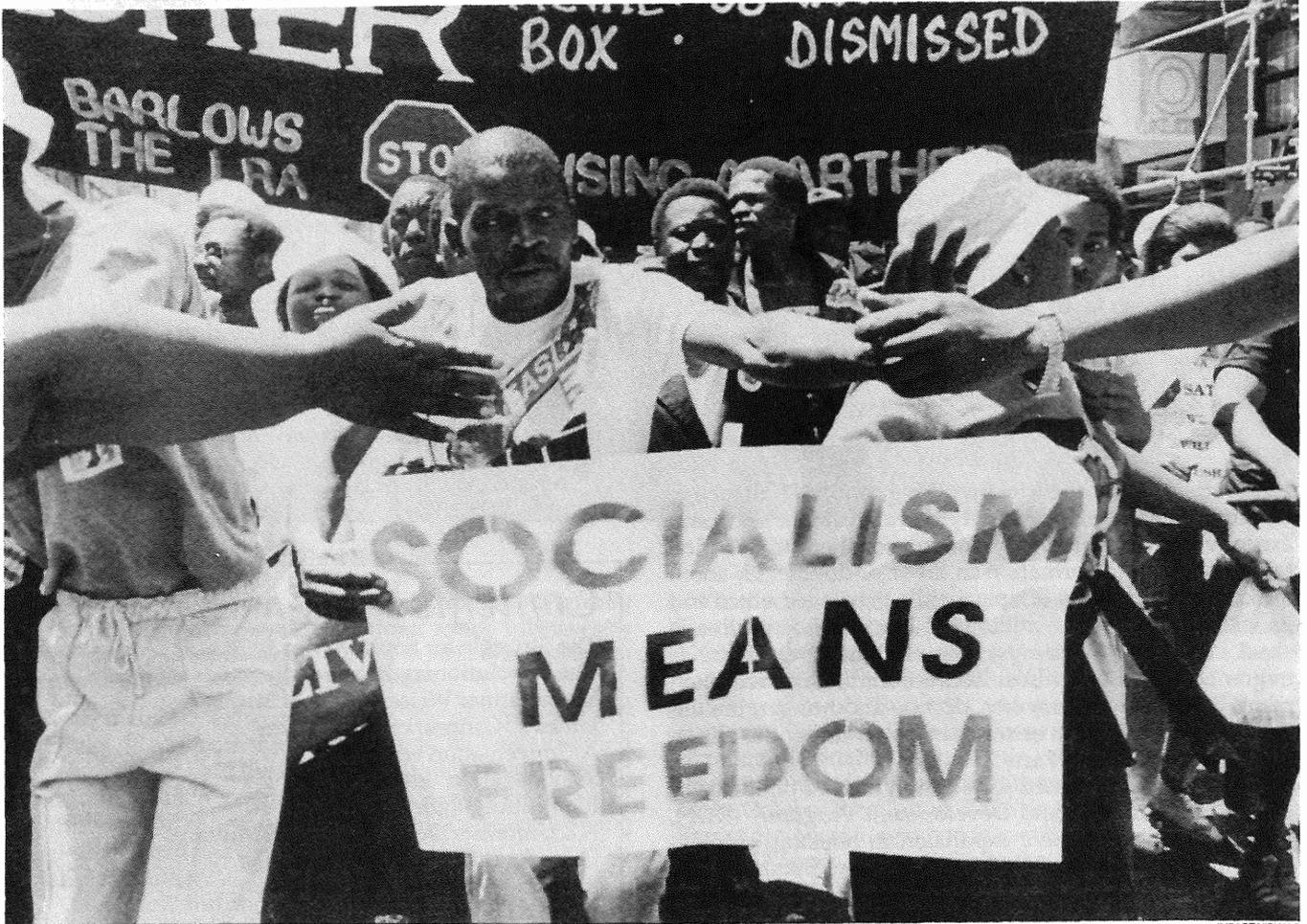
"To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be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

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IMPACT VISUALS

*From Apartheid to Neo-Apartheid*

## The Struggle for South Africa

The growing frustration of South Africa's black working class with Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) government was clearly shown last August, when hundreds of thousands of workers participated in a series of one-day rolling strikes protesting the government's "reform" of the labor code. The ANC wants to extend working hours, shorten maternity leave and give the labor minister the right to exempt employers from adhering to minimum

labor standards. This is part of the government's attempt to demonstrate to international capital that the "New South Africa" is open for business.

During the struggle against apartheid, the ANC employed plenty of "revolutionary" rhetoric, echoes of which still occasionally find their way into materials produced for popular consumption. But left rhetoric is a luxury that the ANC in government can ill afford, as Mandela explained



PETER MAGUBANE—TIME

### Soweto protesters jeer ANC compromisers, 1993

after his return from his 1996 state visit to Germany:

"we need an investor-friendly environment. If we want the support of the leading financial houses of the world, we need to measure our public statements very carefully. It was right for us to make militant statements when we were fighting apartheid, but now that has changed and we need to measure what we say."

—*Business Report*, 2 June 1996

Mandela and other former liberation fighters have traded their jail cells for stately homes, cabinet seats and executive salaries. It is easy enough for them to abandon talk of social transformation in favor of doubletalk about the common interests of apartheid's privileged elites and its victims. But for the millions of blacks who still live in shacks and squatter camps, who eke out an existence as migrant laborers, and whose lives are scarred by unemployment, homelessness, poverty, disease and hunger, life under the ANC is hardly better than it was under the white-supremacist National Party.

The ANC campaigned for election in 1994 on the basis of a "Reconstruction and Development Program" (RDP), which promised massive expansion in housing, employment and social services, as well as the redistribution of almost a third of the country's farmland. All this was supposed to be achieved while adhering to "strict and efficient monetary and fiscal policies." But, after winning the election, the ANC announced that it lacked the resources to deliver on its promises. One promise the ANC has not tried to renege on is repayment of the \$18 billion in foreign commercial bank debt run up by its apartheid predecessors.

The RDP has been replaced with the "Growth, Employment and Redistribution" (GEAR) program, based on the neo-liberal "structural adjustment" formulas promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Advertised as a means of creating economic growth, GEAR focuses on increasing "competitiveness" through depressing wages, reducing social expenditures, lowering tariffs, and tailoring domestic economic activity to fit the requirements of the imperialist world order. These policies have naturally alienated much of the ANC's plebeian base,

but they have been warmly received by imperialist financiers. The IMF's 1995 annual assessment praised the ANC's "extraordinary" accomplishments in redirecting economic discussion from talk of nationalization and expansion of social services to the need for "fiscal discipline" and reducing the public sector.

### From Apartheid to Neo-Apartheid

There have been important changes in South Africa over the past decade: the legal edifice of official racism has been abolished, universal suffrage has been introduced, and the former leaders of the main black resistance organization today head the government. While neither the social order, nor the state apparatus which protects it, has changed fundamentally, the ANC's election did radically change the attitude of the black masses toward the government.

The ANC was propelled into office through its ability to harness the discontent of the black masses (i.e., to make South Africa "ungovernable"). It promised revolutionary social change and radical redistribution of wealth. But it is today the chief agency for demobilizing the mass struggles it once sought to lead, and, with the passage of time, the gulf between the aspirations of the black masses and the program of the ANC is growing. In Mandela's address at the opening of parliament in February 1995, he called for "raising the levels of discipline and responsible action throughout the society," and criticized the "culture of entitlement" of those blacks who expected the ANC to deliver housing, schools, jobs and health care. In particular Mandela attacked those who advocate continuing mass political struggle:

"Mass action of any kind will not create resources that the government does not have and would only serve to subvert the capacity of government to serve the people."

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## 1917

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# Trotsky & the 'Crisis of Trotskyism'

## The Revolutionary Betrayed



1919: Lenin and Trotsky in Red Square

The following review essay, by Murray Smith, was originally solicited by a left-wing academic journal which subsequently decided not to publish it. We are pleased to make it available as a contribution to the history of our movement.

In his memoirs, Leopold Trepper, the one-time head of the Soviet "Red Orchestra" spy network in Nazi-occupied Western Europe, paid the following tribute to the Trotskyist opposition to Stalin's regime—a regime which Trepper had faithfully served throughout World War II despite growing misgivings that it had betrayed the principles of the October socialist revolution:

"The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honor. Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice-axe, they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated. In the camps, their conduct was admirable. But their voices were lost in the tundra.

"Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a *coherent political system* capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed."

—Leopold Trepper, *The Great Game*, 1977,  
emphasis added

Trepper's memoirs and his belated tribute to Trotskyism testify eloquently to the accuracy of Leon Trotsky's claim of 1938 that the Soviet bureaucracy was by no means a homogeneous monolith united behind a single political project, but a sociologically brittle and politically unstable phenomenon that owed its temporary unity to a peculiar combination of venality, fear, inertia, and, for at least some of its members, continuing commitment to the original ideas of the October Revolution. Referring to the defections of the Soviet diplomat Butenko to fascist Italy and of the top-ranking GPU agent Ignace Reiss to the movement for a Fourth International, Trotsky noted:

"The public utterances of former foreign representatives of the Kremlin, who refused to return to Moscow, irrefutably confirm in their own way that all shades of political thought are to be found among the bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F. Butenko)....

"If tomorrow the bourgeois-fascist grouping, the 'faction of Butenko,' so to speak, should attempt the conquest of power [in the Soviet Union], the 'faction of Reiss' inevitably would align itself on the opposite side of the barricades. Although it would find itself temporarily the ally of Stalin, it would nevertheless defend not the Bonapartist clique but the social base of the USSR, i.e., the property wrenched away from the capitalists and transformed into state property."

—Leon Trotsky, *Transitional Program*



INSTITUT LÉON TROTSKY

### 7 November 1928: Russian Left Oppositionists in exile celebrate anniversary of October Revolution

The Trotskyist “political system,” to which Trepper referred, comprises many elements, but one of those elements—implacable opposition to Stalinism combined with unconditional defense of the Soviet Union from external imperialist attack and internal capitalist counterrevolution—was always the touchstone of “orthodox Trotskyism.” In a pithy, yet definitive, programmatic statement of 1939, Trotsky wrote:

“[The] question of the overthrowing of the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; [the] question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution.”

—*In Defense of Marxism*

It is hard to imagine a principled political position more difficult than this to champion in a world bitterly polarized between Stalinist “real socialism” and “democratic capitalism,” and this alone goes far to explain the Trotskyist movement’s persistent “marginality” within the international labor movement since World War II. Trotsky’s last major political fight was waged precisely over the “Russian question”—and it was waged with some of his own erstwhile followers, who insisted against him that the USSR was no longer a “workers’ state” (however “degenerated”) and that it therefore no longer merited unconditional defense (*Ibid.*). Since then, putatively Trotskyist groups have been continually wracked by schisms over whether and how Trotsky’s fundamental programmatic positions with respect to the Soviet Union (unconditional defense against capitalism combined with a struggle for anti-bureaucratic “political revolution”) should be upheld and applied to a succession of concrete political events, among them: the “revolutions from above” in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, the peasant-based revolutions of Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Korea and Cuba, the worker-led insurgencies in Hungary and Poland in 1956, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan,

the *Solidarnosc* movement in the Poland of the 1980s, the “pro-democracy” movements in Eastern Europe and China at the end of the 1980s, and the final crisis of Stalinism in the Soviet bloc between 1989 and 1991, followed by the consolidation of openly capitalist-restorationist regimes.

There is no doubt that these schisms decisively weakened the ability of Trotskyism to present itself as a coherent political-organizational alternative to the Stalinist and social-democratic apparatuses dominating the international labor movement. To be sure, the various ostensibly Trotskyist tendencies—whether they define themselves as “orthodox Trotskyist” or as “neo-Trotskyist” in some sense—have developed profound differences over a range of other programmatic, strategic and tactical questions; but the “Russian question” has always loomed largest. Indeed, the disarray amongst ostensible Trotskyists in the face of the victory of capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1991 goes far to explain why, despite the apparent vindication of Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinism that this event signified, little interest has been displayed by a crisis-ridden Marxist left in revisiting the Trotskyist “political system” that Trepper identified as the only “coherent” socialist alternative to Stalinism.

It is in light of these considerations that two recent books, *Trotsky as Alternative* by Ernest Mandel and *Trotskyism in the United States: Historical Essays and Reconsiderations* by George Breitman, Paul Le Blanc and Alan Wald, need to be evaluated. The former was the last work published in English by Mandel before his death in 1995, while the latter is a volume of essays written by former members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States—the “historic” party of American Trotskyism that formally renounced Trotskyism in favor of an erratic Castroism in the early 1980s. Despite certain differences, all four of these authors agree that the United Secretariat-led “Fourth International”—the product of a reunification of the SWP and Mandel’s International Secretariat in 1963—constitutes the “mainstream” and legitimate continuator of the Trotskyist

tradition. I should make clear that this is a premise that I do not share. Although the United Secretariat is certainly the largest putatively Trotskyist formation in the world, substantial grounds exist for arguing that all of its major contending tendencies and factions (from the 1960s to the present day) have departed from Trotskyism in fundamental ways. Indeed, one important element in today's "crisis of Trotskyism"—its inability to present itself as a coherent political-organizational alternative to social-democratic and Stalinist movements that have long since demonstrated their incapacity to lead a serious struggle for world socialism—derives from the reputation that the United Secretariat formation has enjoyed as the pre-eminent, "mainstream" Trotskyists on the world political arena. The story told by Paul Le Blanc in his two contributions to *Trotskyism in the United States* provides many clues as to why such a reputation is undeserved, even though Le Blanc himself fails to draw any of the necessary conclusions.

The appropriate starting point, however, is with Mandel's attempt to restate the case for Trotsky's politics in an era of Stalinist collapse. An influential Marxist economist and certainly the best-known ostensibly Trotskyist political figure of recent decades, Ernest Mandel brings an authority and reputation to his argument that few others could match. Mandel's familiarity with Trotsky's voluminous writings, together with his acumen in illuminating both the historical and contemporary relevance of many of Trotsky's ideas, is impressive, and it must be acknowledged that, in many ways, Mandel does a fine job of honoring the intellectual and political legacy of the man to whom he pays the following tribute:

"Of all the important socialists of the twentieth century, it was Trotsky who recognized most clearly the main tendencies of development and the principal contradictions of the epoch, and it was Trotsky also who gave the clearest formulation to an appropriate emancipatory strategy for the international labour movement."

Mandel begins by pointing to the centrality of Trotsky's "law of uneven and combined development" in the totality of his theoretical and political views. This "magnificent theoretical achievement," says Mandel, "brings to light the articulation of all the major elements (economic, political, class, psychological, ideological and organizational) of a historical mechanism at work." Indeed, it constitutes the indispensable foundation of Trotsky's theory and strategic perspective of "permanent revolution," his analysis of the principal contradictions and crisis tendencies of the imperialist epoch of capitalist development, his conviction that the wage-earning working class is the only consistently revolutionary class in the modern world, his understanding of the uneven and discontinuous development and spread of revolutionary consciousness within the international working class, and his analysis of the bureaucratic tendencies at work within the labor movements of the capitalist world and within the Soviet degenerated workers' state.

The law of uneven and combined development goes beyond the more familiar Marxist law of "uneven development" by grasping that the very unevenness of global development—in its variegated technological, economic, social, political and ideological dimensions—cannot fail to produce specific and original (local) combinations of features that co-exist within a global totality that has been unified and rendered permeable by the growth and extension of world capitalism. This means that the more backward countries are not condemned to follow the same "stages of development" as the more advanced ones. As

they seek to solve the problems of national unification, industrial modernization, agrarian revolution, democratization and secularization, they have at least some access to the technological, socio-economic, political and educative achievements of societies that have already wrestled successfully with them. At the same time, precisely because they address these problems at a time when the global system of capitalist production relations has reached a stage of structural crisis, such countries are obliged to look beyond the horizon of capitalism for their successful resolution. The tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution become combined with the tasks of "socialist construction," the leadership of the revolutionary process in *all* countries devolves to the working class; and the strategic perspective of revolutionary Marxism in an age of "permanent revolution" becomes more dependent than ever on the victory of the socialist revolution on a *world* scale. Just as Trotsky's law of uneven and combined development establishes *why* an immanent tendency exists for the bourgeois-democratic revolution to transform itself into a proletarian-socialist one in the epoch of imperialism, it also points to why any attempt to limit the revolutionary process to a single country or group of countries—in the name of "building socialism in one country" or "securing peaceful coexistence between the socialist and capitalist camps"—leads perforce to the creation of a deformed caricature of socialism and ultimately to the re-establishment of capitalism.

Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism, then, is inextricably bound up with his larger analysis of the contradictions, crisis tendencies, dangers, and revolutionary potentialities of an epoch of transition from capitalism to socialism on a world scale. From the standpoint of the 1990s, when the "world revolution" seems not only to be in retreat but to have disappeared from the horizon entirely, such an analysis may appear to be hopelessly outdated and even quixotic.

# BLOWS AGAINST THE EMPIRE

Trotskyism in Ceylon  
The Lanka Sama Samaja Party  
1935-1964

Series Editor: Al Richardson

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Chinese CPers celebrate capture of Canton, October 1947

Yet it is precisely Trotsky's specific analysis of Stalinism—and of the damage that Stalinism as the “gravedigger of revolutions” has done to the global socialist project—that may furnish the conceptual resources to explain *how* we have arrived at the present global conjuncture of capitalist triumphalism, and *why*, now that Stalinism has lost its pre-eminence on the anti-capitalist Left, there are grounds for hope that the socialist project, like the fabled phoenix, will eventually re-emerge from its own ashes stronger than ever. In all events, *only* Trotsky's analytical perspectives appear *fully consistent* with a rational “socialist optimism” that looks to the revival of a proletarian socialist movement inspired by the internationalist, revolutionary and democratic principles of authentic Marxism. In this connection we might note that Trotsky's fundamental ideas seem altogether more consistent with Antonio Gramsci's prescription for “a pessimism of the intellect and an optimism of the spirit” than any of the essentially “national-reformist” projects currently claiming Gramsci's legacy.

If all this is true, the stakes involved in a proper evaluation of Trotsky's legacy are very high. Yet, on a number of points central to that legacy, Mandel's discussion must be judged as profoundly flawed. This is nowhere more clear than in his discussions of Stalinism and the problem of “substitutionism.” Mandel affirms correctly that the key to Trotsky's theoretical analysis of Stalinism was his recognition that the Stalinist bureaucracy represented “a specific social layer with its own particular material interests.” But by identifying Stalinism simply with the political rule and material interests of the *Soviet* bureaucracy, Mandel is unable to grasp the significance of anti-capitalist social revolutions led by *Stalinist* parties that refused to subordinate

their policies to the dictates of the Kremlin oligarchy. For Mandel, such parties—the Yugoslav, the Vietnamese and the Chinese in particular—had “broken from Stalinism in practice,” precisely by creating new, albeit bureaucratically deformed, workers' states. But, contrary to Mandel, Stalinism is not inherently a “national” phenomenon (the peculiar result of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution), but a *social* phenomenon (as Mandel elsewhere seems to grasp): the phenomenon of bureaucratic rule on the basis of property forms that correspond to the historic interests of the working class. As such, Stalinism possesses a *dual character*. On the one hand, it is implacably hostile to the direct political rule of the working class; on the other, it defends—inadequately and inconsistently—the proletarian-socialist forms of collectivized property, planned economy, and state monopoly of foreign trade. Hence, the specific “material interests” of a Stalinist bureaucracy are rooted in its political domination of a post-capitalist “transitional” socio-economic formation featuring many of the structural prerequisites of a socialist society, but lacking many of the latter's most indispensable elements: in particular, a real democracy of the “associated producers,” an international division of labor, and an adequate development of the “productive forces,” defined broadly as “human capacities in general.” These considerations stamp the Stalinist bureaucracy as a privileged, “parasitic layer” within a workers' state, rather than as a new ruling class presiding over a class-exploitative mode of production; but they also stamp it as a mortal enemy of the global socialist project and of the full and “healthy” development of socialist relations, institutions and practices.

In light of this understanding of Stalinism, what the

Yugoslav, Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions signified is that, in a world polarized between capitalist imperialism and the Soviet bloc, it was quite possible, under specific conditions, for Stalinist parties—that is, parties committed to the Soviet model of “real socialism”—to lead peasant-based social revolutions and to create bureaucratically-deformed workers’ states qualitatively similar to those which issued from the bureaucratic degeneration of the October socialist revolution and from the Soviet-sponsored “revolutions from above” in Eastern Europe. Even so, the victory of these revolutions in no way suggested that the role of the Fourth International had become any the less historically indispensable. For *none* of these degenerated and deformed workers’ states could play a positive role in promoting a *world proletarian revolution* and none could be expected to build a nationally delimited “socialism” worthy of the name. A workers’ political revolution remained urgently necessary in these bureaucratized workers’ states to create revolutionary, internationalist regimes based upon the direct rule of workers’ councils; and proletarian-led socialist revolutions remained necessary elsewhere in the world to create the conditions for world socialism.

In hindsight, it is relatively easy to say that, in *both* the societies ruled by Stalinists and in the capitalist-dominated world, the Fourth International’s (FI) mission of organizing the working class for its “self-emancipation” should have remained clear, despite the unexpected “revolutionary capacities” displayed by the insurrectionary (but profoundly anti-proletarian) Stalinists of China and Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, these peasant-based, Stalinist-led revolutions engendered a profound disorientation within the post-war Fourth International. One of its central leaders, Michel Raptis (Pablo), spoke of the likelihood of deformed workers’ states existing for “an entire historical period of several centuries,” and urged the national sections of the FI to transform themselves into little more than ginger groups within the mass Stalinist, social-democratic and anti-colonialist movements. Pablo’s proposals—and accompanying organizational machinations—precipitated the 1953 split in the FI, a split from which world Trotskyism has yet to recover.

While Mandel pays tribute to Trotsky’s opposition to “substitutionism” within the workers’ movement (in particular, the tendency of bureaucratic apparatuses to substitute themselves for the self-activity of the working-class masses), he evinces very little self-consciousness about his own long-standing support, extending back to his collaboration with Pablo, for a politics constantly in search of “substitutes” for the class-conscious working class under revolutionary Marxist leadership. This “substitutionist” politics—and its astonishingly opportunist range—remains largely concealed in *Trotsky as Alternative*, but it nevertheless reveals itself at a number of points: in Mandel’s contention that Mao Zedong “tried to fight” the “hardened party, military and state bureaucracy” in the course of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (rather than merely for the triumph of his own bureaucratic faction!); in his soft pedaling of Trotsky’s critique of popular-front coalitionism;<sup>1</sup> and in his rather surprising demand for a reformed United Nations. But it finds its most striking expression in Mandel’s fulsome support (left unmentioned in *Trotsky as Alternative*) for the *Solidarnosc* “trade union” in Poland despite the explicitly anti-socialist character of that organization’s leadership and stated program from 1981 on. Throughout the 1980s, Mandel’s objectivist and substitutionist methodology led him to conclude that the “objective dynamics” of



**Lech Wałęsa, friend of Pope and CIA**

a working-class struggle against Stalinism *guaranteed* the progressive character of that struggle, leading him to abandon in practice any defense of the Polish deformed workers’ state against a movement, backed by the Pope and Ronald Reagan, bent on the restoration of capitalism. This political capitulation to Cold War anti-communism, along with many other examples of Mandel’s political positions that could be cited, confirm that he was far better at defending Trotsky’s ideas in the abstract than applying them correctly to concrete contemporary developments. Indeed, Mandel’s substitutionism and indiscriminate anti-Stalinism placed him in the camp of that “political fatalism” that he counterposes (abstractly but correctly) to the revolutionary Marxism of Trotsky—“a Marxist who was severely critical of the political fatalism of the Second International and who attributed to the subjective factor in history a decisive role in the drama of our century.” All this points to one unmistakable conclusion: that Mandel, in the political vernacular of classical Leninism, was an inveterate “centrist”—a revolutionary in words but a reformist in deeds.

In his splendid essay on “Centrism and the Fourth International,” Trotsky noted that: “In the choice of his international allies, the centrist is even less discriminating than in his own country.” This observation is a good starting point for considering the significance of the reunification of the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.) and Mandel’s rump “Fourth International” in 1963, Mandel’s twenty-year toleration of an SWP leadership that was moving rapidly to the right, and the SWP’s decision in the 1980s to formally break from all pretenses of Trotskyism while concurrently calling for a new revolutionary International centered on the Cuban Communist Party. There is no shortage of irony in these

historical developments. The SWP, at the time of the split in the FI in 1953, was the largest and most experienced national section of the FI (aside from the Ceylonese section, which was both politically and organizationally marginal to world Trotskyism). Against Mandel and Pablo, the SWP leadership waged a principled—if not altogether adequate—defense of “orthodox Trotskyism.” But between 1959 and 1963 it became clear that the SWP and Mandel’s International Secretariat had developed convergent perspectives on the Cuban Revolution.

Despite continuing disagreement over the issues that had led to the 1953 split, the new-found agreement on Cuba was deemed to be substantial and significant enough to warrant reunification of the SWP (and some of its international camp-followers) with Mandel’s IS. Inasmuch as the agreement on Cuba basically consisted in uncritical cheerleading for the Castro-Guevara leadership, an unwillingness to characterize Cuba as a *deformed* workers’ state, and a refusal to call for a working-class political revolution to institute a regime of workers’ democracy, one can say that the SWP had substantially embraced key elements of the “Pabloist” perspective it had opposed in 1953. The *irony* is that, having embraced the “substitutionist” methodology of Pablo and Mandel, the SWP soon moved far to the right of the Mandelite majority of the United Secretariat. This was evidenced in the liberal-pacifist character of its leadership of a major wing of the Vietnam anti-war movement, in its support of black nationalism and related abstentionism from the struggle for racial integration, as well as in many other aspects of its politics. The SWP’s formal break with Trotskyism and the United Secretariat in 1983 was thus long presaged by an essentially reformist orientation that appears to have been inspired by its “discovery” (in Cuba) of “adequate substitutes” for Trotskyist parties and proletarian leadership (as incarnated in the peasant-guerrilla bands led by the “unconscious Trotskyists” Castro and Guevara).

One will look in vain for an adequate analysis of these questions in the Breitman-Le Blanc-Wald collection. And yet the irony—and tragedy—of the SWP’s political trajectory from 1959 to 1983 are what most haunt the reader of *Trotskyism in the United States*. In six essays, each fascinating in its own way, the three contributors to this volume provide historical and biographical sketches which capture something of the original spirit of American Trotskyism (especially its “heroic” years of the 1930s and 1940s when James P. Cannon was its pre-eminent leader) even while failing to identify the (rather obvious) source of the SWP’s 1980s turn to Castroism in its uncritical appreciation of the Cuban Revolution in the early 1960s. Given the centrality of the Cuban question to the SWP’s trajectory from 1960 on, it would seem appropriate to give serious attention to the arguments of those within the SWP who opposed the leadership’s political adaptation to Castro’s regime as well as the reunification of 1963. The failure of the authors to do this is, however, hardly accidental.<sup>2</sup> Their support for the United Secretariat position on Cuba apparently precludes any serious investigation of the “anti-Pabloist” positions of the Revolutionary Tendency of the early 1960s, as does their factional hostility to the groups that trace their lineage to the RT (in particular, the Spartacist League and the International Bolshevik Tendency). No doubt this is why Le Blanc, in his two substantial historical and interpretive essays, chooses to focus instead on the bad *organizational* precedent established by the expulsion of the RT in 1963 and the way in which the 1965 SWP organizational resolution that justified that expulsion was used by the “leadership team” around Jack Barnes to consolidate its bureaucratic grip on

the SWP in the 1970s. Barnes’ proto-Stalinist interpretation of this resolution—and of Leninist organizational norms in general—is obviously of considerable importance to any analysis of how the democratic internal life of the SWP was strangled and how the SWP leadership was able to so easily dispose of two waves of left oppositionists: the Mandelite opposition of the mid-1970s (the Internationalist Tendency to which Wald adhered) and the “Trotsky-loyalist” opposition of the early 1980s (which included Breitman and Le Blanc, along with most of the SWP’s old guard). The problem is that, by stressing “organizational” questions above all others, Le Blanc leaves the reader with the impression that the *politics* of the SWP remained basically consistent with “orthodox Trotskyism” up to the point that Barnes finally decided that his grip on the party was strong enough to permit him to formally dump the “old Trotskyism.” Even for those relatively unfamiliar with Trotskyist ideas, this thesis should ring rather hollow.

To explain the SWP’s formal disavowal of Trotskyism in the 1980s, it is necessary to trace its *de facto* break with both the political and organizational principles of Trotskyism that began around 1960. But to do this one must be prepared to analyze critically the “substitutionism” that continues to inform the politics of the international organization that was led for decades by Ernest Mandel. This is something that none of the authors of *Trotskyism in the United States* is prepared to do, and this failure is finally what renders the book a disservice to the best traditions of American Trotskyism.

## Notes

1. Mandel devotes less than three pages to Trotsky’s critique of the politics of the “popular front,” and part of this woefully inadequate discussion is devoted to criticizing unnamed “sectarians” who are less tactically flexible in their approach to popular-front coalitions than is Mandel’s United Secretariat. Mandel long insisted that a policy of “critical support” to the workers’ parties participating in an electoral coalition with bourgeois parties is a legitimate application of Leninist-Trotskyist tactics. But this position betrays a failure to see that what is at stake in an openly class-collaborationist coalition is not a “tactic,” but a *strategic* question linked to the principle of the political independence of the working class. As Trotsky noted: “In reality, the People’s Front is the *main question of proletarian class strategy* for this epoch” (“The Dutch Section and the International”, 16 July 1936). And, as he goes on to argue, it was the Bolsheviks’ *refusal* to lend “critical support” to the Russian “people’s front” of 1917—including its Menshevik “proletarian” contingent—that was critical to their leadership of the October revolution.

2. One of the authors, George Breitman, was obviously not in a position to do so, since his piece was written as a series of talks to a national education conference of the SWP in 1974. Its inclusion in this collection is motivated principally by the fact that Breitman (a long-time cadre of the SWP) was amongst the victims of the purge of “veteran Trotskyists” engineered by the SWP leadership in the early 1980s. Together with Le Blanc, Breitman helped form the Fourth Internationalist Tendency which regrouped some of the *several hundred* expelled from the SWP for no reason other than their continuing rhetorical fidelity to Trotskyism and the Fourth International. Breitman’s article is not altogether lacking in interest, however, since it captures unwittingly much of the substitutionist methodology that contributed to the SWP’s degeneration. ■

# Myra Tanner Weiss, 1917-1997

## A Life of Struggle

On 13 September 1997 Myra Tanner Weiss, a leader of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) through the 1940s and 50s, died in a nursing home in Indio, California. She had been the organizer of the SWP's five-branch Los Angeles local for a decade, a member of its National Committee (NC) from 1944 to 1963, a three-time SWP candidate for vice-president of the United States, and, for many years, the only female full member of its Political Committee (PC). An obituary in the *New York Times* (20 September 1997) described her as a "fiery speaker" who:

"cut a stylish figure in leftist circles—a small, attractive woman who was always immaculately turned out, generally in a well-cut suit of lush material run up by her husband's tailoring family."

Myra Tanner was recruited to Trotskyism in 1935, while at university in Salt Lake City. She soon moved to California where she became active organizing agricultural and cannery workers. Like Murry Weiss, whom she married in 1942, Myra was one of the few party youth who played a significant role in the 1939-40 struggle against the petty-bourgeois opposition within the SWP, led by Max Shachtman.

The Shachtman split cost the SWP most of its intellectuals and youth. In the post-split SWP, the Los Angeles local, with Myra as organizer, stood out as lively, young and intellectual. By the late 1940s, the LA branch was the largest, and provided the SWP with its most important youth recruitment opportunities.

Myra was not only the SWP's Los Angeles district organizer, but also its main public figure. She ran for mayor in 1945 and again in 1949. In 1945, under her leadership, the Los Angeles SWP conducted an exemplary campaign against the fascist Gerald L.K. Smith, and succeeded in mobilizing 20,000 workers to run him out of town. In an October 1983 letter to the SWP, Myra referred to this as "the most important contribution the Los Angeles Local of the SWP made to the movement as a whole and to the country as a whole."

### Myra, Murry and Jim

James P. Cannon, the veteran leader of American Trotskyism, held Myra in high regard. At the SWP's 1942 national convention, he supported a proposal to put her on the National Committee, however she was not elected until 1944. In a pamphlet written in 1986, Myra recalled:

"Jim Cannon several times called me an 'anarchist.' I didn't mind. Some of our greatest proletarian heroes and heroines were anarchists....But anxious not to offend, like the good revolutionist he was, he always added, 'but she's our anarchist,' which made me, I suppose, an 'anarchobolshevik,' to keep the labels straight. In my opinion Cannon leaned on the side of centralism in this polar relation of organizational concepts. I leaned on the side of democracy. But neither of us collided organizationally in those years. We both lived in the same movement."

—*The Bustelo Incident*

This pamphlet, which is an extended argument for integrating "feminist consciousness" into Trotskyism, contains



Myra Tanner, 1935

interesting observations on her experience in the SWP. She recounts some of the "experiments we conducted in the Los Angeles branches" of the SWP:

"Sometime in the late Forties, to upset stereotypes, we arbitrarily, and unanimously, decided that for a year only women could be elected organizers and only men could hold the secretary's job. At another point we noticed that executive committee meetings, where policy matters were hashed out, were lively and interesting while branch meetings appeared to be dull. For awhile...we decided that executive meetings should be limited to discovery of differences, not their resolution...we took them to the branches unresolved—there to be discussed and decided. That changed branch meetings considerably and gave fuller participation to the members."

In 1952, when Cannon retired from his central leadership role in New York, and prepared to hand over the reins to Farrell Dobbs (the legendary trade-union organizer), he convinced Murry and Myra to transfer to New York in the hope that they might help rejuvenate the SWP's aging and increasingly conservative central cadre.

At this time, the SWP faced a critical internal situation with the emergence of the Cochran-Clarke faction which embraced the "New World Reality" theories of Michel Pablo, and denied the historic necessity for Trotskyist leadership in the struggle for socialism. Pablo proposed instead



SWP's 1956 presidential campaign pamphlet

to pressure the reformist and Stalinist parties to the left. Cannon, who had gone along with Pablo's prescriptions for the rest of the Fourth International, finally balked at the attempt to apply this liquidationist course on his home turf.

At the May 1953 SWP National Committee meeting, Cannon revealed:

"During the course of the past year, I had serious doubts of the ability of the SWP to survive. At one time—I will frankly admit to you here for the first time—I thought that our twenty-five year effort, compounded on all the previous experience and work of ourselves and others, had ended in catastrophic failure; and that, once again, a small handful would have to pick up the pieces and start all over again to build the new cadre of another party on the old foundations."

—*Speeches to the Party*

The "small handful" who could be counted on was a reference to the Weisses and their supporters—as the Cochranites acknowledged by their complaints about the "Cannon-Weiss" faction. The routinist and conservative Dobbs-Kerry-Hansen grouping were eager to take over the reins of the party, but displayed little appetite to fight the liquidators. Cannon ultimately brought Dobbs over with the promise of a free hand in running the party.

The Weisses came into sharp conflict with Dobbs as a result of a 1954 article by Joseph Hansen ("Jack Bustelo") ridiculing women who wore cosmetics. The article unleashed a series of negative responses (chiefly from female SWPers) which Dobbs blamed on the Weisses. In her 1986 pamphlet, Myra described this as a crisis "which threatened to tear the organization apart." Things were eventually patched up, and a joint statement was issued by Murry and Farrell Dobbs pledging to work together collectively. Myra and Murry both sat on the Political Committee in the 1950s, Murry edited *The Militant* for a few years, and Myra served as a staff writer, and was the SWP's vice-presidential candidate in 1952, 1956 and 1960. But the Weisses were never fully assimilated into the Dobbs regime, and remained on

the outside of the central leadership.

Myra considered that the "explanation for the anti-Weiss" group was that, to a large extent, "it was really an 'anti-Cannon' group":

"it was Cannon, 'retired' to California, who persuaded Murry and me and some of our younger cadre to transfer to the center in hopes of improving the situation there. As strong a leader as Cannon was in that small movement, he could no longer count on winning the majority of the leadership in any given dispute with Farrell Dobbs. For example, Cannon, in alliance with Vincent Dunne of Minnesota, could not get a majority vote in the National Committee for their nomination of a woman, this writer, as U.S. Vice Presidential candidate to run with Dobbs in the 1952 election. They were able to win only after taking the problem to the floor of the National Convention."

—*Op cit.*

## The Weisses & the RT

There is a special historical connection between our political tendency and the Weisses. Murry Weiss had always taken a particular responsibility for, and interest in, youth work, and it was natural that he was the one to recruit a layer of talented youth from the Shachtmanite Young Socialist League in 1957. These comrades, who included Shane and Judy Mage, Tim Wohlforth and James Robertson, played an instrumental role in launching the Young Socialist Alliance—the SWP's youth group. A few years later, Wohlforth, Mage and Robertson were leading the Revolutionary Tendency (RT—forerunner of the Spartacist League).

In a discussion in our Wellington, New Zealand, branch occasioned by news of Myra's death, Bill Logan recalled how in the Spartacist League/U.S. in the early 1970s:

"Robertson used to talk a lot about Myra and Murry Weiss, in his little living room in Spanish Harlem—before the days of Scotch, when it was cheap California red wine. I remember him saying something like 'I wasn't trained by Cannon, but I guess I was trained by people who were trained by Cannon.' And it was clear that to Robertson the most important of these people were Murry and Myra Weiss. They more than any other individuals were responsible for winning him and his immediate grouping to a whole range of political conceptions.

"Of course the most important thing the Shachtmanite youth had to be won over on in the process of their recruitment to Trotskyism was the position on the Russian question, but Robertson also learned a whole range of ideas on organization from the Weisses, including the conception we still carry on of a youth organization which is politically subordinate to the adult organization but organizationally independent, and in which the adult organization does not run its members as a disciplined fraction manipulating the non-party youth.

"Robertson...certainly felt a real affection for Murry and Myra, and respect for the thoroughly principled way they carried out political struggles within the SWP, even though they had actually moved to the right more quickly than the party leadership."

The Weisses had played a key role in the fight against Cochran/Pablo's liquidationist perspectives in the early 1950s, but, a few years later, they were among the first in the SWP leadership to embrace Castroism as an alternative to the Leninist insistence on the centrality of the class conscious proletariat. Dobbs soon followed their lead. The Revolutionary Tendency, forged in opposition to this revisionist course, was the victim of unprecedented bureau-



**Farrell Dobbs (right) visits state farm in Cuba during SWP 1960 election campaign**

cratic measures by the Dobbs regime, and was ultimately expelled.

While Myra disagreed profoundly with the RT's positions, she vigorously defended their rights as a minority. And she was the only member of the National Committee to do so (Murry had suffered an extremely serious stroke in 1960 which removed him from political activity). In a motion she presented to the Political Committee on 1 November 1963, Myra noted:

*"The 'evidence' of 'disloyalty' submitted in the report consists entirely of opinions, and no one in the history of the Socialist Workers Party has ever been punished for thoughts that differ with those of the majority—nor ever can be if we are to remain a revolutionary force."*

But, by this time, the SWP was no longer a revolutionary force. The purge of the RT was followed by a campaign to get rid of other dissidents in the party, including the Weisses. After leaving the SWP, Myra and Murry were involved in a variety of leftist political projects at some distance from revolutionary Marxism as we understand it. Murry died in 1981, shortly after joining Clara Kaye's Freedom Socialist Party.

In his remarks to the Wellington comrades, Logan added the following "minor footnote":

*"It was 1979....Adaire and I were living in New York, and I was suspended from the organization [i.e., the international Spartacist tendency] and preparations were being made to expel me, ostensibly on the grounds of various complaints against me as chair of the Australian section in the 1974-76 period.*

*"One of the big boys of the Spartacist League, Reuben Samuels, wrote a nasty document [19 June 1979] in which he said that some of my submissions in this case:*

*"can only receive the response they so justly deserve when he [Logan] is no longer a member of a proletarian organization. Until then he shall be protected by the norms of proletarian morality of which he has so little sense."*

*"Adaire and I took this to be a threat to use physical violence against me after my expulsion, but we were*

*aware of the pressures on us to become overly paranoid, and there was nobody we both trusted and could properly consult with. We were isolated in a foreign city. So I broke the discipline of the Spartacist tendency. I looked up Myra in the telephone book, gave her a call, and made arrangements to have a talk with her. I had no doubt at all that she would keep our consultations effectively confidential.*

*"She was a delightful woman in her early sixties. She talked about Murry, and his overcoming the effects of his stroke. She talked about his getting qualified as a psychotherapist—'it's a good trade for a revolutionary politician.' She complained about men in politics.*

*"And then she asked about my story. At first she was incredulous. She regarded Robertson with some affection, and as a principled sectarian who she thought would conduct inner-party struggle in an overly hard way, but a proper way. She was sure that he and those he was working closely with would eschew violence among ostensible communists.*

*"But she read the documents, there in front of me, getting more and more interested and annoyed, and she altered her opinion and confirmed our interpretation of this comment of Samuels as a threat of violence.*

*"She had no time for the Spartacists programmatically, and was bemused as I defended them, but she was visibly disappointed in what she regarded as a kind of moral degeneration in Robertson, and having seen that degeneration she didn't see any point in our staying round to argue with it. Her attitude was that we should just walk away from the Spartacist tendency."*

When the New York branch of the Bolshevik Tendency was being formed in early 1987, several comrades had the opportunity to meet Myra Tanner Weiss (see accompanying article). It is somehow fitting that one of the last public political events she attended was a debate on the Russian question between the Bolshevik Tendency and the League for the Revolutionary Party held in New York City in December 1988. Myra was present as an adherent of the same Soviet defensist position to which she had helped win Robertson, Mage and Wohlforth some 30 years earlier. ■

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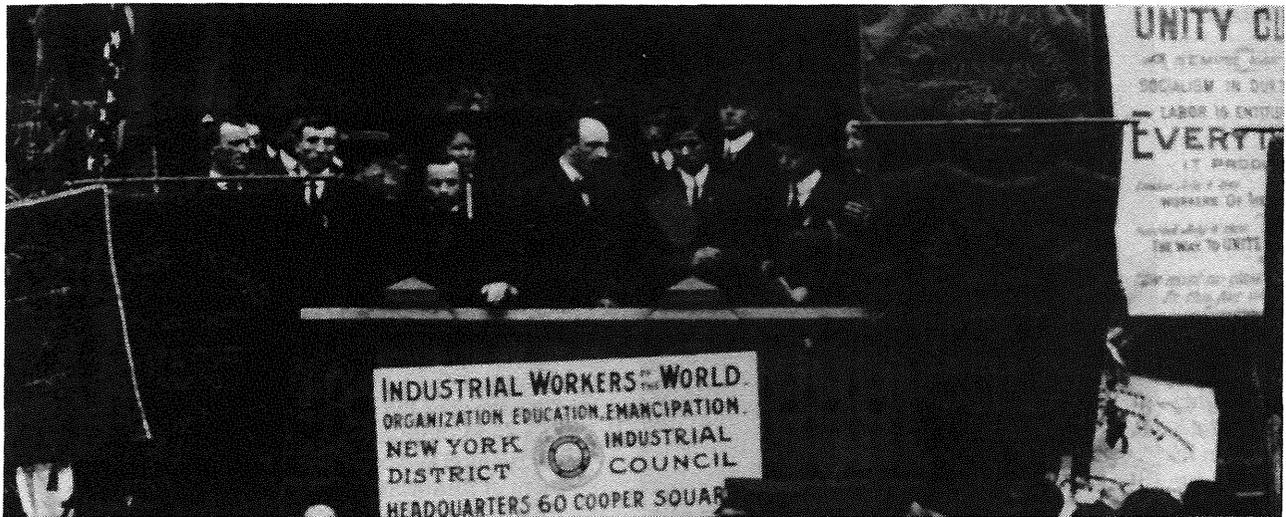
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# James P. Cannon On Anarchism



May Day, 1908: Alexander Berkman speaks at Union Square, New York

*The following letter to Myra Tanner Weiss from James P. Cannon has never been previously published.*

Los Angeles, Calif.

July 29, 1955

Dear Myra:

I received your letter of June 9. Sending you my IWW pamphlet was really a bit of sly calculation on my part. I knew my IWW pamphlet would stir up the old Wobbly in you.

Murry may be partly right in interpreting my sending the pamphlet to you as a recognition that you are an "anarchist." But he is dead wrong to deprecate the term as such. Anarchism is all right when it is under the control of organization. This may seem a contradiction in terms, but if it were not for the anarchism in us as individuals we wouldn't need the discipline of organization. The revolutionary party represents a dialectical unity of opposites. In one sense it is, in effect, the fusion of the rebel instincts of individuals with the intellectual recognition that their rebellion can be effective only when they are combined and united into a single striking force which only a disciplined organization can supply.

In my young days I was very friendly to the anarchists, and was an anarchist myself by nature. I dearly loved that word "freedom," which was the biggest word in the anarchist vocabulary. But my impulse to go all the way with them was blocked by recognition that the re-organization of society, which alone can make real freedom possible, cannot be achieved without organization, and that organization signifies discipline and the subordination of the individual to the majority. I wanted to have my cake and eat it too—in fact, I still have the same idea—but I have never yet been able to figure out exactly how it could be done.

People who have grown up since the Russian Revolution and the First World War don't know and can't have a real feel of what the anarchist movement was before that time, before its theoretical assumptions had been put to the decisive test. Anarchism was then regarded as the most extreme form of radicalism. The anarchists had some wonderful people; they claimed the heritage of the

Haymarket martyrs, and they were greatly respected in all radical circles. When Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman came to Kansas City on lecture tours, we Wobblies used to pitch in and promote their meetings as a matter of course.

Goldman was a great orator, one of the best I ever heard, and Berkman was a heroic figure of pure nobility. It was he who organized the first defense committee and movement for the defense of Tom Mooney, after he had been convicted and was on the way to the gallows, when everybody else was cowed and afraid to raise a voice. I remember his coming to Kansas City on a nation-wide tour to arrange the first net-work of Mooney Defense Committees, and I recall fondly and proudly the fact that I was an active member of this first committee organized by Berkman. (Me and Browder!)

The impulses of the original anarchists were wonderful, but their theory was faulty, and it could not survive the test of war and revolution. It is shameful to recall that the Spanish anarchists became ministers in a bourgeois cabinet in the time of the Spanish Revolution; and that old-time American anarchists in New York, or rather what was left of them, became social patriots in the Second World War. Nothing is so fatal as a false theory.

If I get wound up some day I will write something about the anarchist movement in America, as it was in the days before the First World War.

So you're really living it up these days as a full-time party functionary and housewife. You had better not let Murry read my chapter in "America's Road to Socialism" about the coming jail-break of the housewives from their kitchens. He might get so scared at the prospect as to turn against socialism, and we don't want to risk that.

The weather's cool and crisp here today, as usual in this time of the year. How are things on the weather front in New York? The L.A. papers have been printing a lot of scare stories about the devastating heat in all parts of the country outside California. What's bad weather really like? I can't remember.

Fraternally,  
J.P. Cannon

# Life in Cannon's SWP

## A Conversation with Myra

The following is a transcript of a February 1987 verbal report by Tom Riley based on notes taken during a discussion with Myra Tanner Weiss in her New York apartment. Myra had agreed to discuss her personal political history, but refused to be tape recorded.

I talked to Myra Tanner Weiss on the 9th of February 1987 with Paul Abbot and Uschi. One of the first things she told me was that she had been a friend of Greta Garbo's. In her late teens she was living in LA, and she was going out with the son of Greta Garbo's screenwriter. And Greta Garbo used to make a point of taking her to all the various Hollywood parties where she would rub shoulders with the "progressive" left-wing film community, many of whom were German émigrés.... They were almost all Stalinists, and at this point she was already a Trotskyist, and Greta Garbo, who had no particular sympathies one way or the other, found it very amusing to have her little Trotskyist friend around persecuting these Stalinists.

Myra knew Ernst Toller. He was a collaborator of Bertolt Brecht, and she had been feeding him [Toller] Trotskyist literature, giving him one piece after another, and he had been devouring it. Now, Brecht was a very important émigré, and Toller was potentially a very important contact, and she had given him all Trotsky's writings on Germany, had discussed it, and had discussed various other aspects of the Trotskyist program. He seemed to be in agreement with it—he showed interest and he'd done the reading.

He [Toller] then spoke at a large meeting of "progressives" and he followed the party line exactly, including denouncing Trotsky. So Myra was extremely angry at that, and right around that time, when Brecht approached her and said he'd like to go out and talk to her, she said no, she wasn't interested, on account of the fact that she was mad at this guy Toller. Something that she said she'd always sort of regretted. She said that a year or so after this happened, Toller had committed suicide, but she never knew why.

She also knew Marlene Dietrich.

There was one famous party, apparently, when Joseph Freeman came out to raise money for the [Communist Party's] *New Masses*. They arranged a party of these wealthy Hollywood types, and she went around and talked to all these people. Garbo made sure that she was invited, and she managed to pretty much screw up the guy's fundraising tour, by asking all these difficult questions....

At another party, or perhaps the same one, she met André Malraux, and she asked him, "why do you have one line in *Man's Fate* and another line in *Man's Hope*?" This represented a shift in Malraux's thinking from something approximating Trotskyism to Stalinism. She said he was really on the spot and was very uncomfortable, and couldn't answer it effectively.

She started out in politics as a pre-med student at the University of Utah where she met Joe Hansen. She was recruited by a guy named Hal Ryan who was her chemistry instructor. What's amusing about that, is that Earl Birney, the Canadian poet, was the guy who started the branch at the University of Utah, and [after] she had waged some long campaign and finally got her file from the FBI...it specified that Earl Birney had recruited her to Trotskyism, which she



POPPERFOTO

Castroites in power, 1959

said is a complete lie, and that she had never met Earl Birney, but that she would like to.

She said that she liked the piece we did on "Jimstown" and found particularly useful the section on the organizational question as a political question. She commented that generally she thought it was quite well written. She said that she guessed that the SWP and the SL were approximately the same size now, after Barnes had cleaned out so many people. She said that by the late 1960s and early 70s the SWP had become a pretty strange bunch.

She remembered in the 1950s Cannon telling her that the youth were going to save them. They had managed to survive this long, and now there was this new influx of people on the horizon, and this would turn things around for the party because they were getting pretty old and pretty tired—they'd been at it since the 30s (Cannon of course had been at it since the 'teens) without much to show for it. The problem the party had at this point was that it was pretty much split into two groups. And this was true from '54 on, or perhaps before '54—there was the Weiss group and the anti-Weiss group.

They felt that with these new youth coming in they'd be healthy, they'd be vigorous and they'd solve the problems of the party. But there was a problem, she said, and that was with the kind of youth they were getting. They were ambitious, and they were overly eager to carve out little slots for themselves—little "machine men" they were. She said that this did not apply to people who were in the RT—Wohlforth, Robertson, Mage. The Weissites, who played some role in recruiting them, looked to them as the best elements. But they didn't stay in the party very long, they quickly split among themselves, and they "didn't amount to much," was her characterization.

She said that whatever the problems with Wohlforth, Mage and Robertson, they were a thousand times better than Barnes. She defended them when they were getting kicked out of the SWP [and] felt that if she could engage them politically, give them some time to learn, that they could be won over. She didn't agree with them on Cuba,

but she thought that they were serious people, and that they were getting kicked out of the party prematurely and unnecessarily.

She did say though that she found it extremely amusing that Robertson considered himself to be a continuator of Cannonism, because she said that Robertson didn't know Cannon, he had nothing to do with Cannon. She also said that she didn't know what went wrong, and she thought that Cannon didn't know what went wrong, but she knew that Cannon felt at least by the mid-60s that what the SWP had become was not what he had meant to build....

She also said that she remembered the first time she saw Barnes speak to a youth organization. They were discussing some political point and Barnes said: look, let's not talk about the politics. Let's leave that up to the party leadership. That's their job. Our job as the youth is just to get out there, sell the newspaper, get the subscriptions, etc.—let's leave the political theory with the leadership.

She said that he was saying that to curry favor with the leader, Dobbs, because that's what Dobbs wanted to hear. But she said that she knew also that this kind of spineless behavior was not characteristic of revolutionaries. In the 1930s, when she was a youth, nothing could have been further away from them—the idea of some obsequious toady offering to sell papers, and let somebody else do the thinking was not why she got involved in revolutionary politics. Barnes of course fulfilled her expectations.

She and Murry moved to New York in 1952, and they were sent by Cannon to correct the situation in New York at that time. Murry was supposed to become the National Secretary in place of Dobbs, but Murry became very ill—he had a bad heart even at this time. She says that she knows that Robertson has called her and Murry "Pabloites," and she thinks that is funny because they, in fact, were the people who were fighting Pablo most. Murry was supposed to be an editor of the journal, and Myra's job was to be one of the principal public speakers of the party.

One story which she recounted from the early 50s was that Cannon, in alliance with [Vince] Dunne, proposed to the National Committee that Myra be their candidate for vice president in the election of 1952. But he was unable to persuade Dobbs of this, and Dobbs had a majority, so Cannon and Dunne were defeated. But the problem went to the convention, where it was brought up again, and Myra won a majority.

She said that Cannon was very good on "feminism" and that he always tended to back her when she was involved in some fight for women's rights within the party. She [recalled] one fight in '47 that went to the Political Committee. There was a seamen's branch, and it was made up of either seamen or their wives. The wives pretty much took over the routine functioning of the branch, because the seamen tended to be gone for long periods of time.... Well, one of the seamen at one of the branch meetings apparently put forward a motion that only seamen could be delegates to the upcoming national convention. Myra got involved in this, and there was a fight over it with the branch. Myra was apparently involved in giving advice to some of the wives and saying this was scandalous and ridiculous and absurd and sexist, and whatever.

And Tom Kerry said (I believe at a Political Committee meeting— at a leadership meeting anyway) that he was going to charge Myra for disrupting and meddling in a branch that she didn't belong to, and various formal violations of protocol. When Cannon took the floor, he said this

is ridiculous, it is illegal, you are not allowed to do this in the party—pass motions that certain people can't run for certain posts—and he wouldn't hear of any action being taken against her. That was in 1947.

She said that Murry had a stroke in 1960 that pretty much took him out of politics, and that Jim Cannon insisted that Murry be given permanent membership in the party, that he not have to pay any dues and that he be a member in good standing. This was Cannon's way of indicating his regard for Murry.

Dobbs was always jealous of Cannon, and was hostile to Cannon, and for that reason ended up being pro-Cochran at the beginning of the fight. So Dobbs was blocking at this time with Kerry and with Morris Stein. And at first, they ended up in a bloc with Clarke and Cochran. So it looked, for a period, like the opposition to the Pabloites in the United States would be Cannon and the Weisses. In the end, Dobbs came over, although perhaps not very firmly.

One of the things she described was Murry's role in the leadership where she said that he played a role as sort of a conciliator and tried to balance people off. When Kerry would get mad at Dobbs, Murry would intervene to try to protect Dobbs somewhat or defend him. And he'd do the same for almost anyone in the leadership. His job, as he saw it, was to try to make it into a collective that could work together. And everyone in the party liked Murry more or less. He was not a macho male. He believed that if you defeated somebody you didn't try to smash them into the ground and destroy them. You tried to win them over on the point, and to be comradely toward them after the fight, even if [you] had been on opposite sides over some political question.

She said that one of the origins of the youth group in the SWP was that she went and gave a speech on dialectical materialism at Harvard, and that the turnout was so good, and there was so much interest in her talk, that she suggested to the Political Committee that they consider organizing a youth group again. The Political Committee went along with it. Many of the people who were originally involved in it were young comrades from Los Angeles, which is the Weisses' old branch, and they set up the apparatus.

The first big opportunity for what was to be the SWP youth group came with the dissident Shachtmanites. And the first dissident Shachtmanites that they located (this would become the RT group) were Judy and Shane Mage who were at Antioch College [in Ohio]. Murry was busy contacting them. He was also busy writing another group of people in Chicago that he was in touch with.... These people ended up coming to New York—most of the important people in the Shachtmanites ended up coming to New York. And, in New York, the Weisses organized classes for them to teach them about Trotskyism and re-discuss Trotskyism. The big question they had to win them over on, and it took some time, was the Soviet Union.

At that point, I asked her if she noticed which of these three—Robertson, Mage or Wohlforth—showed the most interest or aptitude, or if there was any difference in terms of winning them over on the Russian question. She thought there wasn't, and explained to me that none of these characters was very important or particularly worth paying attention to, so we got off that subject.

She said that she was in the party and continued to be active until there was one meeting where she made a criticism of Castro in the Political Committee and people were



1945: SWP's Los Angeles branch initiated campaign against fascist Gerald L. K. Smith

furious. Morris Stein, she said, almost threw a typewriter at her. The idea that anyone would make a criticism of Castro was unthinkable, and that sort of represented the beginning of the end for her apparently. She said that Dobbs was no party organizer, that he couldn't organize his way out of a paper bag. When he was in Chicago they had to send people up from LA to help him out.

She said she remembered a PC meeting at the time of the Cuban missile crisis where Dobbs put forward a proposal to condemn Khrushchev for backing down to Kennedy. And she'd said, "What would you have us do, risk World War III for a couple of lousy missiles in Cuba? We shouldn't criticize him for that." What if the bourgeoisie was so stupid and crazy that they would actually drop the bomb? It would be a crime to use Cuba as a pawn. With her intervention, they managed to hold up action on this question until they heard from Cannon. She said that was generally the way that things went in the SWP PC: they would consult him first before doing anything.

Cannon wrote them and said they were way off base, and that he basically endorsed Myra's position. So that was another example where Cannon backed her up, and they didn't publish anything in the paper along the lines that they had been thinking of.

She said that in the mid-1960s, as she was getting less active, she, and Murry I believe, did have correspondence with [European Pabloite leaders Ernest] Mandel and Pierre Frank, just as one friend to another. Although she mentioned that she had never been to Europe, which I thought was curious for someone of her stature in the Trotskyist movement.

Nonetheless, she corresponded with Mandel and Frank and discovered that they had the same basic differences with the SWP leadership. She said that she left the organization for purely personal reasons. Murry had suffered considerable brain damage in the 1960 stroke. He had to relearn almost everything, and the Dobbs machine took this opportunity to move against him. So he did the only thing

possible, and went to a school to re-learn English. She meanwhile got a job in a printshop and financed him.

She said that as time went on she ran into the SL here and there. She always regarded their politics as a little weird, but she was always very impressed with individual Spartacists. They seemed very intelligent and very good people. She belonged to the ITU [International Typographical Union] and she was involved in trying to organize cold type shops around New York where she ran into several SLers. And said that as "crazy as the SL was, they were never as bad as that Barnes bunch." They were sort of "wild and impossible," but Barnes' problem was not wildness—"Barnes buried Trotskyism." At least the SL, even if they were "irresponsible," were Trotskyists by her standards.

She said she went to an ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] march in Washington sometime in the 1970s, and she watched as an SWP contingent went by. She was there with a friend of hers, who she was pushing in a wheelchair, and as the contingent went by she raised her fist and screamed out to them, "Long Live Trotsky!" She said they all looked back and forth at each other and looked fairly embarrassed. And she thought, this is an ailing group.

I asked her a little bit about the Weiss faction—she said, "We didn't have a faction." After World War II, LA was the largest branch in the country. They sent people to all sorts of cities to start up new branches. They sent people to Chicago, to Seattle, to New York and to San Diego. And they would always have these people over to their house before they went out, and they said look, we want you to go out and build a branch. But work through the national office, don't work through us. We're interested and we hope you do well, but remember, you're building a branch not for the LA branch, but you're building a branch for the national. She said we were very strict about that...

I asked her about Grace Carlson [an NC member who

stood as the SWP's 1948 vice-presidential candidate] and if she knew her, and what her attitude was when she defected to the Catholic Church [in 1952], and whether people had anticipated it or not. She said no, she was really shocked, she was devastated. She had no idea at all that this was going to happen, and she thought that was a pretty general attitude. But she was hit particularly hard because Grace was the other best known woman leader. She said that the only other female member of the NC at that point was a woman named Eloise Booth....

She said that....Grace and she felt, by and large, the women got stuck with all the "administrative shit" in the party. That if there was a speech for the fund drive to be given, a speech to give money, it would always go to one of the women. They would never get a political assignment to write up the major document on this or that, or to give a direction here or there....She said that she made several national tours as a speaker.

I asked her if there were any blacks in the SWP top leadership, and she said none after Johnson [C.L.R. James] left. I asked her about the Johnsonite cadre. We talked a little bit about "cult," and she said yeah, it was pretty much like a cult. I asked if she knew Freddie Forrest [Raya Dunayevskaya], and what was her impression. She said Freddie Forest was a Johnsonite. Freddie Forrest later split, but she said that at that point there was no distinction in their tendency that she was aware of. They pretty much came in by themselves, and went out by themselves. She said, though, that they did recruit some people in LA—they recruited some of the Johnsonite faction to the main branch of the party.

She said...she appreciated the stuff we wrote about Cannon and Robertson in "The Road to Jimstown"—that basically it was true that Cannon's group was pretty democratic, and he didn't drive people out of the group at all. He had a sense that if you had enough agreement with the basic programmatic positions of the party—he wasn't going to let them take over—but he wasn't going to try to get rid of anybody who might have any little difference. Nonetheless she said that Cannon's cadre (and this is I think a quote), "was scared to death of him," which she didn't elaborate on all that much.

She said that Cannon was not a feminist, that he was a "Victorian male." But that she often appreciated his authority, and that when Cannon spoke in favor of her everyone else would shut up—which she thought was interesting. She brought up again the seamen's union thing where Kerry had been about to press charges against her, Cannon weighed in, said something, and that was the end of it. She said it was peculiar—nobody would continue to disagree. She said, the way we did it in the LA branch that would never happen. If she or Murry spoke against somebody, the discussion would go on until they were won over, changed their mind or got outvoted or something. But Cannon just spoke on this thing, and on many other occasions, and everybody would shut up, she said. But nobody would give a little talk about how they were convinced, or why they were won over, or anything like that.

She said that perhaps some of his reputation for really hard factionalism was that he was really concerned about keeping the cadre together, and as soon as he'd see someone really starting to move away, he would come down with an axe on them.

She said that the operation of the LA branch, with her and Murry, ran along somewhat different lines. There was a case, for instance, in LA where she was the organ-

izer....Some of the men in the branch were very anxious because they didn't particularly like having to take orders from a woman. There was some dispute over something in an aircraft union, and one of the prominent people in the fraction got someone, a woman, to run against her. They weren't going to run against her directly as a woman, but there was a woman more to their liking who they were going to get to run. So they had a campaign in the branch, and Myra's people won....And she said that some of the men who were in her faction said "oh good, now we can get rid of Jack Dale" (that was the guy's name)....And Myra said, no, no, let's not get rid of them, let's make Jack Dale the education director for LA and make his wife (who had run against her), put her in charge of corresponding for *The Militant*....In the long run, [this] was the best way to build a branch—show these people that it was okay, that they could work together, treat them well and integrate them.

She said that in LA that was generally the approach they took and they had great success in recruiting people back....They had great success recruiting people back from the Shachtmanites, recruiting back from the Johnsonites. She said we were very hard politically, we didn't give anything politically, but we remained personally friendly with these people, and tried to treat people in a decent, political fashion. And she said it worked out well, "we had a very successful branch."

She said the Shachtmanites never gave them any problems—they never lost anyone to the Shachtmanites in LA, and, indeed, the Shachtmanites lost a lot of people to them. At one point apparently, the Shachtmanites got an office in the same building—they opened next door [to the SWP], thinking they were going to cash in. But she said the traffic all went the other way.

There was a famous story which is reprinted in an SL bulletin where Gerald L.K. Smith was going to speak in LA. And this was the biggest fight they had in the branch apparently. The Shachtmanites had proposed an anti-fascist united front to deal with this guy, which basically meant a bloc with other radicals to form a picket line in front of his meeting. The Weisses didn't go for that. They said that this thing could be very big. The war had just ended—there was a war fought "against fascism," and a lot of workers were very concerned about it, and they didn't want to see it cropping up here. So it could be much bigger than just an alliance of left groups. So they proposed that instead of a quickie picket line that they spend a month or so building something in the labor movement, try to get something really big.

She said that they got phone calls from New York, with people saying what the hell do you guys think you're doing—you must be crazy. How could you turn down the Shachtmanite proposal for a principled united front. She said they managed to convince them. They were successful, finally they built a demo of 20,000 people ...and the fascists couldn't get anywhere near the place. And that was basically the end for Gerald L.K. Smith. He turned up a few other places, but the word had got around, and the people in other cities followed the example in LA, and Smith's career as a fascist agitator pretty much came to an end.

She said that in the LA branch they had many disagreements, and that there was never unanimous agreement on anything. But they were always able to keep the minority shifting their ground, keep them off balance, and generally had pretty good success winning people over from outside the group, and also winning dissidents from inside the group. ■

## South Africa...

*continued from page 2*

He denounced popular expectations that "the government must promptly deliver whatever it is that we demand" and criticized those who were "refusing to meet their obligations such as rent and service payments" and others who were engaging in the "forcible occupation of houses." But he expressed no such concern about the forcible occupation and expropriation of black farmlands by whites throughout South Africa's history.

While ANC publicists still talk about "common national interests," and make occasional rhetorical references to the "National Democratic Revolution," the government's insistence on subordinating social need to the dictates of the market tells a different tale. Similar "structural adjustment programs" imposed by the IMF in other countries have raised prices for food and other basic goods, lowered prices for luxury goods, accelerated environmental degradation, and reduced spending on education, health, housing and other social services, while simultaneously reducing jobs and wages. Under the ANC's GEAR program, 126,000 new jobs were supposed to be created in 1996, but instead 170,000 were lost (*Business Report*, 4 September 1997).

The ANC leadership accumulated an enormous amount of political authority through long decades of struggle against apartheid; it is this authority which has permitted them to go as far as they have in attacking the interests of their base. Mandela is committed to transforming South Africa into an "ordinary" capitalist society, but South Africa is no ordinary society, and the ANC's attempts to safeguard the gross inequalities created under apartheid must inevitably lead to social explosions.

While the millions of impoverished blacks will not forever endure their present condition, the South African bourgeoisie is also unhappy with the status quo. The price of gold, their most important export commodity, has fallen. They cannot compensate by exporting manufactured goods because industrial productivity lags far behind that of the advanced capitalist world, while labor costs are significantly higher than in export-oriented Third World countries like Indonesia, the Philippines or Mexico. The ANC's goal of making South Africa more competitive internationally requires it to tame the black unions.

### **ANC/SACP/COSATU: 'Tripartite Alliance' Against Black Workers**

One reason the ANC has felt free to attack its base is that its left flank is protected by its "Tripartite Alliance" with COSATU (the Congress of South African Trade Unions) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). While increasingly critical of Mandela's prostration before the IMF and World Bank, COSATU and the SACP (both of which are nominally pro-socialist) accept the notion that South Africa must undergo a protracted period of capitalist development.

The ANC's neo-liberal policies pose serious problems for the leadership of COSATU and the SACP. Unlike the ANC, they are rooted in the working class and their influence, and even existence, ultimately depends on their ability to defend the interests of their base. Yet the effect of their alliance with the ANC, which is today nothing other than an agency of South African capitalism, is to chain the workers' movement to the exploiters. Every time its Alliance



**Soweto, 1990: Mandela appears with Slovo at SACP rally**

partners complain, the ANC reminds them that, having agreed to take the path of reform and "power sharing" with the white bourgeoisie, they must accept responsibility for the consequences.

In embracing the ANC, COSATU accepted the framework of "co-management" of the economy with the bosses. But for all the talk of democratization, the only "gain" that most workers have seen is a few senior management posts for former liberation fighters whose assignment it is to convince the workers that, in the "New South Africa," it is their duty to work more for less. The ANC has employed a variety of tactics to curtail union power, from demagogic denunciations of unionized workers as "labor aristocrats," to attempts to substitute arbitration and mediation for militant job actions.

COSATU's leadership initially accepted ANC restrictions on the right to strike and went along with legislation designed to bureaucratize industrial relations. But the latest round of ANC labor "reforms" are being met with more serious resistance from the rank and file. But this resistance is being held within the bounds of continuing overall support to the ANC by the leadership of COSATU and the SACP.

As a means of pressuring the ANC, and containing leftist dissidents, COSATU and the SACP sometimes float the idea of a workers' party. But more often they issue warnings to their base that a break with the ANC would risk isolation, and could lead to a rapid move to the right by the government. Yet the pressure is growing—as the massive response to COSATU's August "rolling strikes" indicates—and the ANC is gradually expending its political capital.

South Africa remains one of the few places where socialism is still widely popular. The mass union-centered movement that brought down apartheid aimed at more than



**Apartheid's army intact under ANC**

formal equality for blacks; the masses believed that theirs was a struggle for social and economic equality as well. These aspirations have receded, but they have not entirely disappeared.

### The 'Gravy Train'

Once hailed as the spearhead of the liberation struggle, the black unions are now derided by the ANC and its hangers-on as saboteurs whose "inflexibility" threatens foreign investment and the balance of payments, and whose defense of "high" wages accounts for the massive levels of unemployment. Black capitalists, on the other hand, who were widely despised as collaborators with the regime during the struggles of the 1980s, are today held up by the ANC as role models.

The only beneficiaries of "redistribution" so far have been members of a thin layer of blacks who have secured high-paid positions in the big corporations and civil service. While blacks still constitute a tiny minority of the bourgeoisie, the election of the ANC led to a rapid expansion in the number of black faces in corporate boardrooms. An affirmative action survey conducted in late 1995 by FSA-Contact reported that the percentage of blacks in senior positions had grown from 2.5 to 9.5 in the preceding year, while the percentage of whites had dropped from 95 to 87.

Many top ANC cadres, black union leaders and key figures in civic organizations have managed to hop on the neo-apartheid gravy train:

"A survey by Perry and Associates in 1994 on the attitudes towards affirmative action in 65 of South Africa's top companies is very revealing about the thinking of white executives: the most sought after category of black people were 'those with Robben Island [the apartheid prison where Mandela and other anti-apartheid fighters were held] credentials.'

"It is not hard to find two good illustrations. Fikile Bam, a director of Volkswagen SA, the First National Bank, the Iron and Steel Corporation (Iskor), the South African

Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (Armscor), not only worked in the law firm owned by Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela in the late 1950s, but was sentenced to ten years on Robben Island in 1964 for his political activities. Eric Molobi, chairman of Kagiso Trust Investments and director of several companies, also spent time on Robben Island...."

—D.J. Randall, "Prospects for the Development of a Black Business Class in South Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, October 1996

Gaby Magomola, deputy chair of Afrilink and a former political prisoner, explained that "the white partner brings in capital in the form of money, we bring in political capital." Magomola explained what he meant by that "political capital":

"a lot of the people that we served time with on Robben Island are now ministers, they are premiers, they are cabinet ministers, and we have that direct link. There is no way I can call Tokyo Sexwale [Premier of Gauteng Province] and he will not respond to me, because we slept side by side in bed in prison and he understands my views, and he has a moral obligation to ensure that black business is empowered."

—*Ibid.*

Steven Biko's wife, Mamphela Ramphele, was taken on as a director of the giant Anglo American mining conglomerate. Cyril Ramaphosa, who formerly headed the powerful National Union of Mineworkers, and then the ANC, is one of four men who controls New Africa Investments, "the emblem of black economic empowerment." According to a report in the 24 January 1997 *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, "these four men, who have effective control over the black empowerment giant, are together worth a staggering R150-million." There are also reports of other union leaders who have used their positions to line their pockets:

"Former left critic of the ANC, trade union leader John Copelyn, earned almost R1 million in royalties in 1994 on the basis of the legal business undertakings of 'his' textile workers union. A 'regular' trade union full-timer would have earned less than R50,000 in the same period."

—*International Viewpoint*, 15 May 1995

### ANC In Office, But Not In Power

Under the "power sharing" arrangement negotiated with the apartheid rulers, the ANC is permitted to hold office, on condition that it preserves the social hierarchy created by apartheid. As a token of its good faith, the ANC agreed that the bureaucrats who enforced and administered the white supremacist system could either keep their jobs or accept generous "sunset clause" buyouts. Unlike the broken promises of land, jobs and housing for the millions of apartheid's victims, Mandela's government has scrupulously honored its commitments to those who operated the mechanisms of apartheid.

The fragility of the present political arrangement, and the limits of the ANC's writ, were graphically illustrated recently during the hearings of its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a body set up to appease popular anger through publicizing some of the crimes committed under apartheid. In the interests of "reconciliation," the perpetrators are promised immunity from prosecution in exchange for their testimony, provided they make full disclosure.

When F.W. de Klerk, the last president under apartheid, testified on 14 May 1997, he cynically claimed to be "shocked" to learn that the apartheid security services had

tortured and murdered anti-apartheid fighters. He brazenly denied that the National Party (which had ruled South Africa since apartheid was instituted in 1948) had ever authorized the use of either murder or torture in combatting the liberation movements during the decades it held power. This was too much for Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the moderate cleric who chairs the commission. Tutu said that he could simply not believe that each of the 1,200 individual acts of torture reported to the commission had all been carried out by "mavericks." Tutu's deputy, Dr. Alex Boraine, observed that the state of emergency imposed by the National Party government to suppress the popular upheavals in the black townships (in the course of which more than 1,000 civilians were killed by the military) had amounted to a "license to kill."

De Klerk responded by accusing Tutu and Boraine of "prejudice," refusing to cooperate further with their commission and launching a court suit. The suit was dropped in September, after Tutu and Boraine, who had initially refused to take back their remarks, bowed to what must have been considerable political pressure from the ANC, and formally apologized to de Klerk for suggesting that he had been less than truthful. The humiliating capitulation by the ANC to this arrogant racist (with whom Mandela shared the Nobel peace prize in October 1993) reveals a great deal about who is actually in charge in South Africa today.

### Apartheid's Army & the ANC

The key to the deal between the ruling class and the ANC was the guarantee that the white-supremacist repressive apparatus remain intact:

"The SANDF [South African National Defense Force] is supposed to be a phoenix, born from the ashes of seven different military forces. In actual fact, the former Homeland armies...as well as the guerrilla forces of the ANC's *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), the military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress, are welded onto the existing structures of the old SADF....Although former guerrillas must be evaluated and trained before [being] placed on active duty, SADF members undergo no such process. Despite the appointment of ex-MK commanders to the posts of Minister and Deputy Minister of Defence, and the new army's recruitment of ex-MK officers, the SANDF remains a formal, conventional military dominated by an experienced corps of Afrikaners."

—Gary Kynoch, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, July 1996

In the military, as in parliament, the ANC's role is to provide black frontmen for the maintenance of the status quo. Kynoch quotes Joe Modise, the ANC defense minister as asking "What's the point of prosperity if you can't protect it?...You need the guns to create the conditions to have houses." In fact the only reason the ANC "needs the guns" of the apartheid military is to protect it from the black masses, who are increasingly restive over the government's failure to deliver on its promises.

Given that South Africa does not face any obvious external military threat, and that the ANC has complained loud and long about its lack of financial resources, the government has had problems explaining why the armed forces should continue to be allocated a big chunk of the national budget. But the SACP/ANC leaders have come up with a rationale: the "danger" of more blacks flooding into the country!



PETER JORDAN

### Autoworker in Port Elizabeth

"Kasrils, a former MK commander, noted in 1995 that the SANDF had exclusive responsibility for the security of the land borders, and warned that 'the consequences of an unchecked migration into South Africa would be disastrous'."

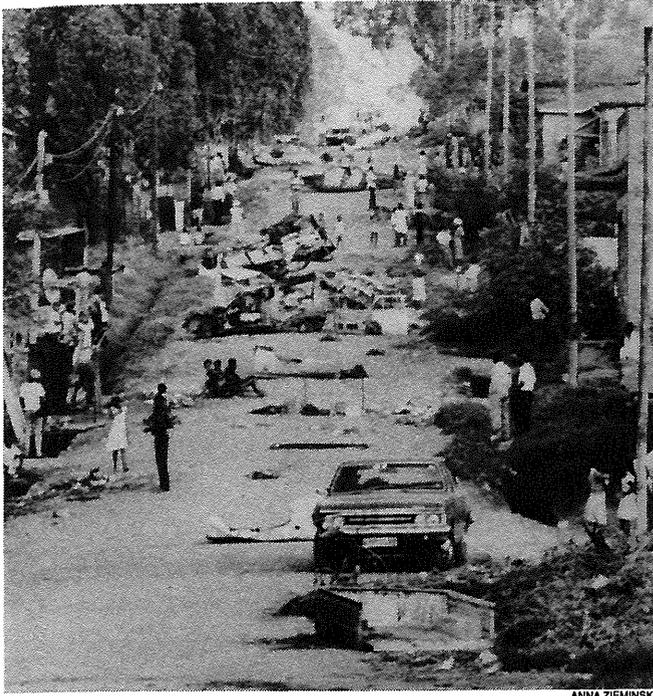
—*Ibid.*

A socialist government in South Africa would welcome immigrants, just as the Bolsheviks did in Russia, and seek to use them as a human bridge to spread the influence of the revolution internationally. But for the bourgeois nationalists of the ANC, and their social-chauvinist allies in the SACP, who are ideologically committed to pushing the fantasy of a non-exploitative, non-racialist capitalist South Africa, "illegal" immigrants are convenient scapegoats.

### Black Labor: Apartheid's Achilles Heel

The cycle of political struggle that culminated in the 1994 elections that put the ANC in office can be traced back to the early 1960s, when the anti-apartheid movement had been crushed by massive state repression following the March 1960 Sharpeville massacre. The ANC/SACP, and their black nationalist rivals in the Pan-Africanist Congress, were banned, their unions crushed and their leaders jailed, driven underground or forced into exile. While the ANC/SACP (and to a lesser extent the PAC) retained the passive loyalty of the black masses, its cadres were unable to shape developments on the ground, and they were forced to exist for decades as essentially emigré movements.

But by the late 1960s, a growing economy and expanding markets required South African capital to expand the pool of skilled labor beyond the white workers for whom such positions had been traditionally reserved under apartheid. By the early 1970s the racially segmented labor market—where white labor was traditionally paid up to ten times as much as black—came into increasingly sharp conflict with the requirements of South African capitalists. The



ANNA ZIEMINSKI

### Barricades built during Alexandra township revolt

white minority, which totals only 13 percent of the population, was increasingly concentrated in the repressive apparatus and the corporate and government bureaucracies, and the demand for black labor increased. This laid the basis for the emergence of new black unions, often initiated by the organizing efforts of radicalized students, many of whom were white or Indian.

A successful strike in 1973 by 100,000 workers in Durban caught the apartheid regime by surprise and succeeded in winning important concessions. This action announced the arrival of a powerful new trade-union movement, which would ultimately rock the apartheid regime to its foundations. Two years later, the crushing defeat of the South African army in Angola by a largely black Cuban expeditionary force provided an important catalyst for the 1976 black student-based Soweto uprising, an event which heralded the onset of a cycle of black resistance that ultimately put Mandela in the presidency.

The apartheid regime responded to the township revolt with bloody repression, but unlike in the early 1960s, its room for maneuver was limited by the increased dependence of South African capital on black labor. The attempt to crush the revolts touched off an escalating wave of popular anger, which spilled over into the factories and encouraged the growth of the new black unions.

The new unions did not set out to confront the regime politically, but instead concentrated on building their strength at the point of production. Their activity was centered on wringing concessions in wages and working conditions from individual employers. This proved an effective tactic. Unable to suppress the new black unions, the regime was compelled in 1979 to grant them a circumscribed legality.

### Apartheid Endangers Capital

The apartheid state was a trusted pillar of the anti-Soviet "Free World," but, in the late 1970s, some of the more farsighted elements among the imperialists were becoming

alarmed by the long-term implications of the emergence of a powerful workers' movement, and growing leftist influence among black youth. By the early 1980s, the political uncertainty was visibly undermining economic prospects, as both foreign and domestic capital worried about the long-term stability of the apartheid regime. A 1981 report by the blue-ribbon Study Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Southern Africa, chaired by the head of the Ford Foundation, concluded:

"Whatever the South African government does to reinforce the status quo, black forces inside the country will eventually alter it.

"The active collaboration of the South African government, whatever its ideology, is *not* an important factor in protecting the Cape sea route. A greater source of danger to the West is the growth of Soviet influence in the region, promoted by white intransigence in South Africa, growing political instability, rising levels of racial violence, and armed conflict."

—*Time Running Out*

By the mid-1980s, even the Afrikaner elite's secret society, the *Broederbond*, had reached similar conclusions. In an internal circular, it advised that:

"the exclusion of effective black sharing in political processes at the highest level is a threat to the survival of the white man, which cannot be countered by maintaining the status quo or by a further consolidation of power in white hands."

—"Basic Political Values for the Survival of the Afrikaner," quoted in *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 September 1991

### ANC/SACP vs. Black 'Workerists'

Many of the key cadres of the new union movement (particularly in FOSATU—Federation of South African Trade Unions) were consciously pro-socialist and sharply critical of the ANC's utopian/reformist goal of replacing apartheid with a non-racialist capitalist society. The ANC/SACP, which had played no role in building the new unions, reciprocated by deriding their focus on independent working-class interests as "workerism."

In the keynote address to the 1982 FOSATU Congress (which was adopted as official union policy) General Secretary Joe Foster warned that subordinating class independence to "establishing unity across a wide front" was a: "great strategic error that will weaken if not destroy worker organisation both now and in the future...."

"This organisation is necessary to protect and further worker interests and to ensure that the popular movement is not hijacked by elements who will in the end have no option but to turn against their worker supporters."

—quoted in *Power!*, 1984

The ANC's record in office provides a powerful confirmation of Foster's 1982 prediction. Yet, despite their leftist impulses, the "workerists" were not able to generalize programmatically from their important political insights. Thus in the same speech warning that the petty-bourgeois nationalists in the ANC would "in the end...turn against their worker supporters," Foster came out in support of Poland's counterrevolutionary *Solidarnosc*, which he naively insisted, "was not struggling to restore capitalism in Poland" but rather "to establish more democratic worker control over *their* socialist society." Without a comprehensive revolutionary political program to counterpose to the ANC's class collaborationism, the FOSATU leadership conceded

the terrain of "politics" to the ANC, while attempting to safeguard working-class interests through militant unionism on the shop floor:

"So what has developed in South Africa is a very powerful tradition of popular or populist politics. The role of the great political movements such as the ANC and the Congress Alliance has been to mobilise the masses against the repressive minority regime. In such a situation mass mobilisation is essential so as to challenge the legitimacy of the state both internally and internationally.

"Where virtually all the population is voteless and oppressed by a racial minority then a great alliance of all classes is both necessary and a clear political strategy."

The experience of the black workers' movement in South Africa proves exactly the contrary: petty-bourgeois nationalist formations like the ANC will always turn on the working class once they come to power. This is why Marxists struggle to establish proletarian leadership in the fight against every form of social oppression. This cannot be done on the basis of narrow syndicalism, but only through the fight for a program which transcends narrow sectional working-class interests, and champions the interests of all the oppressed.

### Primacy of Politics: How ANC/SACP Triumphed Over 'Workerists'

The 1982 FOSATU congress passed a motion calling for launching a "workers' party." But without a nucleus of class-conscious militants who understood the urgency of forging a party to compete directly with the ANC/SACP for the allegiance of the workers and black masses in the townships, and a program to address the burning questions of the hour, this motion represented nothing more than an expression of abstract preference. For all their talk of a "workers' party" and "socialism," the leftists in the unions centered their activity on the shop floor, and left the broader political struggles against apartheid to the ANC/SACP by default. This abdication was raised to the level of principle by those "autonomists" who advanced the view that the best way to push the anti-capitalist struggle forward was to keep the workers' organizations aloof from all political affiliations.

This abstentionism facilitated the ANC/SACP's drive to recruit shop stewards and gradually extend their control over the independent workers' movement. Using pseudo-Marxist terminology, the SACP denounced the left unionists as "workerists," "ultra-lefts" and "splitters" and insisted that the working-class movement must be subordinated to the ANC as the leadership of the struggle for national liberation. At the same time, the ANC/SACP began to present a more radical face by talking about "uninterrupted revolution," the necessity to struggle for "popular power" and even "insurrection."

The 1984-85 township revolts were designed by the ANC/SACP to make the country "ungovernable." The ANC organized a series of "stay-aways" centered in the black townships and enforced by bands of militant young "comrades." This tactic, which shifted the axis of struggle from the workplace to the amorphous community, succeeded largely because of the abdication of the black unions. In suppressing the mass struggles, the regime killed at least a thousand people and jailed thousands more. But the upheavals established the ANC as the undisputed leadership of the movement against apartheid, and tipped the scales in favor of the section of the white ruling class that



December, 1985: COSATU launched

recognized that the rigid system of legalized apartheid had to be abandoned in favor of a more normal (i.e., informally racist) form of capitalist rule.

Without a revolutionary programmatic alternative to the ANC's populism, the leftists in FOSATU's leadership drifted to the right. In 1985 FOSATU joined with pro-ANC unions and the powerful but politically conservative Mine-workers to create COSATU, the country's largest and most important trade-union center. While representing a step forward organizationally, the fusion was premised on the at least tacit acceptance of the leading political role of the ANC/SACP.

In 1987 COSATU's national congress formally endorsed the ANC's Freedom Charter. The union left, including Moses Mayekiso, general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), registered their misgivings by putting forward a "workers' charter," spelling out workers' rights under a future "peoples' [i.e., ANC] government." As political negotiations between the ANC and the government gained momentum, the limits of the syndicalist shop-floor focus became increasingly clear. COSATU's "workerist" wing, swept up by the wave of enthusiasm and hope among their base, came under enormous pressure to get involved in the process in order to influence the outcome. Unable to offer a coherent political alternative, the "workerists" felt compelled to choose between abstention and political support to the ANC/SACP.

When it was legalized in 1990 (in the midst of the collapse of the Soviet bloc), the SACP turned toward a more openly social-democratic brand of reformism and sought to present itself as a tolerant, broad left party of the whole class, within which all shades of leftist opinion could find a home. This proved attractive to Mayekiso and many other former "workerists," who joined the party with which they had engaged in bitter polemics only a few years earlier. The absorption of the leading workerists provided the SACP with an important lever for integrating the unions into the project of stabilizing "post-apartheid" South Africa. The SACP offered some self-criticisms of its previous sectarianism toward the workerists, and promised to abjure such Stalinist behavior in future, but the important political concessions were made by formerly independent union leftists, who abandoned all notions of working-class independence



BUREAU FOR INFORMATION—PRETORIA

### 1991: de Klerk and Mandela commence formal 'power sharing' negotiations

and socialism, and reconciled themselves to the prospect of a capitalist South Africa, administered by the ANC.

#### Background to the Deal

The apartheid rulers had been compelled to seek a negotiated settlement by the continuing mass popular resistance, both organized and spontaneous, which animated the black masses in the factories, mines and townships, and paralyzed the South African economy. The terminal crisis of the Soviet bloc, which removed the ANC's chief international patron, was also a factor. Where the ANC, like other Third World leftist/nationalist movements, had previously been able to maneuver between the imperialists and the "socialist world," they were now forced to go it alone, or settle for the best terms they could get from the "Free World."

In his account of the negotiations between the ANC and the de Klerk government, Allister Sparks notes that the Soviet collapse:

"eased Pretoria's phobia that the black struggle against apartheid was a conspiracy directed from Moscow. It took the monkey off De Klerk's back and enabled him to justify to his people what would otherwise have appeared to them a suicidal course of action."

—*Tomorrow is Another Country*, 1995

The Afrikaner rulers had no intention of committing suicide and, while they recognized that things had to change, they still had a strong hand to play. Prior to the opening of formal negotiations, the apartheid regime had already conducted years of secret, exploratory talks with Nelson Mandela, and extended other feelers to the ANC. At a 1986 conference organized by the Ford Foundation in New York, Thabo Mbeki, the ANC's director of information (and today South Africa's first deputy president), met with Pieter de Lange, chairman of the *Broederbond*. According to Mbeki de Lange told him:

"Look, we Afrikaners thought we needed many things to

secure our future: segregated living areas, no mixed marriages, and all that....But the reality is that we can remove the Group Areas Act tomorrow and it's not going to make any difference, because your people don't have the money to move into the expensive white suburbs. So from your point of view it will be a meaningless change, but for us Afrikaners it will mean we will wake up one day and realize that nothing has changed, that we are still all right....That will open the way to asking the question: Why do we need a white government anyway?"

—*Ibid.*

Another important line of communication with the ANC was established by Willem ("Wimpie") de Klerk, whose brother, F.W.— then a senior cabinet minister in the government of P.W. Botha—was soon to take over as president. Wimpie reported back to his brother and to the *Broederbond*:

"The essence of my message was, 'Look, boys, everything is OK. We can do business with the ANC. They are not that radical. They are willing to negotiate. They are willing to compromise. They see the Afrikaners as an indigenous part of the South African population. They are not that dangerous. There's a flexibility even in their economic outlook'."

—*Ibid.*

The ANC has indeed proved to be "flexible." To allay the fears of the mining conglomerates, they hastily dropped the most radical-sounding demands in the 1955 Freedom Charter including the call for "mineral wealth beneath the soil" to be "transferred to ownership of the people as a whole." Mandela pledged allegiance to the future of South African capitalism and reminded the business press that he had never been an advocate of socialism.

#### SACP: Capitalist Tool

The ANC's Communist Party partners in the liberation struggle used to talk of a revolution in two stages—first the overthrow of apartheid and then, after the establishment of a non-racial democracy, the opening of a struggle for work-

ers' power and socialism. Today the SACP has more than 50 members of parliament elected as part of the ANC slate. It counts ministers, deputy ministers and provincial premiers among its members. But far from talking about any second, socialist "stage," the SACP is solely concerned with making South African capitalism more competitive.

The ANC has assigned its left-wing allies the task of attacking their own base. One of Mandela's earliest appointments was to make the late Joe Slovo (the central SACP leader) minister of housing. During the 1984-86 rebellion in the townships, the ANC called for a rent strike, which was extended into a refusal to pay property taxes, fees for municipal services, electrical bills, etc. Slovo's first task was to "normalize" rent collection. He also moved promptly to begin removing homeless blacks who, after the ANC was elected, had begun squatting in previously all-white enclaves.

Mandela put former COSATU head, Jay Naidoo, in charge of administering the RDP (which was only adopted in the first place as a sop to the unions), so that he could take responsibility for the government's failure to deliver on its promises. Former SACP guerrilla commander, Ronnie Kasrils, who took over as deputy defense minister, was soon advocating increased funding for the apartheid army. Alec Erwin, the ANC's minister of Trade and Industry, who, as a leading theorist of the union left, had once produced some of the sharpest criticisms of the logic of class collaboration, today argues that economic development can only be financed through the massive privatization of state assets.

The ex-Stalinists' lurch to the right has to be understood as a political phenomenon, rather than simply the product of personal corruption. Under the repressive apartheid regime, people risked their lives to join the SACP—it was not a party of time servers and careerists. For six decades, while their party willingly subordinated itself to the petty-bourgeois nationalists in the ANC, the cadres of the Moscow-loyal SACP were able to comfort themselves with the thought that they were fighting on one front of a larger, global struggle between imperialism and the "socialist world." The collapse of the Soviet Union led them to abandon all hope for socialism, and to resign themselves to making South African capitalism work.

In an interview with *International Viewpoint* (15 May 1995), Jeremy Cronin, a prominent SACP representative, explained how the collapse of the USSR transformed the party:

"The existence of two blocks [*sic.*] was central to our concept of national democratic revolution. The disappearance of the Soviet block [*sic.*] raises a lot of unresolved questions....there is no longer a fully fledged second block [*sic.*]—an alternative in terms of trade, aid, military and political assistance."

Cronin concludes that, "the national democratic revolution is likely to be a very long and ongoing project" and suggests that:

"Socialist forces should engage with the present situation, be in the midst of the democratic movement, and champion the advance, the deepening and the defence of the democratic transformation."

For the next historical period, the SACP considers that the "defence of the democratic transformation" is *counterposed* to undertaking any struggle for socialism. Cronin complained that a November 1994 socialist conference hosted by COSATU and the SACP:

"was diverted into a discourse of the deaf by a number of small far-left groupings whose argument was that noth-

ing has changed in South Africa, and that the key task remains 'the overthrow of the bourgeois state'. They're entitled to hold that view, but it is radically different from our own, and it makes useful discussion virtually impossible."

For all the SACP's doubletalk about the "complexities" of economic decision-making and the need to "advance and deepen" the ANC's "democratic breakthrough," it is obvious to everyone that the ANC/IMF's structural adjustment program is widening the gap between the black masses and the predominantly white elite. By openly renouncing socialism and promoting a more robust South African capitalism, the SACP will inevitably come into sharp conflict with the militant layers of black workers who make up the core of its base.

Many SACP militants doubtless remain loyal to their organization because of its heroic history of resistance to apartheid, but it has become so closely identified with the ruling ANC that it is hardly seen as playing an independent role. Its operational structure is reportedly in some disarray, and a section of its leadership is said to favor outright liquidation. This would likely be opposed by the ANC, which has found its Communist Party ally useful both in exercising control over the unions and preventing the emergence of a more radical working-class party.

## Racial Oppression and Class Struggle

The question of social class in South Africa has always been bound up with the question of racial oppression. The bourgeoisie and the core of its repressive apparatus is overwhelmingly white, while the industrial working class is almost entirely black. This has profound implications for the character of the socialist revolution in South Africa, as Leon Trotsky observed more than 60 years ago:

"the South African republic will emerge first of all as a 'black' republic; this does not exclude, of course, either full equality for the whites or brotherly relations between the two races—depending mainly on the conduct of the whites. But it is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the state.

"Insofar as a victorious revolution will radically change the relation not only between the classes but also between the races and will assure to the blacks that place in the state that corresponds to their numbers, thus far will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character.

"We have not the slightest reason to close our eyes to this side of the question or to diminish its significance. On the contrary, the proletarian party should in words and in deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands."

—"On the South African Theses," 20 April 1935

Trotsky pointed to the relevance of the Russian Revolution in illuminating the relationship of the national and social questions in South Africa and the correct attitude of Marxists toward petty-bourgeois nationalist formations like the ANC:

"The Bolshevik Party defended the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination *with the methods of proletarian class struggle*, entirely rejecting the charlatan 'anti-imperialist blocs' with the numerous petty-bourgeois 'national parties' of czarist Russia....

"The Bolsheviks have always mercilessly unmasked these parties...their vacillations and adventurism, but especially their ideological lie of being above the class struggle....



PETER MAGUBANE

### Cyril Ramaphosa, ex-NUM/ANC leader, at the trough

"There could be no question of any permanent alliance with them under the banner of 'anticzarism.' Only thanks to this *irreconcilable* class policy was Bolshevism able to succeed in the time of the revolution to throw aside the Mensheviks, the Social Revolutionaries, the national petty-bourgeois parties and gather around the proletariat the masses of the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities."

—*Ibid.*

South African revolutionaries must adopt a similarly irreconcilable attitude toward the ANC/SACP government. The South African working class is overwhelmingly black, but it has elements and potential allies in every other community. Beside the Indian and "coloured" (mixed-race) populations, who occupied an intermediate position between the black majority and the white oppressors under apartheid, there are also hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers (from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Namibia and elsewhere) as well as a small, but historically significant anti-racist element in the white population. The apartheid rulers historically sought to exacerbate tensions among the different sectors of the oppressed—while attempting to rekindle tribalist identification among blacks—as part of their strategy of divide and rule.

To become more competitive, South African mine and factory owners want to *lower* the living standards of the black working class. The job of the ANC/SACP is to control, demobilize, coopt or, if necessary, attack the unions and mass organizations of the oppressed. As the current political configuration begins to unravel, there is a real danger of a resurgence of racial/communist violence, pitting elements of the oppressed against each other, as well as a revival of white supremacist terrorism.

A revolutionary workers' party in South Africa would seek to function as a "tribune of the people," in Lenin's memorable phrase, i.e., to link the struggle against white supremacy and other manifestations of social oppression to the necessity for working-class rule. Against the ANC's promotion of multi-class "national unity," a Trotskyist party would counterpose class unity. While necessarily centered in the black working class, a Trotskyist party in South Africa would also champion the interests of the unemployed and homeless in the townships, the farm workers and impoverished masses in the "tribal home-

lands," women, immigrants, ethnic, racial and sexual minorities. Rather than limiting the fight to what is possible within the framework of capitalist rule, such a party would combine implacable opposition to all forms of chauvinism with a program of transitional demands to lead the masses to understand the necessity of abolishing the whole system of private property.

### Break With the ANC— For a Revolutionary Workers' Party!

The whole situation in South Africa hinges on the question of the political leadership of the black working class. The most urgent political task is to break the popular-frontist Triple Alliance of the ANC/SACP/COSATU which binds the proletariat to the white capitalists. A key demand in this struggle is for the creation of a *workers'* party to offer a class alternative to the bourgeois ANC and its SACP hangers-on. But such a party cannot be a reformist/electoralist party on the model of the British Labour Party, the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) or similar social-democratic formations. A revolutionary workers' party must be committed to the struggle to establish a workers' government, rooted in the black masses, to carry out the expropriation of the mines, the factories, the banks, transport, agribusiness and all the other productive assets of society. Such a perspective is flatly counterposed to the attempts of the ANC/SACP to administer a progressive profit-driven economy which serves the interests of both the capitalist exploiters and their victims.

The "settlement" worked out between de Klerk and Mandela settled nothing fundamental. The white capitalists still own almost all the productive assets, and are quite willing to launch a "capital strike" to block measures they do not approve of. The bourgeois state machine remains intact, and remains committed to the defense of the wealthy elite. The ANC's promises of "reconstruction," "development" and "redistribution" have become a cruel joke. If the workers' movement is not able to provide some hope for the millions of impoverished blacks in the townships and former "homelands," the result could be a reactionary resurgence of ethnic/tribal hostilities.

A black-centered workers' state in South Africa would face enormous economic and military pressure from the "Free World" powers, who stood behind the apartheid butchers. In order to survive it would necessarily have to pursue an aggressively *internationalist* perspective and seek points of support outside the borders of South Africa, both in the region and in the heart of the imperialist metropolis itself. Just as the struggle launched against apartheid won enormous support internationally in the 1980s, the expropriation of those who profited from decades of legalized racism would similarly inspire many tens of millions of working people around the world—particularly in Africa and in the black diaspora in the U.S., Britain and other imperialist centers.

The repressive apparatus of the South African bourgeoisie has been shaken—the legitimacy of the apartheid rulers has been undermined, the confidence and cohesion of the white minority has been loosened. The organized black workers' movement remains objectively powerful. While the core of the armed forces and the police remains intact, these forces are considerably less homogenous than they were a decade ago. A socialist revolution in South Africa is entirely possible, and it is also the *only* way in which the legacy of apartheid can be uprooted. ■

# The New Realities of BSA/SEP 'Globalization' & the Unions



OLIVER BERG—AFP

**German Metal Union workers in Frankfurt demanding pay increases**

*The following is an abridged and edited version of an article that first appeared in the March 1997 issue of Bolschewik, published by Gruppe Spartakus, German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency.*

Today in Germany many of the gains won by workers in the past are under attack by the bosses. In the name of job security, the union bigwigs are offering one give-back after another: on hours, working conditions, wages and the whole system of regional collective agreements. But, for all the "flexibility" and concessions offered by the bureaucrats, jobs are still being axed, not secured, and conditions for working people continue to deteriorate.

The current capitalist offensive makes it clearer than ever why workers need trade-union organization to defend their interests. The level of unionization in Germany remains one of the highest in the world: about 9 million workers are organized in the German Trade Union Federation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund—DGB). In July 1996, when the DGB bureaucrats called a demonstration in Bonn, 350,000 workers responded. It was an impressive display, even if it was only used to let the rank and file blow off steam.

There is no question but that the German unions are losing ground—in 1996 alone, membership contracted by 348,000. But the workers who are quitting the unions are generally the more conservative and demoralized ones. There are also some who are leaving because they are disgusted by the treachery of the leadership. But this exodus does not represent either political or organizational opposition to the rotten union leadership. And the only mass workers' protests—partial and ineffective as they

have been—have been organized within the framework of the existing unions.

We are undoubtedly witnessing the rapid political and moral disintegration of the union leadership, which nonetheless continues to exert a profoundly reactionary ideological influence on workers. Yet, despite this, the majority of advanced, active workers remain in the unions. The objective of politically-conscious militants must be to work within the unions to struggle to oust the bureaucrats and win leadership on the basis of a class-struggle program.

The BSA (Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter—German affiliate of David North's U.S. Socialist Equality Party) was long known for its attempts to pull off various opportunist maneuvers with one or another "progressive" bureaucratic clique. Today, they have suddenly taken to posing in ultra-left clothing. Their only activity in the unions is to pronounce them dead as organizations of the working class:

"As an opposing power, that is, as workers' instrument for defending their rights and interests, the unions are dead. The actual existing unions are a disciplinary power in the hands of employers and the government."

—*neue Arbeiter Presse (nAP)*, 28 March 1996

They assert that henceforth the unions will always side with the capitalist state in future class struggles, and that workers can no longer use their existing unions as organs of struggle:

"workers must draw a balance and break with the unions. The way forward lies in building a socialist party..."

"Instead of mourning for the reformist bureaucrats, it is more important to understand the social reasons for the

transformation of the unions. The internationalization of production and the globalization of markets has made post-war union methods useless."

—*Ibid.*

## Reformism...Then and Now

The BSA treats the treacherous role of the reformist union leadership as a new phenomenon arising from changed international economic and technological developments. Marxists assert, on the contrary, that this is nothing new: the reformists went over completely to the side of capital over 80 years ago. Since then the labor reformists have repeatedly proved themselves to be the reliable "bloodhounds" of the capitalists. In 1919, at its first congress, the Communist International (Comintern) declared that, when the first shots of World War I were fired:

"This was the moment of the final bankruptcy and demise of the Second International...."

"Owing to these circumstances, the official social democracy degenerated into an anti-socialist and chauvinistic party."

—"The Attitude to the 'Socialist Currents' and to the Berne Conference"

The Comintern's attitude to the reformist-led unions was similar:

"During the war most of the trade unions proved themselves to be part of the military apparatus of the bourgeoisie, assisting the exploitation of the working class and spilling the blood of the proletariat in the interests of capitalist profit.... These unions, corrupted by their opportunist leaders, betrayed not only the social revolution, but even the struggle for the improved living conditions of the workers they represented. They abandoned struggle with the bosses in favor of a program of maintaining peace and agreement with the capitalists at any price."

—"The Trade-Union Movement, Factory Committees and the Third International," Second Comintern Congress

There is no need to revise this assessment today.

It is true, as the BSA writes, that the union bureaucrats have betrayed various struggles and snuffed out the recent waves of protest. But this is their role under capitalism. One of the key reasons that capitalism has survived is because the reformists have repeatedly rescued it at critical moments. That is the central lesson of the international class struggle in this century. The reformists are in a position to betray because they have been able to retain leadership of the workers' organizations, and the masses continue to have faith in them.

The Comintern, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, argued that it was necessary to connect immediate questions of defending and improving proletarian living standards with the struggle for socialism through the use of transitional demands. But with its ultra-left turn, the BSA has reverted to the old social-democratic minimal/maximal program. Instead of seeking to raise the level of everyday struggles through introducing demands to reveal the logical connection between immediate issues of the class struggle and the historic necessity of revolution, the BSA falls back into abstract descriptions of the beauty of socialism. In the imperialist epoch such methods inevitably degenerate into right opportunism.

When the *neue Arbeiter Presse* discusses union and workplace struggles, the only practical recommendations put forward are for workers to leave their unions and join the BSA's committee "to defend wages and jobs" (*nAP*, 12 May

1996). While endlessly repeating that struggle is "possible only on the basis of a socialist program," the BSA cannot connect the issues of the day with the ultimate question of state power. *Neue Arbeiter Presse* outlines all the nice things that a workers' state will do for the working class, but it has little to say about the political path necessary to achieve such a regime. In this kind of propaganda, socialism is presented as a useless abstraction: a workers' regime would be wonderful, but the problem is there is no such regime, and the BSA can offer no practical suggestions about how to advance the struggle to create one.

In practice, the BSA avoids actual struggle against reformism, and contents itself with denouncing it and pronouncing it dead. Reformism, however, is not dead. It retains its influence among the mass of the workers.

The granting of all important reforms is determined politically, i.e., through social struggle—it does not come as an automatic byproduct of objective economic conditions. Reforms are utilized in the era of decaying imperialism to dissipate political crises. In purely economic terms, capital never feels able to "afford" reforms, because every concession reduces profit. But securing capitalist class rule as a prerequisite for the whole profit-making system also has its price. This price fluctuates according to the level of class struggle.

## The BSA in the 'Globalization Trap'

On globalization the BSA shares the notions propounded in a popular book by two *Spiegel* writers, Martin and Schumann, entitled *The Globalization Trap*. The BSA's "central analytical theses" can be summarized as follows:

- The level of international integration of production through direct corporate investment has recently changed qualitatively.
- This "globalization" has resulted from the development of new computer and communication technologies.
- These have permitted the big monopolies everywhere to become "global networks" without special national identities or connections.
- This economic development makes the nation state increasingly powerless against "global capital."

The BSA concludes that state intervention in the distribution of wealth and related social programs is no longer possible. But has there really been a qualitative change in capitalist development in the era of imperialism? In *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, written during World War I, Lenin noted that with the worldwide expansion of finance capital, and the fusion of industrial and bank capital, "finance capital, literally, one might say, spreads its net over all countries of the world." He also observed that imperialism is characterized by "a new stage of world concentration of capital and production" by so-called international "supermonopolies." But he correctly asserted that such formations cannot be stable if they are not based in a single imperialist state, as they can become a "victim" of war or other changes in the relation of forces.

Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was based on fundamental teachings of Marx, which the BSA treats as unknown in Lenin's and Trotsky's time:

"Marxism takes its point of departure from the world economy, not as a sum of national parts, but as a mighty and independent reality which has been created by the international division of labour and the world market, and which in our epoch imperiously dominates the national markets. The productive forces of capitalist society

have long ago outgrown the national boundaries."

—Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution*, preface to German edition

The newspaper of Swiss finance capital, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (28 December 1996), presents an assessment of the significance of recent "globalization" theories that is considerably more sober than the BSA's:

"It is taken for granted that globalization has stood all existing economic rules on their heads....But, the delicious theses do not stand up to closer scrutiny....What brought the world closer together occurred during the second half of the last century—and not only today: steam-powered mass transportation on land and water as well as the rapid spread of telegraphy. That was a qualitative change, which integrated the national economies around the globe for the first time. Compared to that, the present communication and transportation methods are only a matter of quantitative improvement of a standard which was achieved more than a hundred years ago."

The forces driving internationalization are not new. There are two central factors: first, the search for new markets and developed sites for production. Today, this is especially true in Eastern Europe and the Pacific-Asian area. The second is the drive toward lower production costs, e.g., wages, environmental protection and taxes. Throughout the imperialist epoch, the capitalists have searched for investment opportunities around the globe. For this, they need the support and protection of their nation state.

It is true that the export of capital has recently increased dramatically. German investment abroad has jumped from 20 billion DM in 1989 to 48 billion DM in 1996: foreign direct investment by German companies now stands at about five percent of total domestic investment. In 1913, by comparison, foreign direct investment by British enterprises amounted to 44 percent of domestic investment.

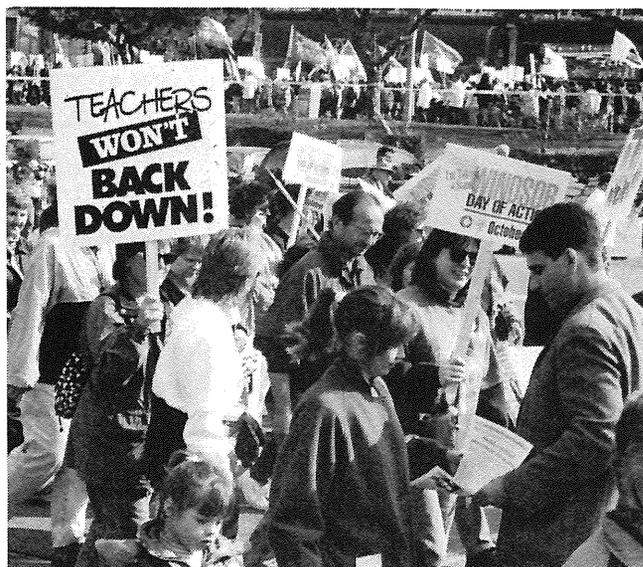
### The 'Helpless' State

Proponents of the new "globalization" theories talk a lot about global networks or "global players" who have no national ties, and about how consequently nation states are becoming powerless to determine policy. The BSA may minimize the importance of the national state, but, in reality, it continues to play a central role in the functioning of the economy.

For example, Siemens and Adtranz recently won a contract with a Chinese partner for a big order of subway cars. They won the bid because the German federal government pre-financed the deal with very favorable interest credits. It is perhaps ironic that a good part of the order is going to be built by a Brazilian subsidiary of Siemens, but this example clearly illustrates that Siemens needs strong state backing to ensure the profitability of its foreign investments, and, conversely, that the German state (which looks out for the overall interests of German capitalists) helps Siemens because of its importance to the national economy.

Similarly, the U.S. looks after the interests of IBM, Microsoft and the American music and film industry. At the first ministers' meeting of the World Trade Organization in late 1996 in Singapore, the U.S. insisted on opening up the markets of the Asian "tigers." This dismantling of state regulation does not express the powerlessness of the states in relation to the economy, but, at most, the powerlessness of certain states in relation to the mighty imperialists.

Just as the protection of private property has historically



1917 PHOTO

### Socialist Equality Party supporter leaflets workers in Windsor, Ontario as 'dead' unions shut down city

depended on the monopoly of organized violence by the state, so too "globalization" requires state power. And there is no state power except that of the nation state. All agreements reached by international organizations (e.g., the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization/General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) result from hard negotiations, pressure and muscle-flexing among various national states. The agreements that have created the prerequisites for accelerated internationalization must all ultimately be enforced by the participating national states, particularly by the stronger (i.e., imperialist) ones.

The fundamental economic processes of the capitalist world economy, the role of the national states in them, and the relationship between state power and economics has not changed. The state protects the capitalists from their enemies both at home and abroad. In exchange, capital is required to relinquish a portion of the available social surplus to the state. Neither the individual capitalists nor the capitalist state have an interest in making more concessions to the workers and the poor than absolutely necessary.

The current political climate is being utilized by the bourgeoisie to improve the situation of capital at the expense of the masses. The shrinkage of the public sector is not a sign of the powerlessness of the state, but rather a result of the weakness of the workers' movement. The rise in class struggle across Europe in the last few years indicates that the working class has begun to recover from the world-historic defeats of the years 1989-91. At the same time, the erosion of the relative inter-imperialist "harmony" that characterized the Cold War period is becoming apparent diplomatically and militarily. These developments will tend to increase the reliance of capital on the state machine. The BSA, however, must deny such possibilities because of its "globalization" theory.

The BSA's theoretical nonsense reveals its most dangerous practical consequences with respect to the unions. The logic of their new position would tend toward indifference to new legal restrictions on the unions, whereas communists fight:

"uncompromisingly against any attempt to subordinate the unions to the bourgeois state and bind the proletariat



ACTION PRESS

### Restive German public sector workers

to 'compulsory arbitration' and every other form of police guardianship—not merely fascist but also 'democratic.'"

—*Transitional Program*

The struggle against state intervention in the labor movement is inseparable from the fight against the trade-union bureaucracy. Marxists defend the trade unions, and even their misleaders, against attacks by the capitalists and their state. The BSA, on the other hand, could, with their new position, at some point find themselves in a political bloc with the capitalists in their attack on the institutions of the workers' movement. This kind of "united front" would not be unprecedented: in the early 1980s, the BSA supported both the counterrevolutionary *Solidarnosc* in Poland, and the imperialist-backed Afghan *mujahedin*.

### The Practical Methods

The BSA once knew, at least in the abstract, how communists view the question of the struggle against the pro-capitalist labor parasites. In 1976 it published a pamphlet (which it still sells) with writings by Trotsky on the trade-union question. In the preface, the BSA painted a dark picture of the situation of the unions, but nevertheless explained that:

"the struggles, into which the working class is forced through the capitalist crisis, will lead to the biggest confrontation in the trade unions.... Trotsky emphasized, as Lenin did, that cadres who are educated with Marxism must work in the trade unions also under the most difficult conditions. The complete independence of the trade unions from the state and the call for the complete achievement of trade union democracy must stand at the center of the struggle for a socialist program."

The working class today finds itself in a serious political impasse, which is manifested in a low level of resistance to the union bureaucracy. One glaring contradiction of the BSA's position is that while it claims that the active involve-

ment of the working class is vital to build a new party and realize socialism, it presumes that the workers are unable to carry out key tasks of the class struggle, namely:

"revolutionizing the trade unions, ridding them of reformist influence and the treacherous reformist leaders, and transforming them into a genuine stronghold of the revolutionary proletariat."

—"The Struggle Against the Amsterdam (scab) Trade-Union International," Third Comintern Congress

In its trade-union brochure, the BSA published a text of Trotsky's from the late 1930s:

"The intensification of class contradictions within each country, the intensification of antagonisms between one country and another, produce a situation in which imperialist capitalism can tolerate (i.e., up to a certain time) a reformist bureaucracy only if the latter serves directly as a petty but active stockholder of its imperialist enterprises, of its plans and programs within the country as well as on the world arena."

—"Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay"

Trotsky did not base his policies on a falsely optimistic picture of the character of the trade-union leadership. Nevertheless he concluded that:

"in spite of the progressive degeneration of trade unions and their growing together with the imperialist state, the work within the trade unions not only does not lose any of its importance but remains as before and becomes in a certain sense even more important work than ever for every revolutionary party. The matter at issue is essentially the struggle for influence over the working class. Every organization, every party, every faction which permits itself an ultimistic position in relation to the trade union, i.e., in essence turns its back upon the working class, merely because of displeasure with its organization, every such organization is destined to perish. And it must be said it deserves to perish."

# IG: Ex-Robertsonites in Denial

## Willful Blindness

In June 1996, the Spartacist League (SL) purged four long-time cadres: Jan Norden, editor-in-chief for 23 years of the group's newspaper, *Workers Vanguard*; his companion and de-facto WV managing editor, Marjorie Stamberg; Negrete, who headed the SL's Mexican affiliate, the Grupo Espartaquista de Mexico (GEM); and Negrete's companion, Socorro, an 18-year member of the Spartacist League. Norden was the most prominent SL cadre ever purged in the group's history; Stamberg joined the SL in the early 1970s, and was a member of its central committee; Negrete and Socorro were their political allies. Immediately following the purge, the International Communist League (ICL—the SL's international) abruptly broke recently established fraternal relations with the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil/Luta Metalúrgica (LQB/LM). The break took place because the Brazilians refused to associate themselves with the purge of Norden and Negrete, who had been their chief ICL contacts, without hearing both sides and reading the documents.

In the year and a half since the purge, the four have refused to be driven out of far-left politics. They have constituted themselves as the "Internationalist Group" (IG), established fraternal links with the LQB/LM, and have won the adherence of two former members of the GEM who initially went along with the Norden purge, but later regretted it. The IG has thus far published three thick issues of *The Internationalist*, with coverage of political developments in half a dozen countries. In their press, in Internet postings, leaflets, and one lengthy bulletin, they have systematically and painstakingly refuted the charges leveled against them by the Spartacist League. Yet, despite its political stamina and feverish activity, the IG has to date proved unequal to the tasks that, for a serious revolutionary group, must come before all others: accounting for its origins and justifying its existence as a separate organization.

Launching a new organization with only a handful of people and a fraternal group thousands of miles away is a difficult undertaking. Any intelligent person contemplating membership in such an organization would want to know why it parted company with a much larger parent outfit whose politics appear nearly identical. The IG has furnished an account of sorts, but, particularly for those familiar with the evolution of the Spartacist League over the past two decades, their version is not plausible.

Beginning with the "Declaration of the External Tendency of the iSt," issued 15 years ago in 1982, we have chronicled the degeneration of the Spartacist League from a genuine democratic-centralist Trotskyist propaganda group into a bureaucratized and politically erratic organization centered on a single individual, the group's National Chairman, James Robertson. We described this degeneration as a slow process, taking place over a period of years, and becoming complete in all important respects by the early 1980s. The techniques employed by Robertson to maintain his regime—psychological gang bangs, pre-emptive strikes against potential opponents, frame-up trials and cop-baiting—have all been documented in our literature.

Norden and his comrades are the latest victims of the Robertson regime. But the indisputable fact is that, for most of the same 15 years, the founders of the Internationalist

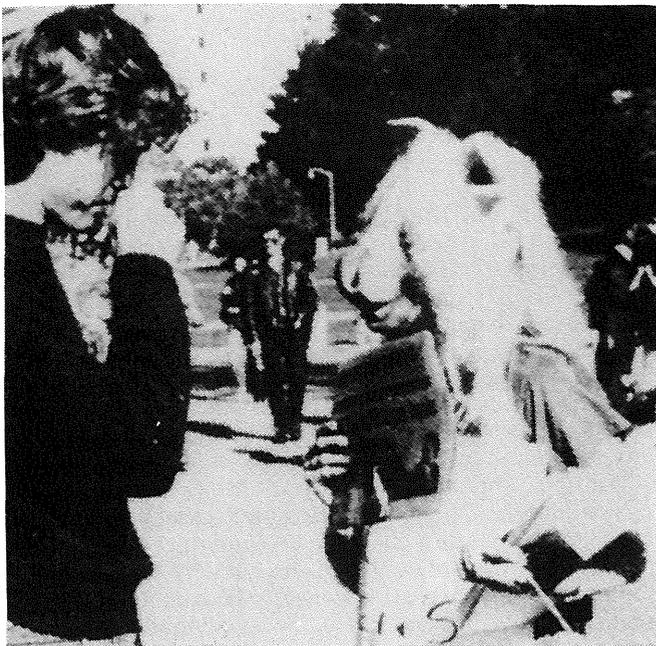
Group functioned as Robertson's willing accomplices. With perhaps less enthusiasm than many hardcore hacks, but dutifully nonetheless, they deployed against others—most notably the IBT—many of the same techniques today being used to anathematize them. Norden, in his capacity as editor of *Workers Vanguard*, played an active part in concocting slanders against us. Yet—how much out of a conscious desire to save face, how much out of genuine self-delusion, we cannot know—the IG cadres have stubbornly resisted any re-evaluation or criticism of their own political past.

Thus the Internationalist Group seeks to defend itself against the slanders and unprincipled attacks of the Spartacist League, while at the same time uncritically defending all previous uses of similar techniques by the Robertson regime against others. This stance, in turn, requires them to make a highly implausible claim: that, right up until the fight against the "Norden clique," the SL remained a healthy Trotskyist organization; and that, in a matter of months, this same organization was somehow transformed into a bureaucratic nightmare, employing methods that the IG itself compares to those of Stalin, without a murmur of opposition from anyone beside the luckless four. This flies in the face of both elementary logic and the facts.

### An Improbable Account

The Internationalist Group's version of the SL's degeneration goes roughly as follows: after the collapse of the USSR and the deformed workers' states of Eastern Europe, the ICL fell increasingly into the grip of a defeatist mood. Leading elements of the organization began to view the working class as being in long-term retreat, and therefore expected that opportunities for intervention in the class struggle would be few and far between. They concluded that the best the ICL could do under these circumstances was to keep itself intact, issue propaganda of an abstract and passive character, and wait for better times. This shift was embodied by a new leadership, headed by Alison Spencer (a.k.a. Parks). A former leader of the Spartacus Youth, Spencer increasingly took over the reins from Robertson, who went into semi-retirement in California in the late 1980s. This new leadership is, according to the IG, "lacking any experience whatsoever in the class struggle," has an "insecure footing in Marxism," and is "heavily shaped by the stultifying Reagan and post-Reagan years in North America."

The IG contends that the historic pessimism of the SL's new leaders led them to view with suspicion the attempts of Norden and company to pursue real opportunities in the class struggle, and to brand such initiatives as opportunism and attempts to get rich quick. This growing hostility culminated in their purge. Robertson, though initially reluctant, ultimately went along with the anti-Norden campaign in order not to undermine the new leadership. The new SL leadership's abstentionist mentality is, according to the IG, manifested above all in the "cowardly retreat from the class struggle" represented by the rupture of fraternal relations with the LQB/LM. The ICL broke relations just as the LQB/LM was facing repression from the Brazilian state for waging a campaign to expel the police from a union they



YOUNG SPARTACUS

### Robertsonite follies, 1984: WV salesperson on campus

led in Volta Redonda, an industrial town not far from Rio de Janeiro. In the course of the Norden purge, the IG argues, democratic-centralist norms were violated, their membership rights were trampled on, deliberately false accusations were leveled at them by the leadership, frame-up trials were conducted and outright lies were printed in *Workers Vanguard*—all, according to the IG, for the *first time* in the history of the Spartacist League.

### A Few Comparisons

While this version of events contains many elements of truth, it is fundamentally false. The remarkable similarity between the IG's account of what happened to them, and our descriptions of previous purges, published over ten years earlier, is, in itself, enough to disprove the IG's claim that the SL regime trampled on internal party democracy for the first time in 1996.

Because Negrete, the head of the Mexican group (GEM), was thought to be a Norden ally, the SL sent a special delegation to Mexico to purge the section. Here is Negrete's description:

"Having gone through the 'Brazil/Mexico fight,' I can state categorically that the current campaign involves a chain of willful fabrications. The fight blew up when Camila and I had questions about significantly inaccurate statements on Brazil in an I.S. mailing cover letter. At the same time as some of these statements were then explicitly corrected, a story was fabricated that I had behaved as a 'sexist bully' towards Camila (which Camila herself denied was true) and browbeaten her into posing the questions she put in writing. When witnesses said and wrote that this is not what happened, not only was the content of what they said ignored, but they were smeared as cliquists, personalists and anti-internationalists. At the same time as requests by Socorro and myself for a formal investigation of the charge were rejected out of hand, the lie was not only repeated but inflated into a supposed pattern."

—From a *Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*

In the first issue of this journal, published in 1986, we recounted another case where a Spartacist cadre who had fallen into disfavor with the regime was accused of "sexual manipulation:"

"When the accused inquired how this charge could be made when he denied it, and all his purported victims denied it, he was informed that this was the *worst* kind of manipulation—it had been done so skillfully that, even under considerable party pressure, the victims themselves couldn't see what happened! Such is the Alice-in-Wonderland quality of the 'richly democratic' internal life of the Spartacist tendency. Sexual manipulation, like everything else in the SL, means exactly what the leadership wants it to mean."

—"The Robertson School of Party Building" 1917 No.1

In another document, Norden and Stamberg describe their own interactions with Spencer, the SL's newly appointed leader:

"When we objected to the multiple inaccuracies and unsupported outrageous claims, Parks [Spencer] flew into a rage and proceeded to purge first Negrete and Socorro from Mexico and then Norden from the I.S. In both cases, invented charges were tossed around with abandon, and when one didn't fly it was simply replaced by a new one. This mud-slinging is an all-too familiar witchhunting technique, based on the assumption that eventually something will stick or the targets will tire of scraping off the slime."

—*Op cit.*

Negrete recounts that during the Mexican purge:

"Once again the grossly distorted picture was backed up by a series of demonstrably false statements. Yet each falsehood, once it collapsed, gave way to a new one.

"The above is only a sample of the false statements piled one on top of the other in that fight. Yet a number of well-meaning comrades have urged that all these 'details' be overlooked in favor of the 'big picture.' But...in this case the 'big picture' is made up of a lot of 'little' lies and fabrications, which keep getting bigger."

—*Ibid.*

In their description of the same purge, Norden and Stamberg write:

"In the opening statement for the I.S. delegation to the April 14 GEM meeting, Kidder began by reeling off a list of the names and ranks of eight full or alternate members of the IEC who had written documents on the fight, then saying: 'You don't have to take anybody's word for it in our organization, leadership or not. Yet comrade Negrete would have you believe that these comrades who together represent about 150 to 200 years in our international tendency have it all wrong, don't really know the facts, are simply engaging in gratuitous insults against him. What kind of organization is Negrete saying that you have joined, comrades?'"

—*Ibid.*

Compare the above accounts to our own portrayal of a typical SL *auto-da-fé*, written in 1985:

"Here's how it works in the SL. A meeting is called where the designated comrade is called to account for mistakes which he allegedly committed. Each item on the bill of particulars is grossly exaggerated and extrapolated; perfidious motivations (political and/or personal) are attributed. Incidental personal criticisms of the individual's mannerisms, lifestyle or demeanor are thrown in for good measure. Those leading the attack typically do a good deal of histrionic screaming and posturing in order to create the proper emotionally-charged atmosphere. The assem-

bled membership is expected to provide the chorus: repeating and embellishing on the accusations.... There is no beating the rap. If you can prove that some of the allegations are false, new ones are quickly invented. Or you are charged with using 'lawyer's arguments' and attempting to obscure the overall picture by quibbling over 'details'.... After all, if you don't agree with the charges, then you *must* think the campaign against you is a bureaucratic atrocity."

—"The Road to Jimstown" (1985)

The parallels between these accounts leaves two possibilities open: either 1) our accusations were false when we made them in 1985-86, but the SL leadership used our literature as a how-to guide, from which they culled the techniques that were deployed for the first time against Norden, Stamberg, Negrete and Socorro in 1996; or 2) far from being new, these weapons had been part of the leadership's arsenal long before the ill-fated four took their turn as targets.

### The Wohlforth School of Cop-Baiting

The Internationalist Group's claim that, in the wake of their expulsion, the Spartacist press for the first time bismirched its formerly spotless reputation for veracity is as preposterous as their claim to be the first victims of bureaucratic treatment in the SL. *The Internationalist* No. 2 laments:

"Founded in 1971, the Spartacist League's *Workers Vanguard* acquired a reputation for accuracy and the hard-hitting integrity of a newspaper seeking to present the program of revolutionary Marxism unblunted by adaptation to the lying ideology of capitalist society. Yet for going on a year now, *WV* has been ripping this hard-earned reputation to shreds."

The same article waxes particularly indignant over the fact that, in *Workers Vanguard*:

"vituperation is a device to cover up the inability to answer us politically. We have charged that the ICL leadership committed a betrayal in Brazil, that its growing tendency to abstentionism led to desertion from a key class battle. The response of *Workers Vanguard* is to say...that the IG is 'for sale.' This is a political response?"

*The Internationalist* aptly compares the *WV* allegations with the infamous smear tactics of the Healyite Workers League of the 1960s:

"We are compelled to ask: did the new *WV* crib from [former Workers League leader Tim] Wohlforth its smear job against the Internationalist Group? Particularly when we compare the end of the *WV* No. 663 article with the peroration of Wohlforth's classic hack job, which claimed of Spartacist:

"Precisely because it is motivated by subjective considerations and lives particularly on its deep hatred of the Trotskyist movement, its role is very much that of a gun for hire. Neither tradition nor any objective consideration places any limit on what this group can and will do."

"What was *vile slander* from Wohlforth's pen is no less so when, in almost exactly the same language, the hobbled post-purge *WV* spews it out against us today.... This is a hoary method: if you can't justify voting for imperialist war credits in World War I, accuse Lenin of taking German gold; if you can't answer Trotsky's analysis of Stalinist degeneration, accuse him of working for the Gestapo, the French Deuxième Bureau and the Mikado; if you can't answer revolutionary criticism, accuse the critic of being 'for sale,' or a 'gun for hire.'"

The IG wants its readers to believe that such politically corrupt practices are completely unprecedented in the history of the SL. But those who peruse the 4 October 1985 issue of *WV*, with Norden as editor, will find us smeared as "anti-Spartacists for hire":

"Those who are guided by intense subjective malice as a political program are just asking to be someone's tool, witting or unwitting (sometimes both).... applying the criterion *cui bono* (who benefits) to the ET/BT suggests answers ranging from the merely unsavory to the downright sinister."

Was *WV*, again during Norden's tenure, cribbing from Wohlforth two years later in its article "Garbage Doesn't Walk by Itself—What Makes BT Run?" (15 May 1987) when it wrote:

"The whole tone of the BT recalls nothing so much as the insinuating style associated with the FBI's infamous CO-INTELPRO....

"Ex-members of the socialist movement do sometimes bear malice toward the organizations that 'failed' them. But people who voluntarily leave even very bad organizations normally find that their grievances recede as they go on with their lives. Hostility doesn't make a program and ex-membership in a party doesn't provide a sufficient reason for publishing a newspaper.... The BT is manifestly an assemblage of garbage.... But to take that refuse heap and make it move like a loathsome living thing requires something more, an animating principle like the electric charge Dr. Frankenstein used to imbue his monster with life."

Or perhaps the IG's memory goes back at least as far as 1990, when the ICL published *Trotskyism: What It Isn't and What It Is!*, which alleged:

"Cold War II also produced defectors and renegades from our organization. Today they call themselves the Bolshevik Tendency and the Gruppe Vierte Internationale [forerunner of Gruppe Spartakus, the German section of the IBT—ed]. Based in North America, the BT are parasites who often will put forward a parody of our positions...while staging repeated provocations against our organization. As for the BT's own political positions, besides hatred of the Soviet Union, these highly dubious provocateurs appear to dislike American blacks, are solicitous of Zionism and praise the indiscriminant [*sic*] mass killings of Americans. Of the state agencies in the world only the Mossad, the Israeli secret police, has similar appetites...."

These are only the most outrageous examples of cop baiting in the Spartacist press. For reasons of space, we must refrain from citing numerous passages containing such epithets directed against us as: "bureaucrat," "red-baiter," "wrecker," "wife beater," "petty criminal," and, most recently, "scab." To sling mud at the IG, the SL had no need to take a leaf out of Wohlforth's book; they had only to consult the bound volumes of *Workers Vanguard* for the past ten or twelve years.

In general the SL does not find it necessary to aim such wild slanders at those who stand at greater distance from its own professed politics. The IG and ourselves have been the main objects of these unscrupulous tactics because, as former "insiders," our criticisms hit home in a way that those of other opponents generally do not. And, as the IG explained, "if you can't answer Trotsky's analysis of Stalinist degeneration, accuse him of working for the Gestapo."

We should, however, note that the SL has on occasion employed similarly unprincipled tactics against other left-

ists. One example was fully documented in WV 26 July 1985, when a well-known supporter of the state-capitalist League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) was cop-baited from the platform by a guest speaker at a public meeting of the New York SL. When he "incredibly" demanded that the SL "uphold his purported honor as a socialist," the SL interpreted this as evidence that: "He wanted us to have to escort him out, which we did."

## The Real Story

The Robertsonites' allegation that the Internationalist Group are "Pabloites of the second mobilization," searching for "social forces other than the proletariat and vehicles other than a Leninist vanguard party" (*Workers Vanguard*, 5 July 1996) is clearly no more applicable to the Norden group than to the Spartacist League itself. But the IG have been unable to provide a plausible explanation of why they were driven out of the SL. Their literature puts heavy emphasis on the "cowardly retreat from the class struggle" in Brazil, which culminated in the breaking of relations with the LQB/LM. There was indeed a cowardly retreat with respect to the Brazilian group, but this was *not* the cause of the Norden purge. In fact, the "anti-Norden" struggle in the Spartacist League began more than a year earlier, when the SL leadership claimed to have discovered evidence of "Stalinophilia" in a speech given by Norden at Berlin's Humboldt University. This accusation, in turn, came as the culmination of tensions that had been brewing for a number of years.

It is always tidier, for public purposes, to locate the reasons for a split in readily comprehensible differences of views or principle, rather than in the petty, squalid internal machinations of a cultist political organization. But facts are stubborn things. It is to such machinations that we must turn to understand the real reasons for the Norden purge.

An inevitable byproduct of the Spartacist League's degeneration was the depoliticizing of the rank and file. Political wisdom was increasingly attributed to the leader alone. Yet the editorial board of *Workers Vanguard* remained the one vestige of the SL's intensely political, revolutionary past. It had over the years drawn to itself many of the SL's brightest, most literate, and most informed members, and political discussion remained an operational necessity for putting out the paper. It was precisely for this reason that the SL's maximum leader, James Robertson, regarded the WV editorial board as a nest of potential oppositionists. Where political discussion occurs, there is always the possibility of arriving at conclusions other than those of Number One. The collective trashing of the editorial board, usually before a meeting of the New York local, had therefore almost become a ritual by the time the "Norden group" was finally expelled.

At Robertson's instigation, Norden would be taken to task for being insensitive to the needs of people who worked under him, driving the production staff too hard, and deeming himself to be above collective discipline (read: obedience to Robertson). In accordance with his usual practice, Robertson sought to exploit the legitimate grievances of Norden's subordinates. Norden is a workaholic, who did on occasion impose a frenzied pace upon his staff. But in this respect he was hardly more culpable than other leading SLers, whose methods were never so closely scrutinized nor so loudly and frequently denounced before the organization as a whole. Robertson likes to appear before the membership as their defender against abusive, small-time bu-

reaucrats. Both the Tsar and Stalin used to do the same; it's good public relations.

These ritual denunciations of the *Workers Vanguard* ed board would usually end with a reluctant capitulation on Norden's part. In 1984, one such episode resulted in the appointment of a Robertson-loyal "editor-in-chief" who, although neither a political heavyweight nor an experienced writer or editor, was given final authority over the paper on closing night, when Norden was barred from the WV offices. He was forced instead to sit by himself in a room on another floor until production was completed, maintaining only telephone contact with the rest of the WV staff. One senior member of the editorial board compared this treatment to that meted out by Mao during the Cultural Revolution to "disloyal" party officials, who were paraded in public wearing dunce caps. And in a stroke truly reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution's "big character posters," which were aimed at Mao's enemies, a poster denouncing Norden was hung in the SL offices. With the passage of time, things gradually returned to normal in the WV bullpen. But by then the organization was well accustomed to the sight of Norden in the pillory.

Several years later, when Robertson moved to California, the scene was set for a succession struggle at the Spartacist League's New York headquarters. The *Workers Vanguard* collective was now the most cohesive group of senior cadres left in New York, and Norden was the most politically authoritative figure among them. He was therefore the most likely candidate to replace Robertson as head of the SL. Robertson, however, was determined to prevent such an outcome. Even from the comfortable semi-retirement of his marina-side Bay Area house, the supreme leader was not prepared to relinquish control of the group he had trained, through years of "fights" and purges, in the habits of unconditional obedience to him. He was bent on maintaining control from afar by means of his lieutenants. Norden was too brash, too independent, and too full of his own ideas to serve as Robertson's New York stand-in.

The IG account says that Norden and Co. were purged in order to consolidate the "new leadership" headed by Alison Spencer. But to what or whom does Spencer owe her new-found leading role? To her profound Marxist knowledge? To her immense popularity among the rank and file? In fact, Spencer is a reasonably competent, intelligent and very ambitious apparatchik, but her talents are almost exclusively of the organizational-instrumental variety; she has never been particularly overburdened by theoretical or political concerns. She was appointed by Robertson because she possessed the one qualification that he valued above all others: total subservience. But, though completely loyal to Robertson, Spencer is too young and politically untutored to possess Robertson's level of authority, especially in the eyes of the older cadres. Her position could therefore only be consolidated by humbling, or, if necessary, driving out those who would stand in her way. Norden was the biggest such obstacle.

The beginnings of this succession struggle are well documented in a 1993 SL internal bulletin entitled *The Struggle to Forge a Collective Leadership* (read: *The Struggle to Preserve Robertson's Dictatorship*). Spencer fired the opening shot when, picking up on cues from Robertson, she criticized as insufficiently earnest (read: strident and cliché-ridden) a perfectly unobjectionable WV front-page article on Clinton's bombing of Baghdad (2 July 1993). Spencer also asserted that the whole issue of the paper was "the worst...we've produced in a long time." Both Norden and

the director of party publications, Liz Gordon, responded that, while neither the article nor the issue were top quality, there was basically nothing wrong with them, especially considering the high level of organizational activity at the time, and the multiple demands being made on their time.

From this point on, the battle was joined, as one Robertson loyalist after another rose to denounce Norden and Gordon as "defensive," "turf-conscious" and "cliquist," and as attempting to usurp the prerogatives of the admittedly weak Political Bureau and International Secretariat. The climax was yet another collective trashing before the New York local of the members of the WV ed board who had dared to contradict a Robertson-appointed "leader." The shrill and strident Spencer led the charge. As a result, Gordon resigned as publications director, and Norden and Stamberg, though allowed to continue at their respective WV posts, were once again humiliated.

### The Anointing of Alison

In the SL's printed record of this fight, one episode in particular stands out. This is a report from a Robertson loyalist, Bruce A., on a conversation he had with Norden and Stamberg. Norden told Bruce that: "Jim [Robertson] asked me if I thought I could run the party. I told him that there were things I would have to learn, but I thought I could do the job." Robertson evidently did not share this opinion. Norden says that: "Jim called me while we were on vacation. He said, I don't want you to be my leader." Commenting on Spencer's criticisms of the *Workers Vanguard* article, Norden reportedly called them a "power play," and remarked: "Alison is the anointed successor to Jim; she is choosing the fights to build her authority." Stamberg took the same view: "Alison was anointed by Jim, so Alison can't lose."

No sooner was this report circulated internally, than both Norden and Stamberg, who admitted it was substantially true, proffered profuse written apologies. That Norden had confirmed his ambition to succeed Robertson was bad enough. But worse by far was what he had said about how the Spartacist League operates: not according to its professed democratic-centralist norms, but as a one-man dictatorship, in which important decisions are made, and leaders appointed, from the top down. All but the newest or most naive SL members know that this is how things work. To say it, however, is to violate the ultimate internal taboo. Could this mean, one of Robertson's toadies would no doubt ask, that Norden and Stamberg agreed with the International Bolshevik Tendency on the nature of the SL's internal regime? Stamberg no doubt saw this question coming a mile away, and anticipated it in her recantation:

"In the framework of the current discussion, I would like to say something about my grotesque remark that Alison was 'anointed by Jim.' It was a remark made in bitter anger, an anger probably accumulated in many fights over the years. In leading and trying to forge an effective PB [Political Bureau], Alison certainly has the added authority of Jim's support—that authority is quite considerable in our party, as well it should be. She has earned that position, and thus has been *elected* and serves with, and because of, the support of the comrades, including my own...."

—*Ibid.*, emphasis in original

Norden was also duly contrite:

"On my terrible statement that Alison was 'anointed,' this could be read as an accusation that the party is bureau-

cratic, something I have never thought. If it were, I obviously wouldn't be here today."

Three years later, he was no longer there.

There is a French saying, "*qui s'excuse s'accuse*,"—those who excuse themselves accuse themselves. Norden and Stamberg had already said too much. Robertson did not react immediately; his style is to bide his time and wait for the opportune moment to strike. But their ill-considered remarks were never forgotten. They were no doubt on the mind of one of Robertson's nastiest attack dogs, Al Nelson, when he went after Norden for "Pabloist" deviations. Nelson's accusations were without political substance. He accused Norden of over-estimating the possibilities of regroupment with a wing of the PDS (the former East German Stalinists, reconstituted as social democrats), and, in a mind-boggling exhibition of cynicism, cited as evidence of revisionism Norden's denial that the ICL's German affiliate constituted a revolutionary leadership during the final crisis of the DDR in 1989. The German group consisted of *eight* members at the time.

For reasons that we can only guess at, Norden did not back down. Nelson comments:

"In the past when one of these episodes provoked a fight in the party he would grudgingly yield to the party's judgment and go on to something else. But not this time. For six months he has categorically defied the party's judgment...."

—*Shamefaced Defectors*

Thus began the final anti-Norden campaign in the Spartacist League.

### Who Did What in Brazil?

In explaining their purge, the IG stresses the SL's rupture with the LQB/LM. And in the 18 months since the purge, the exchanges between the SL and the IG have been dominated by accusation and counter-accusation regarding events in Brazil. The IG has addressed every accusation raised by the SL, and clearly comes out on top; their account is better documented and internally consistent. The SL constantly shifts its line of attack, and it is unable to respond

U.S. \$5

TROTSKYIST BULLETIN No. 5

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**ICL**  
vs.  
**IBT**

The regular list of the ICL's Bulletin.  
The International Bolshevik Tendency  
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ICL and ICL Activities in Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5C 1J0

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directly to the IG's most important arguments. Despite a welter of demagogic charges against the LQB/LM—charges of class collaboration, opportunism and treachery—the SL is unable to present a convincing account of the break.

The IG's version of what happened in Brazil goes roughly as follows. The LQB/LM had attained considerable influence in a municipal workers' union (the SFPMVR) in the city of Volta Redonda, where one of their supporters, Geraldo Ribeiro, was president of the union. At the urging of the ICL leadership, Ribeiro began, starting from about March 1996, a campaign in the union to expel members of the municipal police. This led to a polarization within the union (including the development of a pro-cop faction), harassment from agencies of the state (including a police raid on a union meeting), and legal actions against the union and Ribeiro as its president (including one which suspended and sought to oust him from office). It was as this struggle was reaching its climax that the ICL severed fraternal relations with the LQB/LM.

Subsequently, when the case ousting him from the union presidency collapsed, and the court offered to restore him to office, Ribeiro refused, on grounds of principled opposition to state interference in the workers' movement.

The SL has not succeeded in discrediting this story. They sent two fact-finding missions to Volta Redonda, as a result of which they claim to have discovered: 1) that the LQB/LM never really intended to expel the police, and 2) that Ribeiro not only sought the withdrawal of the court order, but had actively sued the union and turned over its minutes and financial records to the courts.

The Internationalist Group has answered every one of these charges. They have produced union leaflets and articles from the local bourgeois press proving that their intention to throw the police out was well known to friend and

foe alike for months before the ICL's termination of fraternal relations. They quote court papers and legal statements documenting difficulties in controlling the lawyers conducting Ribeiro's defense, and the withdrawal from proceedings initiated improperly in his name. They have produced a statement from one of his lawyers saying that Ribeiro had declined advice to press his advantage in the courts, causing the lawyer to withdraw from the case. Moreover, the IG quote court documents to the effect it was not Ribeiro, but the union accountant, who had the minutes and financial records, and was ordered to hand them over to the court as a result of the suit by the pro-police faction.

We are in no position to pronounce judgment on every detail of this controversy. But important elements of various of the ICL's versions fly in the face of considerable documentary evidence—evidence which is manifestly in the possession of the ICL. On the other hand, the arguments and evidence presented by the IG seem credible.

### **ICL's Dive in Volta Redonda: Not the First Time**

While the IG is evidently right against the Spartacist League on the substance of the dispute in Brazil, it is quite mistaken to claim that the breaking of fraternal relations with the LQB/LM was a turning point in the history of the SL/ICL. According to the IG, the reason for the break was political cowardice. By defying the infamously brutal Brazilian police, the LQB/LM exposed itself to real physical hazards: one meeting of the Volta Redonda union was raided by the military police; one leader was arrested for his local leadership role in a general strike; and Ribeiro was sued by the municipality for defamation for defending a black woman who had been fired by the city administration. Faced with these circumstances, according to the IG, the ICL/SL leadership in New York and California decided

## *NZ Unionists Defend Brazilian Militants*

The International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) calls on class-conscious workers and socialists around the world to defend leftist union militants in Volta Redonda, Brazil, against continuing attacks by the capitalist state. The fight to defend the Comitê de Luta Classista (CLC—Class Struggle Caucus, initiated by the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil [LQB]) took a big step forward in October 1997 when leaders of New Zealand's two umbrella labor federations (including Michael Gilchrist, acting secretary of the Trade Union Federation, and Angela Foulkes, Secretary of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions) agreed to endorse the defense of the CLC after they were approached by an IBT representative.

The latest attack on the Brazilian unionists occurred on 5 September 1997, when a Volta Redonda court ordered the seizure of an issue of the CLC's bulletin, which had exposed an attempt to loot workers' pension funds. The court order against the CLC, issued at the request of a lawyer employed by pro-police bureaucrats within the union, is the eighth legal action against LQB supporters in the last two years. According to a translation of the CLC's September 1997 bulletin produced by the U.S.-based Internationalist Group, the court order calls for seizing the publication by "police force" if necessary, and:

"It personally names Geraldo Ribeiro Neves, the legitimate president of the Volta Redonda Municipal Workers

Union (SFPMVR). It threatens to seize the belongings of the CLC and comrade Geraldo. The original call for the injunction (which the judge has not yet fully approved) also demands the names of the CLC's members."

The CLC links this latest action to previous attacks:

"Last year the commander of the Municipal Guard sued comrade Geraldo when, as class-struggle leader of the SFPMVR, Geraldo carried out a campaign to separate the guardas (municipal cops) from the union."

The CLC appeal for solidarity concludes:

"In your union, student, neighborhood, black or women's organization, etc.: make an urgent solidarity statement with the CLC and Geraldo Ribeiro, demanding: No to anti-union repression! Throw out the 15 percent charge and return the money to those who were forced to pay it! Unconditionally drop all charges against the CLC and Geraldo Ribeiro! Courts hands off our rights!"

Solidarity statements can be sent care of:

Internationalist Group Box 3321,  
Church Street Station  
New York, NY 10008, U.S.A.

and in Brazil to:

Caixa Postal No. 84027  
CEP 27260-740  
Volta Redonda, RJ, Brazil

the situation in Volta Redonda was far too risky. They therefore advised the LQB/LM to move to Rio de Janeiro, and concentrate on propaganda and individual recruitment, rather than direct intervention in the unions. When the LQB proved reluctant to take this advice, the Spartacist League broke relations. With this break, the passivity that had been gaining ground in the SL since the downfall of the USSR (a "drift toward abstentionism") led to desertion from the class struggle. Like the violation of democratic-centralist norms in the purge of the "Norden group," this was, in the IG's version, the first time in the history of the SL that such a departure from its revolutionary principles had ever taken place.

But Brazil is hardly the first place where the SL has demonstrated political cowardice or subordinated the imperatives of the class struggle to its own narrow, organizational interests. For example, in the early 1980s, the SL liquidated what remained of its carefully built union fractions. Various rationales were advanced, but the real, unstated reason was that Robertson feared that these fractions, several of which had developed real roots, might one day be a base for a factional opposition. [See the June 1983 pamphlet by the External Tendency of the iSt (ET) entitled "Stop the Liquidation of the Trade Union Work!"]

In July 1984, the SL leadership, obviously fearful of repression aimed at itself in conjunction with the Democratic Party convention in San Francisco, volunteered to send a union defense squad to protect the Democrats from an imaginary "threat" of attack by Reaganites and fascists (see: *WV*, 6 July 1984). This bizarre episode, in which the SL suggested that Hitler's burning of the Reichstag was "a fitting historical model" for the Reaganites, provoked the ridicule of the rest of the left (see: "The Politics of Chicken," *Bulletin of the ET*, No. 4). Such an overture to one of the twin parties of U.S. imperialism was only possible because decision making in the SL is the prerogative of one unchallengeable leader.

If the SL's posturing at the Democratic convention had little impact outside its own ranks, this was unfortunately not the case when later that year the SL deliberately sabotaged an 11-day boycott of apartheid cargo by longshoremen in San Francisco. The SL's response to the first and only anti-apartheid labor action in U.S. history was to set up a "picket line" on the pier where a ship carrying South African cargo was docked. They abused as "scabs" the (mostly black) longshoremen who went aboard to carry out a union decision to unload the vessel selectively, leaving the South African cargo on board. The SL attempted to sabotage this boycott solely because it had been initiated by the External Tendency, forerunner of the IBT. For the SL, the cherished principles of the class struggle have long taken second place when the object is to discredit an opponent.

### Pre-emptive Strike Against LQB/LM

The Internationalist Group is unable to explain satisfactorily the SL's motives for the break with the LQB/LM. To be sure, an element of cowardice was involved; one can hardly expect exemplary courage from an outfit that responded to the 1983 demolition of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon with a call to save the survivors! But the IG seems to have overlooked the most obvious motive, even though it is evident in the documents they themselves have published. In their angry reply to ICL's severing of fraternal relations, the LQB wrote:

"Comrades Adam, Cirrus and Arturo [of the ICL] asked us several times what we thought of the struggle with

Norden, Abrao [Negrete] and other comrades. We answered that before judging, we wanted to see all the documents, since critical analysis is a part of daily life for all Marxists. You refused, arguing that these documents were internal to the organization, and you only sent copies of decisions after the accomplished fact. But then why ask our opinion about things we couldn't investigate?"

—From *A Drift*...

It is abundantly clear from this that the ICL representatives were trying to line up the LQB/LM in the fight against Norden, which was already in full swing. When the LQB leaders didn't come up with the right answer, the ICL leadership evidently feared that the LQB/LM, with their previous close relationship with Norden and Negrete, could provide them with a base of support. This led to the ICL's peremptory break with the LQB/LM. Robertson was adhering to an old pattern. In 1978, in a pre-emptive strike against those he perceived as potential oppositionists, the SL got rid of a whole layer of its youth leadership in the "clone purge." The following year, with the same motivation, Robertson framed and expelled two of the international Spartacist tendency's most important international cadres, in the infamous Logan trial. And it was for this same reason—not due to different assessments of the likelihood of repression—that the SL regime ended its relationship with what appears to be a very courageous and dedicated collective of Brazilian militants.

### Robertson the Reluctant?

Deliberately or naively, Norden and Co. are just as blind concerning the role of Robertson in their own purge. Comparing Robertson to the historic leader of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), James P. Cannon, Norden and Stamberg write:

"Cannon himself, while not actively leading the fight against the Revolutionary Tendency in the SWP [progenitor of the SL], did condone it, and Robertson has unfortunately played a similar role in the fight against us.

"...with Nelson and Parks [Spencer] firmly determined to smash Norden, comrade Robertson eventually joined the onslaught, evidently seeing this as necessary for the consolidation of the new leadership."

—From *A Drift*...

For those familiar with the individuals involved, the absurdity of this comparison is nothing short of breathtaking. The entire political training of Nelson and Spencer consists in doing Robertson's bidding. Do Norden and Stamberg now believe (or wish others to believe) that Nelson and Spencer, in a couple of brief years, started acting as independent agents capable of bending their former master to their purposes? Have Norden and Stamberg forgotten how Robertson, while still resident in New York, and still directly leading the organization, personally orchestrated the nightmarish sessions of the New York local devoted to chastising and humiliating them? What of Robertson's statement over the phone to Norden that he didn't want him as his leader? Furthermore, the epithet in the title of the SL's bulletin on their purge, "Shamefaced Defectors From Trotskyism," was inspired by a letter from Robertson, published in the same bulletin, which branded Norden as "a shamefaced defector with associated organizational pathology." And finally, a reply to an SL sympathizer in *Workers Vanguard* (27 September 1996), "drawn heavily" from another Robertson letter, argues that Norden was politically unfit because, among other things, he had disagreed with the SL leadership in 1973 over whether the treaty the North

Vietnamese concluded with the U.S. was a sellout. What further evidence of Robertson's role do Norden and Co. require? Robertson coming at them with a meat cleaver?

## In Flight From the Truth

Only one of the SL's accusations against the IG contains a grain of truth; the suggestion that, for such a tiny organization, its press constitutes something of a Potemkin Village. Normally, one would expect a group of cadres who had broken from an organization to which they were devoted, to make a more serious attempt to trace its degeneration. The IG seeks to avoid such questions, and instead treats the SL prior to its own purge as an organization with an unblemished record. This recalls the Maoists who used to argue that the Soviet Union was transformed from a workers' paradise to a state-capitalist hell when Joseph Stalin's heart stopped beating.

With its lengthy articles on the class struggle around the world, *The Internationalist* seems aimed at a readership beyond the reach of the IG. Some of this can be attributed to the fact that Norden, who ran *WV* for 23 years, no doubt feels like a fish out of water without a publication to edit. It is as if, following his expulsion from the *WV* editorial offices, Norden has simply continued to run on automatic pilot. Yet force of habit can also provide a refuge from truths that are hard to face. And the truth the IG has thus far steadfastly refused to confront is that the organization that expelled them in 1996 had long since degenerated.

The reasons for the IG's psychological resistance to this reality are not difficult to fathom. The SL continues to disguise its seamy reality with the forms and phrases of Marxism. The founders of the IG had, in the years prior to their expulsion, become accustomed to the lack of internal

democracy in the ICL. Like many other old-time SL cadres who remain in the ICL, the founders of the IG were not prepared to abandon the organization into which they poured so much effort, in which they had acquired a certain status, and around which their lives had revolved for so many years. And so they refuse to acknowledge the truth, even in the face of overwhelming evidence.

Thus, the IG offers an account of its origins that will not stand critical examination. But this creates a certain predicament. The more they analyze the events surrounding their departure from the Spartacist League, the stronger become the echoes of our critique. And the louder these echoes become, the more shrilly the IG tries to drown them out by repeating SL-confected slanders against the IBT. The IG has not, as the SL charges, refrained from polemicizing against opponents. But in reading *The Internationalist*, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the IGers would like to escape from their predicament by putting their political past behind them and going on to better things.

*The Internationalist* contains analysis—some good—about situations in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere. The IG's political acumen could, however, be rated more highly if they were less oblivious to their own experience. New positions cannot be won without settling old accounts. As long as the IG comrades remain in politics—indeed, as long as they remain thinking individuals—the unanswered questions concerning their political past will not go away. The comrades of the Internationalist Group possess among them many years of political experience, substantial knowledge of Marxism and deep reserves of energy and will—all of which can still be of great value to the working class. In the name of the revolutionary future, we urge them to pause and examine their past with a more reflective eye. ■

## New Zealand Socialist Students Conference



Over 60 people participated in the fifth New Zealand Socialist Students Conference (SSC) held in Wellington from 28 to 30 June 1997. This year the SSC was centrally organized by the Bolshevik Club, youth group of the New Zealand section of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT). Other organizations participating included the Auck-

land-based Workers Power (WP) and their campus group, Revolution, as well as the World Socialist Party (the NZ affiliate of the Socialist Party of Great Britain). The event also attracted a variety of anarchists, unaffiliated leftists and people involved with the Radical Media Collective from Christchurch. The national secretary of the NZ Seafarers' Union also participated.

The SSC provided an opportunity to exchange information on questions of vital importance to the left and workers' movement while, at the same time, allowing participants to openly debate political differences. Over the course of the conference a wide variety of issues were addressed, including: the Irish "Peace Process"; capitalist restoration in the Soviet bloc; perspectives on the Education Fightback in NZ; lessons of the Liverpool Dockers' Strike; the relationship between Marxism, feminism and women's liberation; the tactic of consumer boycotts in the struggle for social change; the struggles of indigenous peoples and NZ's "Grievance Settlement Process," as well as a discussion of the significance of Tony Blair's electoral victory in Britain.

The NZ Socialist Students Conference is the kind of event that is all too rare in this period. A more common pattern is for each left group to organize its own events, where the presentations (and sometimes even the participants) are limited to their own members, supporters and contacts. But, at the SSC, every one of the sessions began with presentations from two or more perspectives—a format that ensured a lively and informative exchange of views. ■

# Once Again on the General Strike Slogan In Defense of Tactics



17 October 1997: unions shut down Windsor, Ontario to protest Tory government attacks

1917 PHOTO

In our last issue we published an article on the use (and misuse) of the general strike slogan in the context of Britain's 1974 "Winter of Discontent." The article was excerpted from one that appeared in the 1 March 1974 *Workers Vanguard* (WV), newspaper of the Spartacist League (SL). The question of the general strike is just as important today as it was then, but the SL's attitude toward it has undergone a substantial degeneration. This is evident in its attitude toward the recent series of one-day token general strikes ("Days of Action") across Ontario in opposition to the attacks of Mike Harris' Tory government.

In our propaganda we have sought to expose the half-steps taken by the union leadership, by calling for a general strike "organized and controlled by democratically-elected strike committees in every workplace coordinated through delegated regional and provincial assemblies." The SL's Canadian supporters have, by contrast, made a point of *not* calling for generalized, province-wide strike action, and have instead counterposed a call for "building a revolutionary party"—i.e., their group.

This sectarian absurdity is not confined to Canada, as we pointed out in a letter sent to the former SLers of the Internationalist Group in February 1997:

"We think that the question of the general strike is posed for French Trotskyists in the mid-1990s as well. As we explained in our article in 1917 No. 18, the situation in December 1995 seems to us to be a circumstance where revolutionaries should have made their agitational focus the call for a general strike to bring down Juppé, concretized with calls for elected strike committees in each workplace, coordinated on local, regional and national levels. This could have intersected the consciousness of the more militant union members who were attempting to push the bureaucrats in this direction, and have provided an opening for revolutionary militants to extend their political influence. Yet, while calling for extending the strikes into the private sector, the Ligue Trotskyste de France [LTF—the SL's French affiliate] deliberately refrained from calling for a general strike, instead asserting that 'the question of power is posed.' Its central slogan was a call to build a 'new revolutionary leadership,' (i.e., the LTF)."

While the Spartacist League has yet to offer an explanation for its new policy on the general strike, *Spartacist Canada* (published by the Trotskyist League of Canada [TL]), responded to our criticism in its Fall 1997 issue. They began by contrasting the current situation in Ontario with that of Britain in 1974, when there was a "nationwide political



GREGOIRE/LEIMDORFER

### Paris 1995: 'nationwide political crisis' in France

crisis" in which the "ruling class was deeply split." But surely everyone can agree that the December 1995 strikes in Paris posed a national crisis for the French bourgeoisie? And even in Toronto, in October 1996, the capitalists decided to close down for the day rather than risk an open clash with tens of thousands of strikers.

A general strike against the Harris government would not likely lead to an immediate struggle for proletarian power. But a defensive victory won through mass action would certainly alter the entire political landscape in favor of the workers and their allies, and make it easier to win future struggles.

The core of the TL's polemic is the assertion that a "general strike poses the question of *power*—which class shall rule, the bourgeoisie or the proletariat?" Having framed the issue in these terms they dismiss our call for a general strike to defeat a capitalist offensive, and bring down the government that is spearheading it, as "nothing more than pressure tactics aimed at a parliamentary shake-up." The SL's 1974 article was directed against exactly this brainless syllogism. While acknowledging that victory cannot be guaranteed in advance, the then-revolutionary SL asserted that:

"it would be the worst kind of scholastic passivity to argue that the workers must accept, without struggle, whatever the Tories do to them because their leaders might betray a general strike that could win."

If a general strike were *only* appropriate in situations where the struggle for power is immediately posed, it would be difficult to justify the Toledo, Minneapolis or San Francisco general strikes of 1934. All of these began as limited and defensive local actions—but they touched off a labor upsurge that finally established industrial unionism in North America (see "American Labor Besieged," 1917 No. 19).

During the 1970s the SL itself called for general strikes in a variety of situations where the level of social struggle was no higher than it is in Ontario today. For example, WV No. 41 (29 March 1974) reported that the Bay Area SL had published a leaflet entitled "For a Political General Strike! For Full Labor Solidarity!" advocating the expansion of a public sector strike wave into a city-wide general strike. WV

No. 55, (25 October 1974) raised the call "For a General Strike Against Proposition 'L'" in response to attacks on civic workers in San Francisco. The front page of the 17 January 1975 WV featured a picture of an SL contingent in San Francisco carrying a banner calling for a state-wide general strike in defense of the United Farm Workers. The main headline on the 16 April 1976 issue again called "For an S.F. General Strike!" this time in response to a union-busting offensive against the municipal unions.

The revolutionary SL did not limit such calls to the Bay Area. The 6 June 1975 WV called "For a Citywide General Strike Against Layoffs" in New York. A few months later, in November 1975, WV ran an article calling "For A General Strike to Restore Labor Government" in Australia. Over the years it also called for general strikes in France, Spain and elsewhere—even, in 1976, in Canada!

The fight to forge a revolutionary leadership for the unions is not something that can be accomplished by exhortation. It requires the intersection of the communist program (embodied primarily in revolutionary cadres in the unions) with the actual, living struggles of the masses. In situations where the workers are confronted by a generalized assault by the capitalists the job of Marxists is to promote a generalized response, and to focus attention on the necessary *next step*, as we explained in our previous issue:

"The masses want a general strike. The bureaucrats are afraid to initiate one. In this circumstance, the call for a general strike can both expose the bureaucrats' cowardice and demonstrate to militant workers (who may even be anti-communist) that, at least on this one question, the communists are right against their existing leaders. This is the only way that revolutionaries *can* begin the struggle to 'politically defeat and replace' the misleaders."

—1917, No. 19

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# For Independent Working-Class Politics!

## Canada's No Choice Election

BACKBENCH



The following statement, dated 11 May 1997, was distributed by the IBT in the run-up to the 2 June Canadian federal election. The social-democratic NDP, which had been reduced to only nine seats in the 1993 Liberal landslide, and had lost its official party status, ended up with a few more members of parliament. But most of these were from Nova Scotia, the small Maritime province that Alexa McDonough, the party's new leader, hails from. The NDP was shut out entirely in Ontario, the industrial heartland of Canada.

The old anarchist aphorism—that whoever you vote for, the government always gets in—is more apt than ever in the current campaign. This is the sole reason [Liberal prime minister] Jean Chrétien called the election: the timing seemed right for the government to get back in.

Since their election in 1993, the Liberals have ditched their old "Just Society" double-talk in favor of the single-minded pursuit of "deficit reduction." Social inequality has accelerated—with bank profits and stock values setting new records, while working people and the poor have suffered a rapid decline in living standards. The number of people below the official poverty line has risen from 4.7 to 5.2 million during the Liberals' tenure, as federal transfer payments to the provinces—the primary means of funding medicare, education and income-support programs—have been slashed from \$19.5 to \$12.5 billion per year. Billions more have been cut from the renamed "Employment Insurance" program.

The Liberals have been deliberately inflaming ethnic and national divisions. Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi reintroduced the infamous "head tax" on new arrivals. When Chrétien was Minister for Indian Affairs in 1969, his department produced a White Paper that called for the forcible assimilation of Indians and Inuit. Time has not mellowed this corporate lackey, and during his term as prime minister, the feds have been stonewalling aboriginal land claims and demands for self-government. Furthermore, the Liberals have insisted that the people of Quebec do not have the right to self-determination (i.e., the right to separate when and if they choose). Justice Minister Allan Rock is currently seeking a ruling from the federally-appointed Supreme Court on the "constitutionality" of separation. With this sinister maneuver, the Liberals are establishing a "legal"

cover for forcibly retaining Quebec. All class-conscious workers in English Canada must unambiguously defend the inalienable right of the Québécois to determine their own future.

While Rock's colleagues have been shredding what remains of the "social safety net," he has been busy expanding the Big Brother custodial state with measures ranging from reactionary and intrusive gun control laws to the creation of DNA banks. The Liberals' most bizarre assault on civil liberties came in a bill introduced last September which:

"would allow the crown to ask a judge to require anyone it believes will commit a serious personal injury crime to be electronically monitored.

"The individual—who may never have committed a crime in his life—would then wear a tamper-proof electronic bracelet which authorities would monitor...."

—*Toronto Star*, 4 December 1996

### NDP: Chrétien's Would-Be Helpers

There is a discernible undercurrent of resentment and frustration within the population, which surfaced with the various one-day city shutdowns carried out by the unions in Ontario against the [right-wing Tory] Harris government. But so far Chrétien's teflon coating has held, despite the Liberals' austerity program. While the electorate is aware of the government's blatant cynicism (exemplified by Chrétien's lies about scrapping the GST [the hated Goods and Services Tax introduced by the previous Conservative government]), the Liberals have remained ahead in the polls. This is because all the big business parties are saying the same thing—that "deficit reduction" must be Job One. "Less carrot, more stick" is the capitalists' new credo.

Unlike the other major parties, the New Democratic Party is not funded by business; it is the party of the trade-union bureaucracy. While claiming to oppose the "corporate agenda," the NDP has also made deficit reduction a central focus of its campaign, and talks about balancing the budget in three years.

The NDP platform also proposes a few modest tax hikes for the rich. But once in power, the NDP has a record of turning on the very people who supported it. Bob Rae's NDP government in Ontario, elected on promises of taxing

the corporations, soon dropped them in favor of ripping up "legally-binding" collective agreements, and rolling back public-sector wages. Rae was trying to curry favor with Bay Street [Canada's financial center]. In attempting to do so, he alienated much of the NDP's base, and helped shift the whole political spectrum significantly to the right, thereby paving the way for Mike Harris and his "Common Sense Revolution."

The NDP's record in B.C. is no better. In an attempt to placate the right, Glen Clark's government attacked the poorest and most defenseless members of society by imposing an unprecedented three-month residency requirement on welfare recipients. It has also been involved in running a murderous operation against native protesters at Gustafsen Lake. According to a report in the 5 May *Globe and Mail*, in the summer of 1995 400 combat-equipped Mounties, acting under the direction of B.C.'s NDP government, laid siege to a native encampment during which: "The RCMP commander [gave] orders to 'kill this Clark [the natives' lawyer] and smear (him) and everyone with him'...." The *Globe* also cited an incident of a police sniper "being told to kill an apparently unarmed Indian walking in an agreed-upon safe zone near the camp (the sniper missed.)" Presumably the NDP was trying to prove to B.C. rednecks that it was not "soft" on native claims.

In Saskatchewan the province's healthcare system, long touted by Canadian social democrats as the CCF/NDP's greatest contribution to human civilization, is being gutted by Roy Romanow's NDP government. Romanow and Clark are also in the forefront of Anglo-Canadian "national unity" Quebec-bashers.

In the current federal campaign, the NDP is explicitly repudiating, *in advance*, any claim to be a working-class alternative to the parties of big business. Conceding that her party cannot win enough seats to form the next government, NDP leader Alexa McDonough has instead set her sights on some kind of *coalition* with the Liberals:

"I'd co-operate with the devil himself, if it would help get us to where we need to go' in terms of government policy, Ms. McDonough said yesterday.

"'We all know this country has worked better...when there is a minority government,' Ms. McDonough said later. 'We will co-operate with whoever else is interested'...."

—*Globe and Mail*, 9 May

Every militant knows that union officials on the bosses' payroll don't fight for the employees' interests. By offering itself as a (formal or informal) partner in a coalition with Bay Street's preferred party, the NDP announces in advance that it *won't* be fighting for the interests of the oppressed. This conclusion is underlined by the decision of the labor bureaucracy to cancel the Windsor "Days of Action," scheduled for mid-June, in order not to embarrass the NDP during the election campaign.

### International Socialists: NDP, Now & Forever

In English Canada, various "Marxists" who are well acquainted with the NDP's dismal record, and who know that McDonough intends to prop up the Liberals, are nonetheless calling for a vote to them. The biggest group of such "revolutionary" NDP-loyalists is the International Socialists (IS). The IS argues that the NDP's connection to the trade-union bureaucracy is reason enough to support it:

"It would be electrifying if the NDP would present itself as a party of principle that stood for the defense of work-

ing people and that would tolerate no chauvinism in its ranks.

"Tragically, there is no sign at the top of the party that such a transformation of the NDP is in the cards.

"On June 2, vote for the NDP because it is the only mass party based on the trade unions and not on big business."

—*Socialist Worker*, 3 May

There is nothing "tragic" about the NDP's repeated betrayals. They are the *inevitable* and *logical* result of the social democrats' loyalty to the capitalist social order. Sometimes, when it wants to present a left face, the IS is willing to acknowledge as much. For example, in a 10 April article in the University of Toronto *Varsity*, IS supporter Sean Purdy wrote:

"In office, NDP governments have cut spending on social programs, closed hospitals, hired 'welfare cops' to harass the poor, slashed government jobs, ripped up the collective agreements of public sector workers and reneged on the fight for same-sex benefits."

Purdy even explains why the social democrats will always betray: "The NDP is not really interested in challenging the wealth and power of the banks and corporations. They only want to manage capitalism...."

Quite right. But why then do the "revolutionary socialists" of the IS advise workers to vote for the NDP? In the past they have claimed that it was necessary to put the NDP in office so that it would expose its real character. For example, prior to the 1988 election, IS leader Paul Kellogg called for building "a fighting socialist alternative to the NDP," but argued that:

"An unavoidable step on the way to building that alternative will be to get the NDP into power, and expose it as the pro-capitalist party that it is."

—*Socialist Worker*, September 1988

Since then, the NDP *did* get into power in Ontario, Saskatchewan and B.C., and workers have become well acquainted with its pro-capitalist nature. But Kellogg and the IS persist in calling for a vote to them.

Someone new to the left might be confused to see that *Socialist Worker's* demand to "Kick out the Liberals" is accompanied by a call to vote for McDonough, who hopes to be in a position to prop them up. But those who are more familiar with the IS will recognize that its occasional left criticisms of the NDP are only a "Marxist" gloss on a policy which, at its core, is simply lesser-evilism.

### For a Class-Struggle Workers' Party!

A vote for the NDP in this election is a vote to endorse the party's chauvinism, its record of betrayals and its strategy of power-sharing with the Liberals. The only way forward for the working class in the face of vicious and continuing capitalist attacks is to recognize the irreconcilable differences that separate the exploiters from their victims, and to launch aggressive, no-holds-barred counterattacks. NDP class-collaborationism will literally be a dead end for the labor movement.

The alternative to the anti-social profit-driven capitalist system is socialism—a humane and rational social order in which economic priorities are determined by human need, not private profit. Fighting for socialism means struggling *within* the labor movement to break the grip of the existing bureaucrats (and their parliamentary counterparts) and forge a new political leadership, committed to the revolutionary struggle for workers' power. ■

# Labour Loyalism...

continued from page 48

as overstepping the bounds of bourgeois democracy itself. But under New Labour, Thatcher/Major's anti-union laws will stay largely in place.

Meanwhile, Blair has already carried out a spate of anti-working-class measures, direct and indirect. He has introduced tuition fees for students, ending free higher education. He has authored a form of U.S.-style workfare, the so-called "Welfare to Work" scheme; though funded by a £5 billion levy on privatized monopoly utilities, it will compel unemployed youth to work for their pitiful benefits, and subsidize employers who take on welfare recipients. This will encourage bosses to replace regular workers with low-paid Welfare to Work "trainees," and hence drive down wages, working conditions and unionization levels. Other schemes being mooted by the new government are the privatization of the benefits service itself, as well as of the London Underground, and cutting benefits to single parents. The Tories, especially in their later years, were often reluctant to carry out measures like these because of the anger they would arouse. New Labour, trading on its reputation as a party of the "left," and seeing little serious opposition, has fewer qualms.

In a more indirect attack, Blair has freed the Bank of England from any semblance of public control, placing the power to set central interest rates exclusively in the hands of a committee of bankers. This move, which provides Blair with an alibi for further cutting the "welfare state," is rationalized as laying the basis for long-term, recession-free growth. Unlike classical Keynesians who sought to minimize the effects of the capitalist business cycle through increasing government spending (and deficits) during downturns, New Labour seems intent on trying to limit the extent of the upturn in the hope that this will soften the impact of the recession that must inevitably follow.

Blair's policy of maintaining a stable currency is designed to benefit bankers and other investors, while pushing Britain's economy toward compliance with the Maastricht convergence criteria for a single European currency. Several hikes in interest rates have already taken place since the election. The result will be an increase in long-term unemployment, as the bankers seek to put the brakes on economic expansion for fear that the current "boom" may translate into higher wages.

## Right Labourites vs. Blair

The continuity of New Labour with Thatcherism is striking even to elements who were formerly on the far right wing of old-style social-democratic Labourism. Roy Hattersley, Neil Kinnock's former deputy party leader, who in the 1980s helped implement vicious witchhunts against more leftist social democrats like Militant Labour, now seeks to distance himself from the results of his handiwork. Soon to be granted a peerage, Hattersley is perversely acquiring a reputation as a dangerous leftist for his attacks on the Blair government for renouncing socialism, equality and defense of the poor. This is an index of just how far to the right the Labour Party has moved.

Yet opposition to Blair within the Labour Party is scattered. The aging left social-democratic icon, Tony Benn, has recently given sonorous warnings that the co-option of Liberal Democrat MPs into Blairite cabinet committees as



ECONOMIST

## Roy Hattersley: too left for Blair

advisers could prefigure the Labour Party's descent into a new "Lib-Lab" coalition. (Within such an alliance the current policies of the Lib-Dems would put them on the left wing!) But the dissident outbursts of Benn and Hattersley appear at this point as simply the anguished cries of individuals on the verge of political retirement; both of them understand the relationship of forces within the Labour Party after the mass recruitment of Blairite footsoldiers hostile to even the traditional social-democratic parody of "socialism." At this point there is no indication that any organized grouping, or even prominent individuals, within the Labour Party are considering a break with Blair.

Neither, it would seem, are the overwhelming majority of what passes for the "far left" in Britain. Most, in fact, displayed indifference or outright hostility to the electoral challenge by sections of the old Labour Party who have actually been driven to *break* from New Labour and stand for election on a pro-working-class platform—Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) and the left-reformist Socialist Party (SP—formerly known as Militant Labour). In fact the bulk of the ostensibly revolutionary left are more conservative and cretinously loyal to the Labour Party than many militant working-class reformists, who at least understand that when a party has ceased to stand for the aspirations of its working-class base in even the most minimal way, it is necessary to begin again.

## Left Candidates & the Election

Given the enormous pro-Blair pressure from the Labour Party, the trade-union bureaucracy, and the "far left," and the intense desire to kick out the Tories, the vote for those leftists who dared stand against Labour was bound to be small. However, both Socialist Labour and the Socialist Party did make a mark in constituencies where their candidates were reasonably well known.

The highest vote for a candidate standing on an avowedly socialist platform was for Tommy Sheridan, a well-known supporter of Scottish Militant Labour (SML). Standing as a candidate for the Scottish Socialist Alliance (an umbrella group comprising the SML, the maverick centrists of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) and Lib-



HULTON GETTY

### Police attack Poll Tax demonstrators, Trafalgar Square, London 1990

eration, a reformist pro-working class split from Scottish nationalism) Sheridan polled 11.1 percent in solidly working-class Glasgow Pollock. This was down from 1992, when he received almost 20 percent of the vote while in jail for non-payment of Thatcher's hated Poll Tax. But it was nevertheless an impressive result. The Socialist Party also made a respectable showing in Coventry South, where Dave Nellist (a nationally known former Labour MP) won 6.5 percent.

Three Socialist Labour candidates got more than the 5 percent threshold required to save their deposit. The best SLP result was scored by the well-known Asian leftist and anti-racist lawyer, Imran Khan, who gained 6.8 percent in a working-class constituency in East London. Terry Burns, the SLP candidate in Cardiff Central, polled 5.3 percent, closely followed by the president of the National Union of Miners (NUM), Arthur Scargill himself, with 5.2 percent in Newport, also in South Wales. Scargill stood against Alan Howarth, who sat as a Tory MP during the 1984-5 miners' strike, but then, over a decade later, jumped to Blair's New Labour because it was continuing Thatcher's policies.

The votes for the SLP and SP/SSA should not be dismissed. They laid down a marker, in an extremely unfavourable situation, for a future left challenge to Blair, as his government inevitably comes into conflict with the working class.

### British 'Far Left'—Prostrate Before Blair

The tension between old-style reformists and the new breed of neo-liberal bourgeois politicians like Blair, who are emerging from social democracy (and not only in Britain), is not insignificant. It is the result of the perceived bankruptcy of social democracy as a force for a gradual transition

to socialism, or even for the humanization of capitalism. Left splits from social democracy can degenerate into bureaucratically-run utopian-reformist sects. But that is not the only possibility. Many of the militants in groups such as the SP and SLP are motivated by a profound hatred of capitalism; when the bankruptcy of reformism is demonstrated in practice, some can be won to a revolutionary perspective.

The job of Marxists is not to sneer at such individuals and groups, but, as far as possible, to develop their best instincts into revolutionary consciousness. Of course there is no guarantee of success in such an endeavor. But to write off such possibilities in advance bespeaks not a revolutionary impulse, but passive acceptance of the inevitability of victory by the Blairites and their ilk.

Yet this is *exactly* the perspective of most of the British far left. The largest ostensibly revolutionary organization in Britain, Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party (SWP) advised workers to "Vote Labour" and, after the results were in, raved that:

"This vote was a class vote. It was a dramatic rejection of Tory values and priorities which were said to have been so entrenched in every level of society, that ideas of collective responsibility and redistribution of wealth were history. Far from being history, these ideas are central to the expectations that the mass of people have in the new government."

—*Socialist Review*, May 1997

This echoes Hugo Young, a liberal journalist and biographer of Thatcher, who commented in the *Guardian* (3 May):

"Tony Blair had two objectives during this election. The first was to win, the second to minimise every expectation

of what would happen then....Now he has got a totally unforeseen result. The strategy turns out to have produced a triumphant contradiction. So huge was his performance that it has given rise to massive hopes and dreams, far exceeding what he promised in order to secure his victory."

Whatever "massive hopes and dreams" Blair's victory may have given rise to, they have little to do with the "hopes and dreams" of socialism, or even significant reforms in the interests of working people. Even Roy Hattersley knows that.

The SWP is not the only left organization in Britain with a rotten position on the Labour Party. The Workers Power grouping (WP), for instance, has for many years maintained a niche as a left (and supposedly orthodox Trotskyist) alternative to the SWP. Yet, in recent years, particularly since a 1995 split by some of its international co-thinkers over WP's scandalous refusal to defend the Bosnian Serb militias against NATO, Workers Power has more and more reverted to its Cliffite roots. During the recent election WP was even more cravenly Labour-loyal than the SWP, whose members occasionally muttered about supporting Socialist Labour and Socialist Party candidates against Labour. WP, by contrast, issued a leaflet in Newport, South Wales, calling for a vote to Blair's Tory recruit, Alan Howarth, *against* Arthur Scargill, the leader of the NUM during the great miners' strike of 1984-5!

Workers Power views the task of the working class, according to its oft-repeated mantra, as getting Blair elected, in order to then "force Labour to meet our needs." This strategy of making working-class demands of an openly anti-working class, bourgeois government necessarily involves an unhealthy dose of reality aversion. Workers do not have any kind of left illusions in Blair because he ran on an explicitly anti-working-class platform. The fact that left reformists like Scargill can see this, while Workers Power cannot, testifies to the depth of its centrist muddle-headedness. In the post-election issue of *Workers Power*, the Hugo Young piece quoted above is cited as evidence that the working class has been roused to some sort of class consciousness by Blair's victory. In reality, Young's rhapsodizing represents the joy of reborn English liberalism at the banishment of even reformist aspirations for "socialism" from the political mainstream.

In 1992 WP at least called for votes to Militant Labour candidates Nelligan, Fields and Sheridan (the latter retrospectively after a revealing opportunist flip-flop when Sheridan did better than expected). This time around WP simply dismissed the SLP and SP as "tiny parties with little support in the working class" (*Workers Power* election special, May 1997). In case socialist-minded workers were unimpressed by such small-baiting (from a group far smaller than either the SP or SLP), WP tacked on a more political explanation:

"But surely you have to start somewhere?" some might object. True: except that these parties' programmes offer no coherent alternative to Labour. And this is the most important point.

"For all their talk of 'socialism' both the SP and the SLP offer only a more left wing version of the parliamentary road to socialism.

"They offer more radical slogans than Blair (which is not difficult). They call for renationalisation, for higher taxes on the rich, for a shorter working week etc.

"But they are silent on the most important point about how socialism can be established.

"...consistent socialists are revolutionaries. We say openly to the working class that we will need to overthrow the

state and break up the capitalists' apparatus of repression through a mass movement prepared to use force."

This cynical "leftist" critique is a smokescreen to hide WP's prostration before Blair. It is also a willful falsification: no one imagines that New Labour stands for the "parliamentary" or any other "road to socialism." The new British PM rarely misses a chance to praise Margaret Thatcher, and met with her to seek her advice before attending a European summit shortly after he took office. *Tony Blair no more stands for the "parliamentary road to socialism" than Margaret Thatcher.* To pretend otherwise is absurd.

## Workers Power's Anti-SLP Cardiff Caper

A grouping of former WP members in the SLP which publishes *Socialist Labour Action* (SLA) has been intervening in the internal struggles of the SLP against the party's undoubted bureaucratic deformations, with the purpose of using these issues to win SLP members to its pro-Blair perspective. Despite professed support for the SLP during the election campaign, immediately after the vote, SLA announced its "public" support for Workers Power, an organization that called for a vote to Labour *against* the SLP in all but one seat! The comrades associated with SLA have put themselves in an untenable position: even those SLP members who are angry about their leadership's bureaucratic behavior are hardly likely to take seriously the views of those opposed to the very existence of the SLP.

Workers Power only supported the SLP against the Blairites in one constituency:

"There is one constituency where Scargill's SLP is standing on a revolutionary programme. It is in Cardiff Central and we urge a vote for their candidate Terry Burns.

"There has been a struggle going on inside Arthur Scargill's SLP. Many socialists have already [been] expelled or 'voided' from the party. Vauxhall Constituency in Lambeth was dissolved for just daring to discuss a local election manifesto! This is because it was a revolutionary programme, not just Arthur's preferred version of warmed-up old Labour reformism.

"Cardiff Central has refused to be intimidated and is standing its candidate on a clearly revolutionary manifesto. This is excellent. Workers Power wholeheartedly supports Terry Burns. We encourage other SLP branches to follow Cardiff's example."

—*Ibid.*

Workers Power may have imagined that its "revolutionary" influence had transformed the Cardiff SLP into something qualitatively better than the rest of the party. But while WP offered its "wholehearted" support to Terry Burns, the gesture was not reciprocated. Interviewed shortly after the election, Burns was asked about *Workers Power's* assertion that he had been "the only candidate standing on a revolutionary programme," when it was known that he had been distributing the SLP's official election manifesto. He replied:

"As a branch we drew up a statement for the election which we as a branch stood on, but we stood on the national platform as well—otherwise why be in a party if you are going to stand on an independent platform? We did not have an independent manifesto, but a statement of where we stood as individuals in the party.

"In our branch we have people from many different left-wing groups and by coming together we have changed our views on many things just during this election campaign. We have differences in our branch for instance on

whether there should be a vote for the Labour Party, or for other socialist candidates. Those who argued that we should vote Labour in other areas found that more and more difficult during the campaign. Particularly when we had the support of Workers Power members, who were calling for a vote for me, but not for Scargill in Newport, which was totally untenable.

"My ideology might be more libertarian and my politics more revolutionary than Scargill, but in fundamental terms we were arguing for socialist transformation of society. How WP could put a fag paper [a cigarette paper] between the two, when we were standing on the same manifesto, and decide they would vote for one and not the other I don't know. Nevertheless WP members came to our meetings and defended those positions against our criticism, but we were still able to work together."

—*Weekly Worker*, 8 May 1997

Burns' revealing observation that, as the election campaign wore on, Cardiff SLP comrades became progressively less inclined to heed WP's advice to vote for the Blairites where the SLP was not standing (let alone its grotesque appeal to vote for Howarth against Scargill!) is quite an indictment. And contrary to WP's claim, the "revolutionary" manifesto which so excited WP was *not* what Burns campaigned on, but an internal statement of position. Rarely are the inflated claims of opportunist hustlers so rapidly and humiliatingly uncovered. Workers Power has exposed itself to rank-and-file SLP members not merely as right-wing and pro-Blair, but as extremely foolish as well.

### WIL's More Rational Labour-Loyalism

A marginally more rational variant of WP-type Labourism was advanced by the Workers International League (WIL). A step to the left of Workers Power in this election, though historically slightly to its right, the WIL advocates a more straightforward version of WP's approach. While denouncing the SLP and SP campaigns for "standing against Labour on a sectarian basis," the WIL nevertheless issued a call to "Vote Nelligan, Sheridan and Scargill." They selected these candidates purely on the basis of their perceived personal popularity:

"In Newport East, we call for a vote for Arthur Scargill despite our overall opposition to the Socialist Labour Party's election strategy. Although the SLP does not have a significant local base in Newport, Scargill has a national profile as a radical trade union leader, and still commands the respect of many class conscious workers. He is therefore likely to find a reasonable level of support among workers in the constituency."

—*Workers News*, April-May 1997

This position perhaps befits an organization that frankly opposed the formation of the SLP from the very beginning, but has had to come to terms with the fact that the SLP commands the loyalty of some of the best militants in the British labor movement. The WIL, like WP, calls on Blair to implement a radical program of "full employment," repeal of Thatcher's anti-union laws, taxes on the rich, re-nationalization of privatized utilities, and implementation of a laundry list of assorted other left-reformist demands.

Why would Blair, who was elected on the basis of his hostility to these kind of traditional social-democratic measures, now suddenly decide to carry them out? Like WP, the WIL evidently believes there is a fundamental difference between Blair's government and the Tory administrations that preceded it. In reality, of course, one could not get a "fag paper" between Blair and Thatcher/Major on most of the questions on the WIL's

laundry list.

Marxists may make demands on a Labour government, but they have to be carefully formulated in order to destroy illusions, not to create or perpetuate them. But the WIL's demands on Blair's government, which has no socialist pretensions, owes more to Alice in Wonderland than to the Leninist tactic of critical support. If the WIL's demands on Blair have any effect at all, it can only be to *create* illusions where few exist.

### Spartacist League: Political Cowards in Fear of...SLP!

The flip side of the Labour loyalism of the mainstream British Trotskyoids, and their consequent hostility to the SLP and SP, is exhibited by the Spartacist League/Britain (SL/B). The ailing British section of James Robertson's grandly titled International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), is rarely seen in public these days. At its peak, the SL/B had four branches—in London, Birmingham, Liverpool and Sheffield. Some years later, several of these were cannibalized to create a branch in Glasgow. Today the SL/B is reduced to a single branch, in London, where it is generally regarded as a somewhat unsavory and frequently hysterical bunch of cranks.

The SL/B remains somewhat interesting politically, if only because it is still capable of approximating aspects of a Marxist approach toward New Labour and the SLP. To its credit, the SL/B is very clear in its opposition to voting for Tony Blair's Labour Party. Not only that, but it was one of the few leftist outfits to recognize the importance of the formation of Socialist Labour, which, it wrote, "offers the possibility for a fundamental realignment of the political configuration in this country out of which a genuine working-class party can be constituted" (*Workers Hammer*, February-March 1996). This would appear to be the beginning of wisdom. But for reasons it is unable to articulate, the SL/B abstained from participation in the founding of the organization that offered such important possibilities.

The SL/B has apparently decided that maintaining its own separate press and organizational structure is sacrosanct, even though it is a tiny grouping without roots in the working class. The SL/B's activity since the formation of the SLP has been limited to turning up in by-elections where the SLP stood candidates and handing out leaflets offering critical support. The SL/B leaflets, which tend to be both abstract and repetitious, read as if they had been drawn up long in advance with only the candidate's name and location left blank, to be filled in as the occasion arises. The SL/B's "critical support" is a cardboard position, without political impact.

The Robertsonites have sought to justify their abstentionism with orthodox-sounding appeals to the historical experience of the Communist International:

"Critical support is an application of the united front tactic which was developed by the Communist International. It means unity in action among the participating organisations, combined with an opportunity to test out their competing political programmes. The SL/B has extended critical support to the SLP in three previous by-elections, where we actively campaigned for the candidate and distributed their election material. At the same time in our paper *Workers Hammer* and in interventions at meetings we presented our Trotskyist programme...."

—SL/B electoral statement, 21 April 1997

The Comintern's united-front policy was intended to bring about joint actions with other, mostly reformist, par-



HULTON GETTY

### Premature Blairites: 'Gang of Four' (Owen, Rodgers, Jenkins & Williams) led right split from Labour in 1981

ties on single issues. It is, however, another matter when there is a real possibility of participating in a "fundamental realignment" of the workers' movement. In situations such as that presented by the founding of the SLP, where the leadership of a new workers' party has a paranoid fear of "raiding" by opponent groups, small Marxist groupings should jump at the chance to participate in building a genuinely socialist current within the proletariat. Within a larger movement, Marxists need not renounce their revolutionary views, and can find greater opportunities to help develop socialist consciousness among the working class and the oppressed. The SL/B, however, does not operate as a group of genuine Marxists, but rather as the British branch office of a declining political sect whose leadership secretly fears that, if allowed to participate in a broader political milieu, its remaining adherents may cease to regard their aging American leaders as infallible, and their fragile hold over them will be lost.

Such fears are, of course, not entirely irrational. It is quite probable that any real communist militants who remain in the ranks of the SL/B would, through participation in the SLP and the experience of direct intervention in the political struggles of the working class, come to view their old group in a new light. Sooner, rather than later, this would mean goodbye to Robertsonism in Britain.

### Robertsonites on SLP/SP: a Distinction Without a Difference

Sectarian as their attitude is toward the SLP, the Robertsonites are much more hostile toward the Socialist Party/Militant, which they regard as untouchable. In fact, the SLP and SP are rather similar. Shorn of a certain residual "Trotskyist" phraseology, the thrust of the Socialist Party's politics is left social-democratic and barely distinguishable

from Scargill's SLP. The Socialist Party, as the general election results show, has, in some parts of Britain (notably Glasgow and Coventry) a real, if modest, working-class base.

In the period leading up to the election, both the Socialist Party and Socialist Labour had differences within their leaderships on the question of advocating electoral support to Labour where no socialist candidate was standing. It is generally thought that "No Vote to Labour" sentiment was stronger in the leading committee of Socialist Labour, whereas, in the Socialist Party, the leadership was more evenly divided. In practice, however, neither party explicitly called on workers not to vote for Blair. In the pre-election issue of its paper, SLP Vice-President, Patrick Sikorski, wrote:

"Our Party presents the only real Socialist alternative to the three major parties, each of which supports capitalism and the free market.

"One of the founding tenets of the SLP is that New Labour has so fundamentally altered its policies and its constitution that it is now indistinguishable from the Tories and Liberal Democrats, and Socialists *can no longer support it.*"

—*Socialist News* No. 4, March/April 1997

(emphasis added)

The Socialist Party/Militant position on the election was in substance identical:

"Every week there's more Labour backtracking on policies such as privatisation....Most people see them as having the best chance of kicking out the rich, sleazy and detested Tories.

"Few expect real improvements for ordinary people under a Blair government.

"Labour's policies are now as anti-working class as the Tories'.

"That's why we don't endorse Labour in this election. Vote for Socialist Party candidates where you can. Wherever you

are, campaign to get the Tories out and help us build a fighting force for socialism and real change."

—*The Socialist*, 11 April 1997 (emphasis added).

Both of these statements are formulated in such a way as to *fudge* the question of whether or not to advocate a vote for Labour where neither the SLP nor SP were standing. They neither call for a vote to Labour nor a boycott of Labour. The similarity of these statements reflects the essential political similarity between the two parties—which has led many militants in both parties to see the division between them as undesirable and artificial.

Yet, in its 21 April 1997 election statement, the SL/B claims to have discovered a great difference between the two: "Nor do we advocate voting for the Socialist Party (formerly Militant Labour) whose campaign is *entirely subordinated to electing a Labour government*" (emphasis added). This statement is a complete falsification. Why does the SL/B insist upon a major difference where none exists? It is well known that most of the SLP's left wing (including a sprinkling of former SL/B members and sympathizers) tends to favor unification with the SP. In its electoral statement, the SL/B mentions SLP members who advocate closer work with the SP, and comments, "their opposition to Scargill comes from the right" (*Ibid.*). If the SP were a pro-Blairite outfit, then those SLPers advocating unity with it would indeed be "rightists." But this is not the case. Is the SL/B's insistence on a bogus distinction between the SP and the SLP just plain stupidity? Or is this nonsense intended to discourage any SL/B sympathizers, or supporters, who might be entertaining notions of regrouping with elements of the SLP left?

### SL/B vs CPGB: Political Bandits vs Stalinoid Sectarians

The SL/B has made a particular target of one component of the SLP left—supporters of the CPGB, which, like the SP, it characterizes as being to the right of Scargill. The SL/B makes much of the CPGB's forerunners' flinch on the "ballot" question during the miners' strike of 1984-5 as evidence of this. While this was indeed a mistake by the CPGB, the SL/B is diplomatically silent about the fact that Arthur Scargill made at least an equally serious error in taking the Labour Party to court as a means of reformist "struggle" against the right wing's abolition of Clause IV.

The SL/B electoral statement does criticize Scargill for "refus[ing] to stand against New Labour 'left' MPs—Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Jeremy Corbyn and Dennis Skinner." But it fails to mention that one of the key points of confrontation between Scargill and those linked to the CPGB was over the Brent (North London) SLP candidacy of Stan Keable, who ran against Ken Livingstone. Scargill intervened publicly when Keable's candidacy was announced, to proclaim that Keable was not an SLP member (i.e., effectively expelling him). Scargill also stated that "the SLP has never intended to contest, and will not be contesting London's Brent East constituency in the General Election" (*Morning Star*, 3 February 1997). The decision to run against Livingstone hardly fits the SL/B's characterization of the CPGB as being to Scargill's right. True to form, the Robertsonites do not hesitate to misrepresent reality in pursuit of petty sectarian advantage.

Many SLP members were critical of Stan Keable's campaign, *not* for the entirely correct decision to stand against Livingstone, but for the sectarian manner in which it was

executed. After being denounced by the SLP leadership, Keable continued to stand against Livingstone, and was quoted in the *Weekly Worker* (1 May 1997) as saying, "In Brent East we chose to stand on the communist manifesto we believe in," that is, the CPGB's "Communist Manifesto," which explicitly claims to be a revolutionary alternative to the SLP's program. There was nothing wrong with Keable standing on the program of his choice, but he should have done so on a CPGB ticket. To stand on his program, while still claiming to be an SLP candidate, was a sectarian stunt. It could only outrage mainstream Scargillites, who saw Keable appropriating their name for the project of another organization.

### Marxism vs. Labourism

In "Labourism & the British Left" (1917 No. 17) we wrote: "The Labour Party question is at present *the* strategic question for Marxists in Britain. Opportunism toward the Labour Party, particularly its left wing, runs deep in the ostensible Trotskyist movement, and has played a major role in derailing more than one serious attempt to forge a revolutionary party...[S]terile sectarianism...is a complement to this opportunism—the opposite side of the same coin. The sectarian, like the opportunist, fears confrontation with the reformist misleaders in front of the working class."

The reaction of the British left to the rightward collapse of Labourism, and the resulting left splits from it, has confirmed our analysis. The organizations of the British far left have faced severe tests in this last period...and for the most part been found wanting. We hope that those British leftists who read this journal, and have some affinity with our program, as well as an understanding of the very fluid political situation that exists at the moment, will not fail to seize the present opportunity to work toward supplanting Labourism with revolutionary Marxism among the advanced detachments of the British working class. ■

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## Justin Ryniker



Justin Ryniker, a long-time supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency, died during liver transplant surgery in Sydney early on the morning of Sunday, 1 June 1997. He was 31 years old.

As Wellington's *City Voice* said in a page three obituary (12 June 1997):

"He was lead singer for brattishly literate 1980s Wellington band The Wart, banner painter and babysitter for the Permanent Revolution Group and painter of the huge canvases that hung in the Hole in the Wall bar for its first year of business."

Over 400 attended Justin's funeral. His mother, Margaret, spoke movingly of his wisdom and friendship. Others talked of his generosity, artistic flair and unusual turn of mind. One friend, comrade and former workmate recalled:

"My first impression of Justin, meeting him a decade ago, was of a likeable young man, with a sometimes acerbic sense of humour and an air of cynicism about him. As I spent a bit more time with him over the years,

particularly working together, I enjoyed getting to know him better and came to see him as the opposite of cynical, a very kind man, generous in his opinions of others."

Justin was no sentimentalist and had a sharp sense of irony, but he was thoroughly sensitive, deeply considerate and capable of great patience. He was very bright, intrigued by political ideas, and enjoyed an argument.

As a teenager, Justin displayed keen interest in various forms of artistic expression—music, painting, writing, film. He was never afraid to stand apart from the crowd. Among the enthusiasms which shaped his taste were Erich von Stroheim and Kenneth Anger films, and Metal Machine music. His aesthetic is perhaps summarized by this passage, chosen from his journal by his partner, Michelle:

"We must free ourselves from cultural conservatism, as well as from political conservatism. We must see our rituals for what they are—completely arbitrary things, tied to our bourgeois way of life; it is good—and it is the real theatre—to transcend them in the manner of play, by means of games and song....[O]ne must put 'in play,' show up, transform, and reverse the systems which quietly order us about."

Justin became a supporter of the Permanent Revolution Group (PRG) at first in work against unemployment about ten years ago, well before its fusion with the Bolshevik Tendency in 1990. His band, The Wart, which had a substantial following in Wellington in the late 1980s, did gigs for united fronts the PRG was involved in.

During Christmas 1990, Justin's liver suddenly started to fail, and he had his first transplant early in 1991. His health was never satisfactory again, but he continued to work a full-time job, to do serious study in the field of art history and his own painting, to build a satisfying personal life, and to make significant political contributions.

For years, he looked after Sophie and Karl one evening a week, so their parents could attend IBT meetings. Their step-father recounted how:

"when Sophie (she was probably about six at the time) would get up at about 8pm, get dressed, and insist that she was going off to night school, Justin would deal with it all with his usual patient good humour."

Justin was a good trade unionist, and played an important role for a time with another comrade in the National Film Library resisting job cuts. And he also made banners and placards to order for the IBT—professionally, reliably and fast.

At the funeral, a PRG comrade said:

"Justin's friends will miss his wry little smile, his brutal brand of humour and sense of the absurd, and his occasional outbreak of maniacal laughter, with the accompanying stamping of the foot."

The IBT has lost a valuable supporter.

# Tony Blair & the British Left

## Class Politics & Labour Loyalism

B. BISSON—SYGMA



The electoral victory of the Labour Party on 1 May 1997 brought an end to 18 years of Tory rule, the longest tenure in office by any British political party this century. In the previous general election, in 1992, the Conservatives had narrowly retained power with a majority of 21 seats; in 1997 Labour won with a 178 seat majority—even larger than its famous landslide victory at the end of World War II. Labour replaced a government whose avowed purpose had been to roll back the conquests of the working class since the 1930s, and which, in its last years, under John Major, appeared shamelessly and openly corrupt.

All over Britain there was great relish at seeing the Tory rabble humiliated; even in many “safe,” rural, affluent constituencies, Tory MPs (including a number of leading ministers) were thrown out and replaced with Labour (or sometimes Liberal Democrat) newcomers. The Conservatives are now completely without parliamentary representation in either Scotland or Wales. In many of England’s major cities, such as Manchester and Liverpool, there are no Tory MPs whatsoever. In Birmingham, Britain’s second city, there is only one Tory MP left. The Conservatives, after winning four elections in succession, each with an overall majority of the 600-plus parliamentary seats, were reduced to only 162—for them, an unprecedented catastrophe.

Yet the election results represent less a positive swing to “New Labour” than a defection from the Conservatives. Tony Blair’s party captured a *lower* share of the national vote than in the victories of 1945, 1950, 1964 and 1966, when

Labour was elected with smaller majorities. Minor parties, such as the Liberal Democrats and Scottish nationalists, also made significant gains. The middle-class swing away from the Conservatives was a more significant factor than working-class enthusiasm for Blair. In many areas that Labour used to consider its natural base—in core working-class urban constituencies—its vote *declined* as compared to the 1992 election, which Labour lost.

The decline in working-class support is not surprising. Blair’s whole project—the culmination of many years of rightward motion by decisive sections of the Labour Party’s careerist bureaucracy—is to create a party that can be a governmental force for British capitalism *pure and simple*. Since its founding, the Labour Party was inherently contradictory: on the one hand, it was the expression of the need for political independence on the part of the working class; on the other hand, it was thoroughly pro-capitalist in its ideology. By weakening its historic links to the trade-union movement, New Labour is now seeking to resolve that contradiction and become merely another party of the ruling class.

Blair’s reformist facade is paper-thin. It consists primarily of a largely cosmetic decentralization of the British state—including “devolution,” i.e., regional parliaments for Scotland and Wales, and an elected mayor for London. The Blairites did repeal the ban on trade-union membership at the Government Communications Headquarters (i.e., spy center) in Cheltenham, a measure that was widely seen

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