

# 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 for action arrives—these are the rules of the Fourth International."

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## *Eastern European Regimes Implode* Death Agony of Stalinism

The unravelling of the political order imposed upon Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union after the Second World War has profoundly altered the configuration of world politics. The dramatic recent events can be traced to Gorbachev's acceptance, last August, of a Solidarnosc-

led government in Poland, which signalled that the Kremlin would no longer back up its Warsaw Pact clients with troops and tanks.

With the threat of Soviet intervention removed, mass popular demonstrations against decades of Stalinist



GILLES SAUBIER—GAMMA LIAISON

### Romanian soldiers fought Ceausescu's Securitate

tyranny exploded across the region. In Romania this popular upsurge spilled over into a bloody armed conflict with Ceausescu's Securitate. Elsewhere the ruling Communist Parties, devoid of any belief in their own legitimacy, changed their names and sacked their leaders before running for cover. To date, overtly pro-capitalist governments have taken office in Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany (DDR) and Hungary. In Romania and Bulgaria the "reform" Stalinists who still hold the reins of power promise to implement capitalist market measures in the near future.

While Moscow's domination of Eastern Europe is rapidly becoming a thing of the past, the region's future remains murky. But the momentum is clearly to the right. Forty years of Stalinist rule have profoundly discredited the very idea of socialism among broad layers of the working class. Misled, betrayed and confused, the East European proletariat has yet to assert itself as an independent political factor. The masses of people who tore down the Berlin wall and stood up to Ceausescu's thugs were united by their hatred for the privileges, mendacity and economic mismanagement of their bureaucratic taskmasters. They knew what they didn't want, but had no positive program.

The political vacuum created by the collapse of bureaucratic authority created an opening for pro-capitalist intellectuals and nationalist fanatics. Across Eastern Europe there is a recrudescence of fascist organizations dating from the Hitler era. In the Romanian city of Tirgu

Mures an organization calling itself the Iron Guard took responsibility for the murder of ethnic Hungarians; fifty years ago their namesake carried out pogroms against Jews. In Bulgaria vicious pogroms against the Turkish minority have caused thousands to flee for their lives. In the DDR, assaults on immigrants and leftists by gangs of Nazi skinheads have become common. Behind these forces stand the bankers and industrialists of the West who have been itching to reconquer the countries of the Soviet bloc.

The restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe—a prospect now acutely posed—would represent an immense setback for the international proletariat. The bureaucratically-decreed collectivization of the means of production brought concrete benefits for the working class. Employment was guaranteed; food, housing and transportation prices were stabilized (and frequently subsidized); and health care and education were made generally available. In the DDR, daycare has been cheap and widely available, and special provisions have ensured affordable housing for single mothers and retirees. These social gains, which are directly targeted by the architects of capitalist restoration, remain genuinely popular among large sections of the masses, despite their current infatuation with the "magic" of the market.

### For Political Revolution—Not Capitalist Restoration!

Millions of East European workers are not going to enjoy the introduction of capitalist speedup and layoffs. They will not sit still as food prices and rents soar while real wages are cut, nor will they be herded quietly into the unemployment queues and soup kitchens that await

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## 1917

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*Signed articles or letters do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the Bolshevik Tendency.*

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## Eyewitness Reports

# The Collapse of the DDR

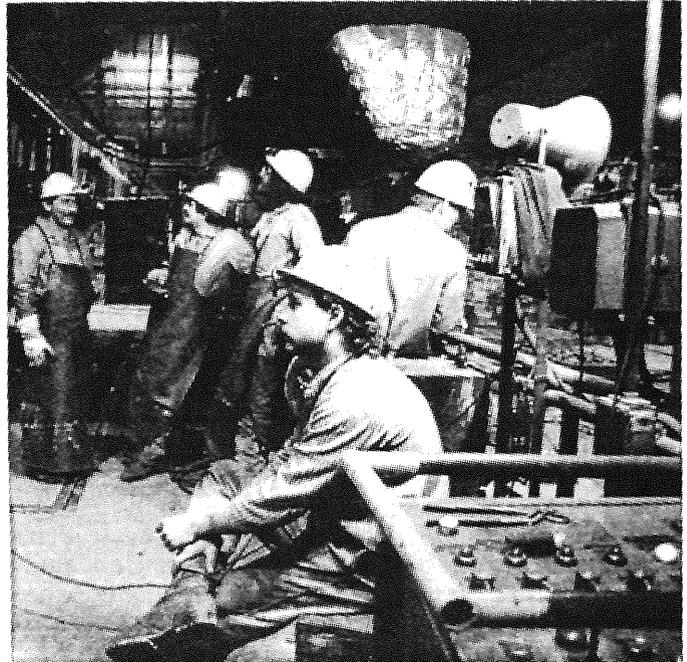
**MARCH 10**—One of the most striking things about events in the DDR [German Democratic Republic] is the almost total absence of *political* class-conscious activity by workers as workers. To understand why, you have to understand something of the social/political reality in the DDR. It seems clear that the elementary consciousness of the workers of themselves as a class, with their own class interests, exists on a much lower level in the DDR than in the Federal Republic [BRD].

Many DDR workers have no idea how capitalism works, or that workers and capitalists have opposing interests. A recent poll showed 56 percent of the people in the DDR believed that only *minimal* legal limitations should be placed on capitalists. In the BRD only 39 percent felt that minimal legal controls are adequate. The organized opposition, the mass demonstrations, the post-November "citizens' movements" and the developing political parties had no independent working-class character. The leadership of all parties, from left to right, was and is in the hands of the petty bourgeoisie: doctors, academics, ministers, artists and lawyers. Even the United Left [Vereingte Linke (VL)] activists are students and academics. The strike wave that occurred in late January and early February has tapered off. Issues were limited and varied: higher wages, demands for management (SED) resignations and for separating factories from Kombinat and economic control (narrow worker sectoral interest).

### Capitalist Restorationism and Trade Unionism In the DDR

Some *Betriebsrat* [workers council] bodies have been formed but these are either like shop-steward groups or nascent trade-union formations. The maximum level of working-class organization to date has been a ragged and confused growth of trade-union activity. The FDGB (Stalinist-dominated union body) quickly got rid of its old leadership (many resigned without pressure), and is trying to rebuild a trade-union movement on a limited, defensive trade-union program.

Distrust of the old FDGB (which had done nothing for 40 years) gave rise to burgeoning independent trade unions with narrow interests. Teachers, police and railroad workers began asking for *Beamtenstatus* (as in the BRD). This has been a special category of public workers who give up the right to strike in exchange for fixed wages and lifetime jobs. When the independent teachers union asked for state guaranteed social protection, i.e., medical care, child care and cost of living (only for themselves), they were told rudely by the vice-minister of education that workers can have such guarantees only with socialism, and one can have socialism only with dictatorship. The ideology of the union movement is



DER SPIEGEL

### DDR steelworkers: uncertain about their future

borrowed directly from the DGB [BRD trade-union movement] and the SPD [BRD Social Democratic Party], which are directly guiding and trying to control the DDR union movement.

The DGB is apparently having some success in persuading the FDGB that shop-steward bodies must be separated from the union with full-time, on-site workers representatives, paid by the enterprise, not the union. This is rationalized as giving full scope to workers democracy, but is really aimed at separating the trade-union functionaries from the rank and file, and limiting work-place meetings (whether meetings of the whole workforce or of shop-steward bodies) to economic matters. It is a framework for establishing a very bureaucratized trade-union structure, free from control by the base, which could get away with holding very infrequent membership meetings.

The DDR parliament amended the basic law to forbid lockouts and guarantee the unlimited right to strike. The law enshrines *Mitbestimmung*, which does not simply mean that workers and employers must sit down and talk, but also that both parties have common interests in efficient and uninterrupted production, and *must* act together for social peace. This is the legislative and ideological underpinning of the BRD trade-union movement. The proposed DDR trade-union law included language on "co-determination" that implied union veto power over management prerogatives such as joint ventures, outright sale of factories, placing economic enterprises on the stock market, etc. This was rejected by the parliament.

"Co-determination," by the way, is the maximum economic trade-union program of the West German SPD and DGB. The legislation, which was made part of the DDR constitution by a two-thirds *Volkskammer* [DDR parliament] vote, was passed despite the objections of some CDU (DDR) members of parliament.

The DDR trade-union law has some parallels with the Norris-La Guardia Act (the so-called Magna Carta of labor), passed in the U.S. in the 1930s. The CP [Communist Party] as well as the SWP [Socialist Workers Party] opposed the law as an extension of the "right" of the capitalist state to intervene in and exert control over workers struggles. The CP quickly capitulated, but the Trotskyist SWP did not. Of course the situation here is different because it is still a deformed workers state.

The fact that the new law does not place limitations on the right to strike resulted in a storm of anger from BRD capitalists, and threats of no economic "aid" unless the law is changed to conform *at least* to BRD restrictions (which are in some ways more restrictive than U.S. law). The SPD (DDR) candidate for prime minister, Boehm, stated darkly that this law will be "subject to disposition." There is great anger at what is seen as a PDS attempt to cater to working-class interests and disrupt rapid capitalist restoration.

But the restorationist drive seems very strong. If, after the elections, a pro-capitalist government is consolidated and state property is privatized, new amendments to the trade-union law will rapidly be imposed to narrow the space for "legal" workers defensive actions. The *Mitbestimmung* establishes the framework for class collaborationism involving the unions. A sort of precedent for this already exists in the BRD. Elected workers representatives in the BRD often have legal access to employer financial and business records and information, but are prohibited from telling their fellow workers or union officials. Violation of this can lead to severe penalties.

## The Legacy of Prussian Stalinism

Why did this happen? Forty years of Stalinism have resulted in a profound depoliticization of the working class in the DDR. Workers had neither independent organization nor even the most limited union rights. All benefits came from above, from the party. The SED/DDR catchword was not "working class" but "Volk." This can be translated as "people," but also carries extreme nationalistic connotations of race, culture and blood. Everything was *Volks*: *Volks*-parliament, *Volks*-army, *Volks*-police. In fact the old Prussian elitism was carried over into all institutions. Academics and professionals appear to have had more influence than workers in the state and economic apparatus; university graduates automatically became army officers. Workers could aspire only to be soldiers. Academics with doctorates occupied almost all leading positions, except for a handful of politburo members.

This was a state with non-capitalist Prussian-style organization and petty-bourgeois intolerance and smugness. The petty bourgeoisie is quite sizable. Eighty thousand private petty-bourgeois establishments (limited to

ten workers) are in operation, ranging from pubs and restaurants, to repair and service, to small factories. There are close to a million people in the DDR working for private businesses outside the *Volkseigentum* [peoples' property] sector of the economy. These petty entrepreneurs, together with clergy and academics, constituted the cadre of the movements and parties fighting for reunification and capitalist restoration. They were joined rapidly by most of the economic administrators and bureaucrats.

Political ideology did not exist in the DDR except as a crude form of Prussian Stalinism. Few people (including



Erich Honecker

SED members) completely embraced or really believed in this world view. People just went home and watched BRD TV (except in and around Dresden). Enormous social pressure had built up, and when the mass demonstrations began, a number of writers and intellectuals attempted to give expression to a "democratic socialist" vision for the future of the

DDR. This vision was very soon swept away and replaced with a vision of market economics and capitalist reunification as the way forward.

The regime virtually collapsed. The political bureau of the SED resigned, and the SED conference removed the entire central committee without replacing them. Many SED functionaries quit the party and left their government posts. An economic and political vacuum existed. The most important ministry, the economic ministry, ceased to function. Central (or even ministerial) planning collapsed or was abandoned. *Kombinat* and works management were left without power or guidance; regional government bodies collapsed either through resignation or lack of "legitimacy."

In the political field many SED state functionaries were initially replaced with ministers from the four bloc parties, and ministers without portfolio were added from the Round Table opposition. These were mostly from the "center" parties. The PDS is in a minority in the council of ministers. A significant number of government functionaries left the SED, and either joined the right-wing or the liberal parties or are knocking on the door of the SPD.

Most of the industrial and economic managers began demanding legalization of capitalist property. A few *Kombinat* managers are making half-hearted pleas for *Volkseigentum* in heavy industry, but of course subject to market pressures. Everywhere Round Table formations have sprung up and are assuming administrative powers. These often include the PDS, which appears to always capitulate to the majority. These Round Table formations have appointed working bodies to study, make recommendations, and to assume control of administrative functions, buildings, communications, press and former Stasi [disbanded DDR secret police] property.

The initial cry "we are the people" was rapidly

replaced with the slogan "we are one people." The orgy of nationalism is more widespread and hysterical than in the BRD. The ideological programmatic vacuum is filled almost entirely from the BRD. Capitalism, national reunification and anti-communist slogans, as expressed by BRD political parties, have been adopted wholesale, and are reflected in simplistic slogan form by almost all the larger, influential DDR parties. German nationalism dominates. Our German brothers and sisters will not allow us to suffer, but will rapidly incorporate us into successful BRD capitalism, with its extensive social cushions. After all, we are all Germans! Television shows of factory and work-place meetings in the DDR show workers begging for advice as how to build capitalism, or workers passionately attacking former SED members and saying, "We can only move forward when we get rid of everything red."

It seems that, at the moment, conditions in the DDR are more favorable for the rapid growth of neo-fascist groups and ideology than in the BRD. The DDR regime was always extremely nationalistic. Fascism was always characterized primarily as anti-communist. At the site of the Buchenwald concentration camp there are no memorials or information about the large number of Jews who were imprisoned and murdered there. School-children learned very little about the Holocaust. The Ulbricht regime was openly anti-Semitic. A sizable number of Jewish communists returned to the DDR after 1945. Many were persecuted, and most Jews left the DDR in subsequent years. The DDR is supposed to have only 400 people of Jewish background (Gysi's father was a German Communist Jew). About 0.8 percent of the DDR population is composed of non-German residents, mostly students or workers from Vietnam, Poland, Mozambique, Angola and Cuba. Non-German children born in the DDR have no rights to citizenship and apparently it is impossible for non-Germans to acquire citizenship. Foreign workers are limited to a maximum of five years residence. There are no exceptions. The PDS election platform makes no mention of allowing foreign workers to remain after five years, and Christa Luft, vice-premier, PDS member, and minister (without a ministry) of economics, is alleged to have sent laid-off Vietnamese workers back to Vietnam.

Foreign workers and students, especially in Leipzig and Dresden, are living in fear. They stay home during demonstrations, and the increasingly bold fascist elements are demanding the expulsion of all non-Germans. When a small group of students (German and foreign) put up a small exhibit against racism and *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* (hostility toward foreigners) during one of the regular Monday demonstrations in Leipzig, people denied the existence of racism but said that the foreigners should be sent home or strictly segregated.

*Übersiedler* (people who leave the DDR for the BRD) are demanding that the millions of Turks in the BRD be sent home to make jobs and living space for "real" Germans. Every morning thousands of people pour into West Berlin, demanding jobs held by Turks, and offering to work for less than legal or union contract wages. Mothers with black or Asian mates in the DDR fear for their children's safety.

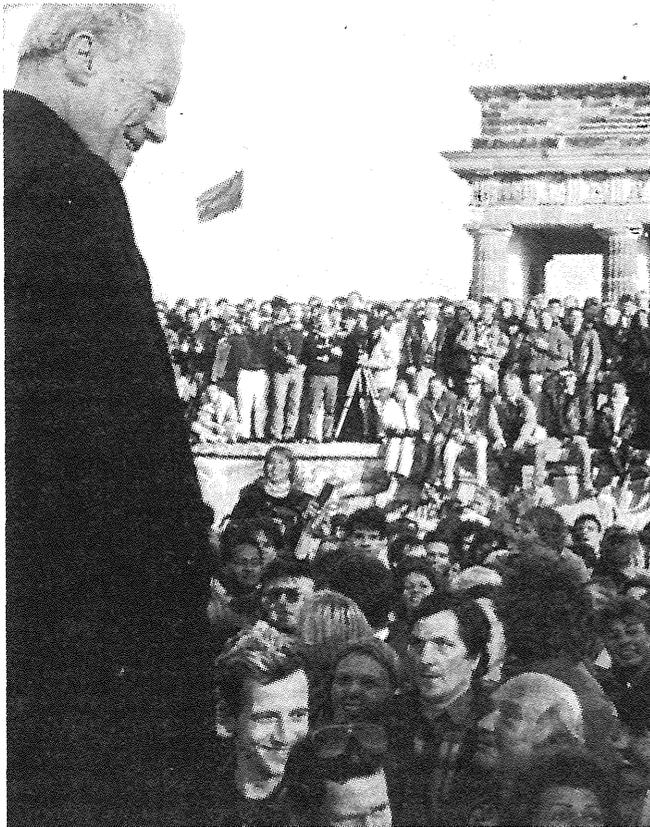


**Fascist punks: emboldened by German reunification**

The Round Table recommended that the Republikan Party (neo-fascists) be forbidden in the DDR. The Volkskammer adopted the proposed law but no one enforces it. Skinheads and neo-Nazis openly demonstrate, shouting "Reds Out!" and "Foreigners Out!" and singing the verse from the old German national anthem that speaks of Germany from the Memel (a river in the USSR) to the Maas (a river running through France, Belgium and the Netherlands) to the Etsch (a river in northern Italy). BRD television has had plenty of coverage of the Republikan Party in the DDR, including meetings to establish new branches.

When a small group of anti-fascists (associated with the Autonomous movement) tried to confront a group of skinheads, the *Volkspolizei* (peoples police) protected the fascists. West German journalists went to the office of the district attorney in Leipzig. They showed him videos of the Republikan Party meeting establishing the party in Leipzig and shots of neo-fascist demonstrations there. He responded by flatly denying that any such activity was taking place. He also noted that the video footage was not taken from DDR television!

The DDR election commission refused to register the Republikan Party for the March elections. This move was probably made because a high neo-fascist vote would have alarmed many in the BRD (especially in the SPD base) and increased resistance to reunification in the other European countries. BRD capitalists don't need the fascists yet. In fact the increased fascist vote is cutting into the CDU/CSU [Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union] vote and endangering the governing state, city and county administrations—especially in their strongholds in the states in the southeast of the BRD. The necessity for the CSU and CDU to form governing coalitions with neo-fascists could jeopardize CDU/FDP [Free Democratic Party] coalition governments. After an *Anschluss*, of course, the Republikan Party will be legalized—the idea of a German confederation with a separate legal system and constitution in the DDR raises too many problems for rapid capitalist restoration. The right-wing and liberal parties are for rapid and total reunification under the BRD constitution and laws. The DDR Republikan Party is composed mostly of workers with some petty bourgeois. It includes many former SED members. Besides the PDS, the neo-fascists have the most



Willy Brandt campaigning for SPD in DDR elections

plebeian membership and profile.

I have seen *no* mention or coverage of neo-Nazi demonstrations or activities on DDR TV. DDR television coverage of Leipzig demos carefully avoids mentioning the neo-fascists, which is not surprising, since the radio and TV are largely in the hands of the right-wing and SPD Round Table forces. Those DDR parties that are allied to BRD parties are well financed and have taken over newspapers or started up new ones. The huge West German publishers have formed a consortium for massive penetration of magazines and newspapers into the DDR, including the worst right-wing street tabloids (naked women, axe-murders by foreigners and communist/terrorist plots). The better quality press, like the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the high-quality muckraking weekly, *Der Spiegel*, and the leftist daily *Tageszeitung* (TAZ) are of course excluded from this consortium.

All the former bloc parties and almost all the newly formed parties have moved rapidly to the right in the space of two months. For example, the CDU (DDR) bloc party, which used to stand for "socialism," is now in an election alliance that opposes all forms of economic enterprise that are collective or public in nature. The "Democratic Awakening" opposition movement started out for "democratic socialism," then tried for a bloc with the SPD and, when that failed, ended up in the same bloc with the CDU and the even more right-wing DSU.

The economic, political, ideological and programmatic vacuum is being filled almost entirely from the BRD. Discussions in the media reflect an unsophisticated, watered-down version of BRD politics and social/

economic thought. This is most apparent in the arena of economics. It seems that every DDR academic with a degree in economics is working full time explaining how laissez-faire capitalism has matured into responsible capitalism; how only the stock market is truly democratic; how market forces automatically result in flexibility and an efficient, productive economy; and how the very idea of a planned economy is unscientific. According to the economic academics, two-thirds of all businesses in the BRD and the U.S. are small or medium concerns ("dismantle the Kombinati!"); most successful U.S. businesses were started by one or two men in a garage, and rapidly grew larger ("you too can get rich!"), etc. They are equally adept at explaining how socially-owned property can only mean "party-owned" property, and can only operate through top-down commandism. By contrast, they claim private enterprises cannot be commandist because they must operate in accordance with the desires of consumers.

This is all embarrassingly naive, and the people in the BRD are much more cynical about how "democratic" the market actually is. A much larger proportion of BRD workers believe that only strong workers parties and unions can force the capitalists to part with a large enough share of the total social product to maintain their current standard of living.

Things aren't all that rosy for the capitalists, and the steady stream of DDR people coming to the BRD (10,000 to 15,000 weekly) is a source of considerable social tension. The cost of maintaining them is astronomical. The BRD constitution regards all such people as full German (i.e., BRD) citizens who are automatically eligible for social insurance, schooling, unemployment assistance and retirement benefits. In addition, the law obligates the BRD (or individual states) to furnish housing, living expenses and help in finding jobs. The BRD already has a severe shortage of housing and almost two million unemployed. Most *Übersiedler* are currently housed in sports halls, cruise ships, cargo containers, trailers or military barracks. Alcoholism and drug addiction are a serious problem. There are a lot of reports of fights between DDRers and Poles of German descent. On top of that, even many of the well-trained and educated DDRers have proven unemployable. They are not used to either the pace or the capitalist work discipline. Unless they receive a direct order, they tend to play cards or stand around.

They expect only to be required to perform one simple task, and are in the habit of arriving late and taking off early. The rude, selfish, male-chauvinist behavior of many of them has apparently been causing problems with co-workers, as has their extreme intolerance for dress, behavior or lifestyles which even slightly deviate from DDR norms. Parents are not accustomed to the absence of accessible, very cheap and comprehensive child care. There have been reports of some of them simply walking off and leaving unattended children. Already there is evidence of demoralization among many of those who expected that a new car, a nice, cheap modern flat and an easy job were all part of the "free world" package.

The cost of capitalist restoration will be quite high.

Before the economy can be profitably reoriented, simply treating the DDR as an exploitable colony could mean that the bulk of the 16 million population would flood into the BRD. They have the *constitutional right!* The employers are telling BRD workers that a shorter work week or significant pay raise is out of the question. The capitalists tell the workers that they will have to sacrifice to help their sisters and brothers in the East, i.e., taxes will have to be raised and social services reduced. The DGB and SPD may be developing sharp differences with the BRD government on the question of who will pay for reunification. The two million-member metal union is gearing up with a demand for a 35-hour week plus an 8.5 percent pay raise. The printing and media union has similar demands. There could be a major strike wave in the BRD by late spring. The initial enthusiasm for reunification is clearly receding from the earlier high point when all parties in the Bundestag (except part of the Greens) supported reunification.

In the DDR the planned economy has been effectively abandoned. DDR managers, confronted by workers anxiety about jobs and wages, plead helplessness, and argue that only rapid privatization can supply a *Tarifpartner* (a bargaining partner). The PDS program is limited to an occasional plea for retaining some mining and heavy industry as public property. The regime is retreating rapidly on all fronts, especially on the question of collectivized property. But the West German capitalists are holding out for removal of all DDR laws in any way restricting capitalist activities, including reducing the (previously high) tax rates for small and middle businesses. Incidentally, all land and property confiscated from medium businesses in 1972 were recently returned.

Capitalist counterrevolution will result in massive unemployment, higher rents and the dismantling of social programs. The reality of "actually existing capitalism" will result in extreme social anxiety, which could be expressed in everything from strikes to anti-communist pogroms. Social intolerance is quite high in the DDR, and Prussian Stalinism has taught DDR people that political struggle means suppressing your opponents. As the reality of capitalism becomes clear to large sections of the population, the PDS, playing the treacherous role of left social democracy, may give leadership to this elementary class consciousness, but limit it to bourgeois trade unionism and parliamentarism.

Enclosed is a copy of the critical support letter, which we addressed to the campaign of the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands [SpAD—German organization affiliated to Jim Robertson's Spartacist League/US], which addresses their claim that a proletarian political revolution has been underway in the DDR for the past few months.

To make such assertions the TLD/SpAD simply closes its eyes to political reality. No workers councils are contending for power. No proletarian formations posing, or even aspiring to, dual power have developed in the DDR. The soldiers' councils are either limited to simply addressing soldiers' "work" conditions, or they represent pressure groups for professional military personnel, and are dominated by officers.

"Der Wirklichkeit offen ihre Augen machen, die sie den geringsten Momenten herausfinden, die Dinge die Menschen, wie diese Massen die Wahrheit sein ließen wie sie auch sein wollten. Die Kinderklasse fürchten, endlich Programme auf die Logik des Klassenkampfes stützen; Mut besitzen, wenn die Stunde der Revolte kommt - dies sind die Regeln der Vierten Internationale."

# 1917

Extra-Ausgabe

BOLSCHEWISTISCHE TENDENZ

## Für Arbeiterräte - jetzt!

Die repressiven und inkompetenten nationalen stalinistischen Regimes in Osteuropa sind zusammengebrochen. Jahrzehnte der brutalen Unterdrückung jeder Form von Arbeiterdemokratie haben die Arbeiterklasse in den deformierten Arbeiterstaaten ohne Führung gelassen. Die Stalinisten haben jede Erinnerung an die wahre Geschichte des Leninismus und des internationalen Kommunismus aus dem Bewußtsein (bis Hand), von Helsinki bis Berlin; Die westlichen Leninisten/Trotzkisten, die die faschistischen und kapitalistischen Mord von den Stalinisten umgebracht. Die Stalinisten regierten im Namen der Arbeiterklasse, während sie alle politische Macht von den Arbeitern fernhielten.

Der kapitalistische Weltimperialismus und seine sozialdemokratischen Wasserträger sind nun außerordentlich. Ein großer Teil der internationalen Arbeiterklasse, bisher unerreicht für kapitalistische Ausbeutung, profitiert geworden - genau wie Brasilien, Süd-Korea, Taiwan, um nur einige zu nennen. Zur Maximierung ihrer Profite investieren die Imperialisten mehr und mehr politischen und neokolonialen Ländern, in denen Unterdrückungsregimes die Löhne und Arbeitsbedingungen niederhalten. Die Arbeiter in diesen Ländern erhalten nur einen geringen Teil dessen, was ihre Klasseneliten Zentren des Imperialismus bekommen. Selbst die Arbeitsplätze der BRD-Arbeiter verschwinden. Der Schiffbau verläßt Westeuropa; Stahlproduktion, Auto-Griechenland und Spanien. Mit der Konsolidierung der EG 1992, so wird westdeutschen Arbeitern schon heute erzählt, werden

den sich ihre Löhne und Sozialleistungen verringern oder sie werden ihre Arbeitsplätze verlieren. Dieser Prozeß der De-Industrialisierung ist in Nordamerika bereits kräftig im Gange und hat zur zunehmenden Verarmung der Arbeitermassen - und nationalen Minderheiten - und nationalen Entwicklung sind Solidaritätsaktionen mit den Arbeitern der Länder, in die die Kapitalisten ihre Produktion verlagern.

**DER PARLAMENTARISCHE WEG ZUM KAPITALISMUS**

Für die Arbeiter in der DDR besteht jetzt eine kritische Gefahr. Keine der größeren Oppositionen hat das Programm, um die DDR davon zu bewahren, eine zweitklassige Plantage des westlichen Kapitalismus zu werden. Die Sozialdemokraten der SPD wollen ausdrücklich zurück zum Kapitalismus, während die sich PDS Reformstierenden "dritten Weg" durch "soziale Marktwirtschaft" propagieren. Alle diese stalinistischen Konterrevolutionen. Die Intellektuellen und Kombinate manager zeigen aber Bürokraten- und Führungsinstanzen im Inneren wie des BRD-Kapitalismus. Es gibt einen Weg, der weder zurück zum Kapitalismus noch zurück zum Kommunismus der stalinistischen Bürokratie führt. Seit dem Dritten revolutionären egalitären Geist der nirgendwo ein stalinistisches Regime die Existenz wirklicher Arbeiterräte auf der Basis demokratisch gewählter Arbeiterräte den kapitalistischen Feinden der Arbeiterklasse darin überein, daß das ökonomische Versagen der Staaten, die sie regiert hat.

### Special German edition of 1917, January 1990

The SpAD must be going through a crisis of expectations. Their morale seemed low when we last saw them. The one thing they did well—distributing hundreds of thousands of leaflets and newsheets—apparently can't be continued. Their orientation toward the demoralized and depoliticized SED/PDS ranks hasn't paid off. They no longer list a Leipzig address, and, outside of Berlin, their only address is Greifswald, site of the main nuclear energy plants. Exposure of the dangerously deteriorated condition of these Chernobyl-type, first-generation technology plants has resulted in two of them being shut down. The SpAD intervened with the claim that the reported dangers were manufactured by the West. But almost no one buys this. Even the PDS agrees that bad construction, poor management and old age renders the plants unusable. SpAD arguments that only the plant workers could make the decision are not likely to get them much of a hearing.

To get a member elected to the Volkskammer, which at this point is probably their most optimistic scenario, the SpAD will have to get 0.25 percent of the vote or one vote in 400 straight proportional representation....

**MARCH 21**—The SpAD got fewer votes than we expected, less than the German Beer Drinkers' Union, which ran only in Rostock. The total, 2,396 votes, is very low. Of course the tide was running heavily in favor of reunification, but I think their inability to adjust their election propaganda to the changing realities also hurt them. When it became clear that the vote was going to be



Party leader Gregor Gysi shows off PDS 'new image'

overwhelmingly for capitalist restoration and unification, they should, without compromising on this key question, have also tried to address the more immediate questions of working-class defense and especially basic class-struggle trade-union questions. The Vereinigte Linke, with a few hundred members, addressed trade-union questions within the context of defending the working class, and ended up winning one seat in parliament, with 0.18 percent of the vote. VL supporters also actively intervened in the trade-union movement and shop-steward bodies.

We saw one DDR TV discussion with a participant from the SpAD. It was an embarrassing disaster. The Spart was a caricature of a new leftist in appearance and style, and a caricature of a Trotskyist politically. He simply read a series of slogans, and appeared unable to respond in any real way to questions about economic restructuring, rents, child care, unemployment, subsidies or currency reform.

These were all good openings, which could have been linked to working-class power and collectivized property forms. On parliamentarism, he said, "We will smash this parliament with workers councils and workers militias," while totally ignoring the question of trade-union rights, and the possible course of workers struggles in the near future. He was worse than the lowest-level SYL [Spartacus Youth League, defunct American Spartacist youth organization] recruit of the 1970s. SpAD style is lecturing and arrogant, just like the old SED style. The SpAD election leaflet emphasized defence of the USSR, but nowhere described the USSR as a degenerated workers state! Other parties in the television discussion simply ignored the SpAD speaker.

Election results show that the "capitalism now / unification now/ no interference with the trade unions" program of the conservative Allianz für Deutschland [Alliance for Germany] got its main support from the heavily industrialized south and the smaller towns and

villages. In areas where over 45 percent of the people work in industry, the Alliance got 56 percent of the vote; where service and agriculture dominate the economy, the Alliance got 30 to 42 percent. Fifty-eight percent of those describing themselves as "workers" voted for the Alliance. Only 32 percent of those described as "intelligentsia" voted for the Alliance; an equivalent percentage of this group voted for the PDS and Bündnis 90. This latter group includes the three citizens' movements, which largely led the November revolution. In cities with 200,000 or more, the Alliance got only 26.5 percent of the vote, contrasted with towns of 2,000 or less, where the right wing got over 56 percent. The smallest Alliance vote was, of course, Berlin (22 percent), where they ran third behind the SPD and PDS. The Alliance also did not get a majority in the northern areas of Rostock, Schwerin, and Neubrandenburg, nor in the areas of Potsdam (central DDR) and Frankfurt on the Oder.

The SPD, which began two months ago with over 50 percent support in the DDR, played the nationalist card, and Kohl won the game! The intellectuals who led the revolution, but couldn't address economic questions with any clarity, got very little support.

DDR workers had been accustomed to receiving benefits and instructions from an authoritative, powerful state. It seems that in the elections they transferred this passive acceptance to the BRD establishment. The workers are as yet largely unaware of the difficulties ahead in trying to transform the DDR into a fully developed part of German capitalism.

In the last weeks of the election campaign, even the SPD and the other parties considered left-of-center (like Bündnis 90) and the Greens, were afraid to go into the streets in Leipzig. Anyone carrying a DDR flag in that city was likely to be attacked. Even in Berlin, gangs of skinheads attacked groups campaigning for the alternative youth list. Right-wing youths invaded youth centers and beat up people inside. Dozens of bomb threats against leftists went unreported in the BRD, except by TAZ. The most surprising result of the election was the 16.33 percent PDS vote. Two months ago the party was demoralized and at that time would have gotten at most five percent. In the election only 26 percent of former SED members voted for the PDS! Most top and many middle-level functionaries quit, but suddenly many young people joined the PDS, and it rapidly began to build a profile of defending living standards, the social net, and trade-union rights. The PDS even claims to defend the state sector of the economy—but of course within the context of market conditions.

Their whole style has changed. PDS representatives came across as pedagogic, ultra-democratic and humble. Their candidates and other public people were probably less contaminated by past collaboration with the Stasi than the Alliance candidates and functionaries. They took the lead in amending the DDR constitution to include the right to a job, the right to housing, the unlimited right to strike, and a constitutional prohibition on lock-outs of workers. The PDS is now founded in Hamburg. Gregor Gysi, PDS secretary, says that the next BRD election will see the PDS in the Bundestag. This could mean

a real base for left social democracy in the BRD.

The newly-elected Volkskammer cannot change the constitution or basic law without collaboration between the social democrats and the Alliance. The social democrats' commitment to rapid restructuring and capitalist restoration will probably lead them to side with the BRD capitalists, who are holding out on large investments in the DDR economy until the laws and constitution are changed to allow a total capitalist takeover. BRD capitalists are rapidly gobbling up the most advanced and productive sectors of the DDR economy, such as heavy machine building, locomotive building, electronics, optics and auto assembly, or "picking the raisins out of the cake," as it's called.

The pre-"November Revolution" DDR economy presented a contradictory picture. Although the DDR was the tenth-ranking country in the world in production of goods and services, the production per worker ranked behind every EEC country except Greece and Portugal. Farming supplied a surplus for export, but was only half as productive per person as in the EEC. Much industry operated with obsolescent equipment. The chemical industry has largely 1930s level technology, and the communication and transport infrastructure badly needed replacement and modernization. Pollution of the air, water supply, food and environment led to a decline in health, and a staggering rise in illness. Infant mortality is high for an advanced industrial country. Work-place health and safety was probably even worse than in the U.S. There were *no* mechanisms by which workers could raise demands for amelioration of work-place health

hazards, since the SED claimed that all such complaints arose from petty-bourgeois life-stylist, anti-working class capitalist propaganda....

Once the border was down, the DDR effectively lost control of its currency. The erosion of the monopoly of foreign trade made DDR production vulnerable to Western market forces, just as the sharp fall in trade with the Comecon countries and increased trade problems with the USSR was idling large sectors of the export-based economy. The sizable foreign debt and growing imbalance of foreign trade confronted the SED with the necessity to sharply reduce imports and living standards. In this context, the hopes of many in the immediate post-November period for a "democratic socialist" DDR—aspirations expressed by practically *all* parties and movements—were rapidly replaced by a sense of fatalism, hopelessness and impotence. No group presented a believable or realizable solution to the economic problems, and people soon concluded that a "third way" was not possible. Today in the DDR "socialism" is one of the dirtiest words you can use. It is associated largely with Stalinist repression and commandism. The massive BRD destabilization campaign filled the programmatic vacuum with nationalism and the magic phrase "social market economy." The capitalists have won, and won big so far. But the Kohl regime cannot deliver on its promises to the DDR population. As the unpleasant aspects of the "social market" manifest themselves in the days ahead, it will become clear that there is more to carrying out a social counterrevolution than simply buying an election. ■

## *BT Visits SED/PDS Branch*

# A Glimpse Inside the 'Monolith'

**FEBRUARY 7**—We received an invitation to go and talk to members of the PDS [Party of Democratic Socialism, formerly known as the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling party of the German Democratic Republic (DDR)] in Finsterwalde, halfway between Berlin and Dresden. Of course we decided to go; a chance like this is too good to pass up. It opened our eyes to the real situation in the PDS/SED, at least in that area....

When we got there we noticed that most of the houses were quite well kept. This must be difficult given the level of air pollution. I have never been an eco-freak, but the Trabbi [DDR auto] is a nasty stinker. You can see black fumes coming out of the back of most of them. But that's nothing compared to the foul smoke pouring out of the chimneys of the factories—all of which seemed to be located right in the middle of the living quarters! The brown coal they burn produces poisonous sulphur dioxide fumes. It is literally unbearable.

We arrived just after Modrow's spectacular speech capitulating on reunification. This was earth-shaking for the SED members.

On Saturday we visited what was left of the local





SED conference, November 1989

DER SPIEGEL

PDS/SED leadership. They had never spoken to anyone from the West. Even CP members from the BRD [Federal Republic of Germany], some of whom have been permitted to visit relatives in the DDR (usually SED members), were never allowed to visit the SED offices or attend meetings or forums! Until November, even *unofficial meetings* between members of the SED and the West German CP were forbidden.

A couple of months ago there were over 5,000 SED members in the area. At this stage they still claim 1,900, but the real figure is probably considerably lower. When I was told that they had not been able to contact many of the branch leaders in the locality by letter or phone, I suggested that perhaps this indicated that the nominal membership of 1,900 included quite a few who had just not bothered to return their party books. This was met with silence.

This year they built the annual January Luxemburg/Liebkecht demonstration by scribbling a notice on the blackboard in the party office. Three hundred people turned up. But there were no letters, no phone calls, no posters and no leaflets. They say they have trouble getting notices into the paper these days. It seems that *Neues Deutschland* [ND, the PDS/SED party daily] is so busy concentrating on the large issues that it only runs announcements of demonstrations in Berlin. The machine is broken.

The PDS leaders (and members) seem totally unprepared for the upcoming elections. They do not seem to be able to produce a leaflet, brochure or even a press release. Before November, they said you could just call the party advertising department and they would send you what you wanted. Often they would send stuff that nobody wanted; often it was not even necessary to call. But in those days the SED couldn't lose elections anyway, so why worry?

When we got a chance to make a presentation to a section of the local branch, it seemed at first like we had

hit some pretty left-wing elements. But I soon began to wonder why there were no disagreements coming up. After all, Stalinists are supposed to have *some* differences with Trotskyists, aren't they? It was all a bit strange. They agreed on the necessity of workers councils (although it became clear that they only had in mind the class-collaborationist shop stewards' councils on the BRD model). They agreed that a reunified Germany could only be a dangerous imperialist power (but unfortunately they did not have much of a grasp of what "imperialist" means, apart from something you call people who disagree with you). They agreed with everything in our [German] 1917 statement. But none of this agreement meant much—they hardly seemed equipped to disagree. No one had even heard of Gramsci, nor had anyone heard of workers councils before. It had never been part of the required reading! Eventually I asked for a show of hands among those present who had read the *Communist Manifesto*. They all sat there and looked ashamed.

In the DDR it seems that the attitude toward Marx and Lenin was the same as the attitude of my classmates at school who had to read German classical poets like Schiller, and hated it. Most of them never found out what a good writer he was. When I asked about buying a set of Marx's writings and a few volumes of Luxemburg, people seemed genuinely astonished that anyone would be interested in such things.

If you want to talk politics with people, with very few exceptions, it all has to be pitched at a fairly elementary level. You cannot assume that people have read a thing by the founders of our movement. Most SED members read ND and get their politics from that. Those with decent memories could recite, more or less intelligently, the latest speech or directive—but that was it. Only one of all the PDS/SED members I met owned copies of the six-volume Marx/Engels and six-volume Lenin sets. He was also the only one who had read all of *State and Revolution* (my god, it's only 120 pages long!) or *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. What a superb job the Stalinists have done in eradicating any kind of Marxist tradition in the DDR, especially considering the numbers of old communists living there. I am still somewhat shocked at the appalling political level.

After a while it became clear that the immediate concerns of the PDS/SED members were not really political, but rather organizational. They seemed to have absolutely no experience whatsoever with party organization in our sense of the word; they could not summon all their members to appear at a certain time and place; they seem to have no idea about how to create functioning units. (They don't appear to have units any more since the work-place and living area units collapsed.) The members who still meet do so almost casually, at work or in their residential units. Many of the PDS members we met seemed anxious to get things organized, but it was apparent that they shared no clear set of ideas (program) around which to reorganize. They did not know whether they would be able to agree on a program, and generally seemed to think that under the circumstances it was best to avoid possibly controversial points, because this could lead to a split. Talk about chickens with their heads cut off! ■

## BT Statement on DDR Elections

# Critical Support to the SpAD

*The following is a translation of a statement distributed in the DDR during the recent election campaign.*

23 February 1990

Dear Comrades:

At this decisive historical juncture for the German working class it is the duty of all revolutionaries to unite with any forces prepared to struggle against capitalist reunification and to defend the system of collectivized property in the DDR. Your "Open Letter to All Communists" proclaims that, "Independent of existing political differences on many questions, we call upon all those who share our deep concern and wish jointly with us to defend the social gains of the DDR, to agree on and carry out actions with us." In this spirit we of the Bolshevik Tendency (BT—an organization founded by former cadres of the International Communist League—ICL) call on all workers and all those who defend the social gains of the DDR to vote for the candidates of the Spartacist Workers Party (SpAD) in the March 18 elections.

While calling for a vote for the SpAD, it is our duty to make clear our differences with the Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands (TLD) which organized the SpAD and the American leaders of the ICL to which the SpAD is affiliated. Only a full and frank discussion of political differences within the left can clarify the road forward. We address our criticisms to all supporters of the SpAD, although we understand that the comrades of the Spartakist-Gruppen [DDR supporters of the TLD] are new to the ICL and cannot be held politically responsible for the historical mistakes of the ICL.

### ICL's Imaginary "Political Revolution"

We must note first of all that the SpAD/ICL's assertion that the DDR today is in the midst of a proletarian political revolution is simply false. While the SED-PDS is in disarray, it is unfortunately not the case that, as yet, the working class is actively engaged in a revolutionary struggle to wrest political power from the discredited Stalinist bureaucrats and the parties promoting capitalist reunification which are already filling the power vacuum. A workers political revolution can open the road toward genuine socialism through instituting proletarian democracy and the rule of workers councils. We urgently hope that the workers of the DDR take the road of proletarian political revolution—but it does no good to mistake our subjective desires for reality. As we noted in our January statement:

"At the moment there is a political vacuum in the DDR. Unless workers councils are organized which establish their own organs of administration this vacuum will shortly be filled to the disadvantage of the working class through a newly elected or appointed Volkskammer

[DDR parliament]. Workers councils must immediately institute supervision and control over factory and economic managers to stop the joint ventures and other forms of penetration and control by Western capitalism already being put into place by Kombinat managers and foreign trade functionaries."

At every point in the class struggle revolutionaries can only project the next step correctly if we face reality squarely. As Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the October Revolution, noted in 1928 in *The Third International After Lenin*: "On ascending the stairs a different type of movement is required from that which is needed to descend. Most dangerous is such a situation as finds a man, with the lights out, raising his foot to ascend when the steps before him lead downward." The SpAD/ICL claim that a proletarian political revolution is already underway, yet they cannot say exactly where it is taking place, who is carrying it out, or against whom. A very peculiar "revolution" indeed. This notion of a political revolution as something suspended in midair which simply "unfolds" as some kind of disembodied, semi-automatic process, can only disorient anyone who takes it seriously.

Never has the inextricable connection between proletarian political revolution and defense of collectivized property been clearer than it is today. Prime Minister Hans Modrow, as the representative of what remains of the SED-PDS "reform" wing, came out fully in favor of reunification, if only Kohl would agree to "neutrality." The treachery of the Stalinist misleaders is something the Trotskyist program allowed us to anticipate. In our January statement we noted that:

"Nowhere has even the most 'reform' of the Stalinists called for or supported workers councils as the basis of state power as Lenin did in 1917. This is no accident. The creation of such bodies can come about only through the destruction of all wings of the bureaucracy."

An actual proletarian political revolution in the DDR would pit the power of the insurgent proletariat against those elements of the Stalinist military and police apparatus which remain loyal to the regime. In Hungary in 1956 the workers created their own fighting squads and workers councils to coordinate the struggle. But today in the DDR there are no real workers councils. The so-called workers councils being formed are really shop stewards' bodies which only aspire to the class-collaborationist BRD-model of "Mitbestimmung" (worker-management committees). None of them are interested in the struggle for real workers power. It is vitally necessary to form workers councils to provide an organizational structure for the class-conscious elements of the working class to defend collectivized property and carry out the struggle for power.

In the "Open Letter to All Communists" the TLD calls for "joint patrols by soldiers of the Red Army, the NVA



WIDE WORLD

### East German workers rose against Stalinism In June 1953

[DDR army], members of the Volkspolizei [People's Police], VP auxiliaries and workers defense groups from the factories" against fascists. Of course revolutionary workers must be prepared to form a bloc with all anti-fascist elements—including Stalinists—against the fascist vermin. But the SpAD's proposed united front with the existing military apparatus, with its officer corps still relatively intact, is an implicit recognition that a political revolution is not currently underway. Moreover, the fact that the NVA and VPs, as the historic agencies of the rule of the SED, cannot stop the growth of capitalist reaction, underlines the necessity of proletarian political revolution. Indeed, a wing of the NVA officer corps supports Modrow's reunification program and is calling for an immediate alliance with the Bundeswehr.

### Adaptation to Stalinism

While the TLD's "Open Letter" talks vaguely about the necessity to "replace the arbitrary rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy," it refers to the DDR simply as "our workers state." This formulation also appears in other ICL material. In fact the DDR, like all the states of East Europe, is a *deformed* workers state—to transform it into a healthy workers state, it is necessary to carry out a revolutionary struggle to overturn the Stalinist rulers and dismantle what remains of their repressive apparatus. From a Trotskyist standpoint this omission is an elemen-

tary error, one which, given the considerable political experience of the leaders of the ICL, we can hardly suppose was accidental.

This political deviation is paralleled by the TLD's 29 December 1989 letter to General B.V. Snetkov, Soviet commander in Germany, which appeals to him as a fellow "internationalist" to permit the "peaceful development of the political revolution unfolding in the DDR." This same letter, devoid of even a hint of criticism, applauds the Soviet military for standing as "a bulwark against those who dream of a new fascist nightmare" in Germany. This ignores the fact that the Soviet military for over four decades has also stood as a bulwark of the continuing rule of a succession of corrupt, anti-working class Stalinist parasites. On 17 June 1953 it was Soviet motorized units that gunned down workers on the streets of Berlin and preserved the Stalinist regime. We note that the TLD sent a copy of its paean to Snetkov's boss, Gorbachev. Perhaps the TLD leadership also considers him a fellow "internationalist."

Political adaptation to elements of the Stalinist bureaucracy is nothing new to the TLD/ICL. In 1982 the TLD's American parent, the Spartacist League/US, organized a contingent for a demonstration in Washington under the name of the "Yuri Andropov Battalion." At that time the ICL tops insisted that it was "obscene" to compare Andropov—who organized the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian workers political revolution—with Stalin. Posing as the Kremlin's American surrogates is

something that the ICL leaders would perhaps like to forget, but it provides an index of their capacity for erratic political gyrations.

While the ICL correctly opposed the counterrevolutionary course of Solidarnosc in 1981 (as did the founding cadres of the Bolshevik Tendency), the International Secretariat of the ICL put forward a motion that was subsequently approved by the TLD, declaring that not only would they support military blows by the Stalinists against the counterrevolution, but that they would also "take responsibility in advance for whatever idiocies and atrocities [the Stalinists] may commit." This motion was adopted at the 1981 conference of the TLD while a counterposed motion supporting military actions against capitalist reaction, but specifying that the group would "take no responsibility for acts of anti-proletarian character" was voted down and its mover driven out of the organization! In the 1980s the ICL leadership went so far as to hang a picture of General Jaruzelski in its international headquarters in New York.

### For Leninist Egalitarianism! Against Slander and Bureaucratism!

While the SpAD/ICL raises the correct call for a Leninist-egalitarian party in Germany, the ICL itself is not organized along these lines but rather on the principle of unquestioning obedience to the leadership, and in particular to the group's guru, James Robertson. "J.R., J.R. is always right; and comrades that will always remain..." [parody of two lines of a well-known SED song]. In Lenin's party there was a lively and genuinely democratic internal life, which was reflected in vigorous internal debate and the frequent organization of internal factions and tendencies to argue for their particular views. But in the ICL there has not been an organized factional opposition for *twenty years!*

Cadres considered capable of presenting a political challenge to the leadership have been ruthlessly purged. In some cases comrades (including those of the BT) have been slandered as "racists" or even "fascists." A particularly ugly case of this occurred in Berlin in 1982 when Uli Sandler, a TLD central committee member, resigned from the organization. *After* he quit, the TLD leadership launched a vile slander campaign claiming he was a "fascist." Sandler has spent many years in the left in the BRD [West Germany] and has always been an active anti-fascist militant. Today he is a respected member of the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes--Bund der Antifaschisten (VVN).

While the SpAD, section of the ICL, calls for a "Leninist-Egalitarian Party," the ICL's top leader enjoys substantial material privileges at the expense of the membership. James Robertson occupies an extensive two-story Manhattan apartment, with a hot tub installed with organizational funds and labor. Several years ago the group conducted a fund drive among its members to purchase an expensive summer house in California for the use of Robertson and his entourage.

While we do not believe the core leadership of the ICL is in any way revolutionary, we are nevertheless critically



Hungarian workers challenge Stalinist rule, 1956

supporting the SpAD election campaign because it is carried out on a clear axis of opposition to capitalist restoration in the DDR while calling for the creation of workers councils as the means to prevent a capitalist takeover. None of the other groups participating in the elections, including the Vereinigte Linke and the Nelken, differentiate as clearly as the SpAD between workers councils and bourgeois parliamentarianism. At this moment it is vital to rally the working class against the social democrats' promotion of a counterrevolutionary capitalist reunification, and to link this struggle to the necessity for workers political revolution in the DDR, the Soviet Union and throughout Eastern Europe.

We advance these criticisms to alert the revolutionary-minded workers and communists drawn to the SpAD campaign to the reality of the ICL. Forging a new revolutionary international worthy of the proud tradition of Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht necessitates a struggle not only against Stalinism and social democracy, but also against the ICL pretenders to the mantle of Trotsky. The truth is revolutionary and revolutionaries can have nothing to fear from the truth.

With Leninist greetings,  
J  
for the Bolshevik Tendency

### Contact the Bolshevik Tendency

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# Eastern Europe...

*continued from page 2*

them in the kingdom of "free enterprise." This poses an acute problem for the new pro-capitalist governments. Their main asset is mass support, yet they have a mandate for social counterrevolution that requires them to savage their base.

The projected absorption of the DDR by West Germany would create potentially explosive contradictions as the bourgeoisie attempts to make the working class assume the costs of the *Anschluss*. But the West German capitalists possess both a powerful state apparatus and immense economic resources with which to impose their will. Elsewhere in the region however, the lack of an effective repressive apparatus presents huge problems for the new governments. The existing military/police apparatuses inherited from the old regimes are in a state of disarray and cannot be relied on without first undergoing deep purges and new selections of personnel. This will not be easily accomplished, and in any case, requires time. Meanwhile the economic situation is rapidly going from bad to worse. There is not going to be any new Marshall Plan. To pull off the Pinochet-style "economic miracle" the new regimes hope for, they will need the military capacity to crush working-class resistance.

At this point the openly fascistic formations, like the anti-Semitic Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN), which aspire to translate the anger and desperation of the plebian masses into pogroms and white terror, are too marginal to do the job. Without a sufficient coun-

**Hungarian workers political revolution, 1956**

terweight to a cohesive working class, the embryonic capitalist regimes remain extremely vulnerable as the initial euphoria of "freedom" wears off, and the masses begin to comprehend exactly what life under capitalism means.

Now more than ever, the masses of East Europe need a revolutionary leadership committed to defending collectivized property and instituting the direct political rule of the working class, i.e., the perspective of *proletarian political revolution*. The first qualification of such a leadership is the ability to face the truth squarely and acknowledge the gravity of the restorationist danger. On this score most of the groupings of the ostensibly Trotskyist left come up short. Whether out of reluctance to criticize "mass movements," or unwillingness to admit that the present political tide is not running in the direction of progress, the majority of the left pretends that it lives in a world more to its liking than the one that exists. This can only disarm the working class politically in the face of the reactionary onslaught.

## The Collapse of Stalinism: Trotsky's Prognosis Vindicated

The test of any political theory is its ability to explain great historical events. Over fifty years ago Trotsky characterized the Stalinist bureaucracy as a privileged social stratum, resting on the economic foundations created by the October Revolution of 1917. He pointed out that the bureaucracy's political stranglehold prevented the democratic input and control by the producers necessary for the proper functioning of a collectivized economy. In

BBC HULTON



the *Transitional Program* Trotsky predicted that, "Each day added to [the bureaucracy's] domination helps rot the foundations of the socialist elements of economy and increases the chances for capitalist restoration."

Trotsky also argued that the Stalinists' quest for wealth and status contradicted the egalitarian property forms on which their rule was based. This is why the Stalinist caste could never congeal into a new ruling class. Trotsky further asserted that the bureaucratic oligarchy remained a highly unstable social layer, vulnerable to either working-class uprisings or capitalist-restorationist currents. This analysis has been powerfully confirmed in recent months by the dramatic disintegration of what various impressionists had depicted as an unchanging totalitarian monolith. If nothing else, current developments in the "Soviet Bloc" conclusively refute all claims that the Stalinist bureaucracies constitute a new ruling class.

For many years the best known proponent of the "new class" theory was Max Shachtman, who split from the Trotskyist movement in 1940, and went on to claim that the Stalinists represented a "bureaucratic collectivist" class, neither bourgeois nor proletarian. Shachtman's new class theory was so indeterminate, and his eventual defection to the imperialist camp so ignominious, that few leftists now lay claim to the doctrine of "bureaucratic collectivism" in its original form.

A variant of Shachtman's theory is that of "state capitalism," according to which the Stalinist bureaucracy has transformed itself into a new, collective, capitalist ruling class. The largest "state cap" tendency is headed by Tony Cliff, leader of the British Socialist Workers Party. Cliff's grouping originally deserted the Trotskyist movement in the early 1950s, just as the Cold War was turning into a shooting war in Korea. In North America Cliff's followers are known as the "International Socialists."

While the "theory" of state capitalism absolved Cliff and his co-thinkers from the uncomfortable task of defending the Soviet bloc against imperialism, and made them "respectable" in their social-democratic milieu, it could not explain the Cold War or the social revolutions led (and misled) by the Stalinists in the Third World. Nor could it explain why, if there was no fundamental antagonism between the two variants of "capitalism," the imperialists fought so ferociously to contain and roll back "communism" from the Chinese revolution of the 1940s, to Korea, Vietnam and Cuba.

### Harman vs. Cliff on the Character of the Bureaucracy

While the Cliffites have spent most of their time enthusing about the collapse of Stalinism and promoting various social-democratic oppositionists as "revolutionary Marxists," their occasional attempts to explain events (rather than merely describe them) clearly expose the insoluble contradictions of their theory.

In a piece which appeared in the press of the American International Socialist Organization, Chris Harman, the British Cliffites' leading Soviet expert, explained that:

"The market is a code-word for restructuring the economy in Eastern Europe. Those sections which are not competitive with the West are to be wiped out, workers in other sections will have to work harder for less" (*Socialist Worker* [U.S.], January). True. But if wholesale privatization will have such disastrous consequences for the working class, it should surely be the elementary duty of Marxists to defend the *status quo* of state ownership—call it "bureaucratic collectivist," "state capitalist" or anything else—against the "free market" onslaught. Yet such a call for the defense of state ownership would flatly contradict the visceral anti-Sovietism which defines the International Socialists' worldview.

The Cliffites seek to conceal the manifest bankruptcy of their theory as a guide to action by downplaying the restorationist danger and instead singling out the rapidly disintegrating Stalinist state apparatuses as the main threat to the working class. According to Harman:

"It is premature to predict exactly how political life will now develop in Eastern Europe. What can be said with certainty is that the old ruling class is nowhere finished yet.

"This is true even if, as seems possible in Hungary, the old ruling party collapses completely.

"A ruling class and a ruling party are never quite the same thing...

"...the class can preserve the real source of its power and privileges, its control over the means of production, even when the party falls apart. This was shown in Germany, Italy and Spain after the fall of their fascisms.

"The formal networks binding together police chiefs, army officers, government ministers and industrialists disintegrated.

"But informal networks remained, as did the drive to accumulate which gave them a common class goal against those below them. It was not long before they were able to build new ruling parties just as capable of defending their interests as the old ones had.

"In Eastern Europe, whether these networks stick to the old parties or switch to new ones, they will be preparing now for the next round in the fight..."

—*Ibid.*

Harman is apparently not concerned that his superficial analogy directly contradicts his mentor, Tony Cliff. In *State Capitalism in Russia*, Cliff compared the two systems of "class rule" as follows:

"Wherever there is a fusion of economics and politics it is theoretically wrong to distinguish between political and economic revolution, or between political and economic counter-revolution. The bourgeoisie can exist as the bourgeoisie, owning private property, under different forms of government: under a feudal monarchy, a constitutional monarchy, a bourgeois republic...In all these cases there is a direct relation of ownership between the bourgeoisie and the means of production. In all of them the state is independent of the *direct* control of the bourgeoisie, and yet in none of them does the bourgeoisie cease to be a ruling class. Where the state is the repository of the means of production, there is an *absolute* fusion between economics and politics; political expropriation also means economic expropriation."

Cliff at least recognizes that the "informal network" that binds capitalist classes together, regardless of which political faction is in charge of the state, is nothing less



The crisis in Eastern Europe has prompted discussion amongst groups on the left. On 26 February and 26 March the Bolshevik Tendency debated representatives from the International Socialists (Cliffites) and the NDP (Canadian social-democrats) in Kingston, Canada. The Communist Party of Canada was invited to participate, but turned down the offer.

than *private property in the means of production*. And if, as Cliff and Harman will readily concede, the absence of private property is a distinctive feature of the collectivized economies of the USSR and Eastern Europe, then the only way that the Stalinist "ruling class" can maintain its power is through an absolute monopoly on the state. Why then are the Stalinists relinquishing their political monopoly in one Eastern European country after another? Are they the first ruling class in history to abandon power without a fight? If so, isn't Harman wrong to call Eastern European opposition leaders "reformists," who are naive about the dangers of Stalinist retrenchment? The reformist strategy would appear to be working.

### Stalinist Bureaucracy: Caste Not Class

The Stalinists do not behave like a ruling class because they are *not* a ruling class. The main enemy of the workers of Eastern Europe today is not the various national bureaucracies, which are in an advanced stage of decomposition, but the capitalists of the U.S. and West Germany, who seek to reintegrate these economies into the imperialist world market.

In a particularly opaque piece in the February issue of *Socialist Worker Review*, the Cliffites' monthly magazine, Chris Bambery claims that:

"In reality, the choice for the bureaucracy is whether to cling to the old state capitalist methods of the past or to adopt policies similar to Thatcherite privatisation. Both Gorbachev and Thatcher are concerned with increasing exploitation."

Bambery's notion that the impulse for the projected privatization of the economies of Eastern Europe originates in a conscious decision by the Stalinist rulers aimed at consolidating their rule by "increasing exploitation" is ludicrous. The drive toward capitalist restoration can only further disintegrate whatever social power the Stalinist apparatuses still possess. When and if the Com-

mon countries reintroduce capitalism, the Stalinist bureaucracies will be dismantled. The bulk of the *nomenklatura* is well aware that their replacement by the capitalist market as the regulator of economic activity will entail a loss of both material privileges and social status.

In the *Revolution Betrayed*, Trotsky anticipated that, "The fall of the present bureaucratic dictatorship, if it were not replaced by a new socialist power, would thus mean a return to capitalist relations with a catastrophic decline of industry and culture." In *State Capitalism in Russia*, Cliff ruled out such a development: "*The internal forces are not able to restore individual capitalism in Russia...*" Cliff's mistaken projection was not just an unlucky guess; it is a necessary corollary to the claim that the Soviet bureaucracy is a new ruling class rooted in a new form of class society, rather than a parasitic growth on working-class property forms.

The precipitate panic and desperate backpedalling of the Eastern European bureaucracies in the face of recent events has graphically revealed the profound instability of these bureaucratic castes. Those elements of the bureaucracy who can, are already scrambling to find places in the emerging capitalist order, not as members of a Stalinist "ruling class," but as individual entrepreneurs. Those bureaucrats who see no place for themselves in a Western-dominated economy will be compelled, regardless of their motives, to throw in their lot with the sections of the working class disenchanted with the "market reforms." This is not the behavior of a ruling class, but rather that of an unstable social layer torn between major contending forces in any decisive class confrontation.

The current crisis of Stalinism has revealed Tony Cliff's doctrine as what it has always been: a smokescreen for political accommodation to anti-Soviet prejudice. The Cliffites' inability to answer the most elementary questions posed by the class struggle in Eastern Europe or explain, much less predict, the behavior of the Stalinists, testifies to the complete lack of scientific merit of the

theory of "state capitalism." Worse, if followed by leftists in Eastern Europe, it could only mean abstention in the major class question posed today: whether or not to defend the system of collectivized property (which alone can provide the basis of democratic planning) against those who would restore private ownership in the means of production.

## USec Embraces "Dynamic" of Social Counterrevolution

Unlike the "state capitalists," Professor Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec) claims to stand in the tradition of Trotsky, including his position on the "Russian Question." Thus, they characterize the USSR as a degenerated workers state and recognize the states set up by the Kremlin in Eastern Europe after World War II as deformed workers states. But the USec has been, if anything, even more Stalinophobic and less fastidious about the character of the "mass movements" they champion in Eastern Europe than the Cliffites. The Mandelites have embraced any and all anti-Stalinist currents in the region, including those with openly fascist sympathies. The 18 September 1989 issue of the USec's main English language organ, *International Viewpoint* (IV), published a revolting appeal for the rehabilitation of the Estonian "Forest Brothers," an anti-Semitic band of Nazi-collaborators (see "How Low Can Mandel Go?", 1917 No. 7).

The same Stalinophobic reflex was evident in the USec's enthusing over Polish Solidarnosc, despite the latter's adoption of an openly capitalist-restorationist program at its September 1981 congress. Today Solidarnosc, at the head of the Polish government, is aggressively pushing the program of capitalist restoration that it adopted nine years ago. The human costs for the Polish

**Mandel supports all anti-Stalinist movements:  
How about this one in Sophia?**

DER SPIEGEL



workers will be enormous. In the 25 March *Toronto Star*, liberal columnist Richard Gwyn commented that, so far: "The scale of the pain is—to us—utterly unimaginable. In January, the real incomes of Poles dropped by one-third." Moreover:

"The second shock, starting this summer, will knock some people flat on their faces when they find themselves unemployed while others, the black-marketeers and joint-venture employees, will skip and dance to the head of the income queue.

"There is a risk of conflict that is growing all the time," says Maciej Jankowski, vice-chairman of the Solidarity union's Warsaw district and a government loyalist."

None of this has prompted Mandel to rethink his position. His American adherents in the Socialist Action grouping, who have raised the openly counterrevolutionary call for the "unconditional" (i.e., capitalist) reunification of Germany, still use an adaptation of the Solidarnosc logo on the masthead of their newspaper. The USec's European leadership, which is not quite so clumsy, attempts to distance itself from Solidarnosc in power, while remaining completely unrepentant about having tailed Walesa & Co. all the way to the Sejm.

## Pablote Objectivists: See No Evil

The USec leadership rationalizes its adaptation to the burgeoning pro-imperialist movements for "democracy" in Eastern Europe by downplaying the restorationist threat. In a lengthy analytical piece that appeared in the 30 October 1989 *International Viewpoint*, Mandel wrote:

"The main question in the political struggles underway is not the restoration of capitalism. The main question is whether these struggles head in the direction of an anti-bureaucratic political revolution or of a partial or total elimination of the democratic freedoms acquired by the masses under glasnost. *The main fight is not between pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist forces. It is between the bureaucracy and the toiling masses...*"

—emphasis added

To back this assertion Mandel points to the "objective logic" of class forces. Noting that, "In none of the bureaucratized workers' states does the petty bourgeoisie and middle bourgeoisie represent more than a small minority of the society..." He concludes: "The only minimally realistic possibility for arriving at such a result [capitalism] is relying outright on the 'reform' wing of the bureaucracy." But even this is no cause for worry, because for the:

"very great majority of the bureaucracy, the restoration of capitalism would reduce their power and privileges. Only a small minority would or could transform themselves into real entrepreneurs of big industrial or financial firms..."

"Assuming that the bureaucracy is heading in this direction means assuming that it is ready to commit hara-kiri as a crystallized social caste."

Mandel goes on to assert that the workers and poor peasants will never embrace capitalism because, "The weight of the ideological factor...remains subordinate to the confrontation of real social interests." In Poland:

"However delighted they may be by Solidarnosc's spectacular political victory...and however great the real

ideological influence (often exaggerated abroad) of the church and nationalism, the Polish workers will act decisively to defend their standard of living, their jobs and even the miserable social security that they have gained when any government, even one led by Solidarnosc, attacks them. It is their interests and not any 'ideological values' that in the last analysis will determine their day-to-day behavior..."

—*Ibid.*

## Barnesites' Criminal Idlcy

Jack Barnes, leader of the American Socialist Workers Party, Mandel's partners in the USec, also sees the key issue in Eastern Europe as one of democracy versus Stalinism. The Barnesites, who are in the habit of uncritically retailing every pronouncement of the Cuban bureaucracy, have uncharacteristically taken issue with Fidel Castro over this question. In the 9 March issue of the *Militant*, SWP leader Cindy Jaquith criticized Castro for denouncing the "ferocious anticommunism" of Solidarnosc and its allies. Jaquith lectures the Cuban jefe that "it is not the case that the fight for democratic rights in Eastern Europe hurts Cuba; just the opposite." She continues:

"It is not socialism that is being dealt a blow by this upsurge, but Stalinism, which has kept a counterrevolutionary grip on the working classes of these countries for decades. And by dealing a blow to Stalinism, the workers are dealing a giant blow to world imperialism, which has relied on the stability of Stalinist rule in Eastern Europe to maintain the status quo for 40 years."

To portray the reopening of this major sector of the world economy to capitalist penetration as "a giant blow to world imperialism" is so completely at variance with reality that it defies description. Even the Barnesites must know that a return to capitalism in Eastern Europe will mean an orgy of anti-Semitic pogroms, attacks on women's rights, wholesale reduction of living standards for the masses, and the transformation of millions of workers to homeless paupers. Yet Jaquith brightly opines:

"as millions of workers in Eastern Europe confront the devastating consequences to their living standards and working conditions resulting from the introduction of capitalist methods, they will resist. And they will reach out for revolutionary ideas that have been denied them for decades..."

What will the SWP hand the future paupers of Eastern Europe when they "reach out"? Remaindered copies of the speeches of deposed Third-World bonapartists Thomas Sankara and Maurice Bishop?

## False Consciousness In the Proletariat

Those SWPers and USec members who can think, and who are not cynics, should be deeply troubled by the attitude of their leaders. If the workers will always defend their interests "decisively," why did they vote in overwhelming numbers for the pro-capitalist Solidarnosc candidates in the first place? The monumental false consciousness of the Polish working class, which im-

agines that it has friends from the White House to the Vatican, demonstrates that class consciousness is not an automatic function of objective social interest, as Mandel and Jaquith suppose. If it were, socialism would have triumphed long ago.

Humanity makes its own history, but often not as it intends. When workers act on the basis of a faulty understanding of their objective situation major defeats for the class can result. The history of the American trade-union movement contains abundant examples of white workers striking against the hiring of blacks, to "protect" their jobs. The Ulster Workers Council strike of 1974, one of the most powerful and successful labor actions in the recent history of the British Isles, was conducted with the aim of maintaining Protestant supremacy. The British miners' strike of 1984-85 was defeated in part because a majority of the Nottinghamshire miners scabbed on their fellow workers.

Polish workers do not compare their lot with that of the impoverished masses of Latin America, but with the skilled workers of Western Europe and the U.S. They do not see the squalid ghettos in which American blacks and immigrant workers are imprisoned, nor the millions of homeless indigents sleeping in cardboard boxes. Nor do they see the image of their future in the devastated industrial belts of the American Midwest or the north of England. Instead, their gaze is fixed upon the full shop windows, the VCRs, and the well-appointed suburban houses portrayed in capitalist propaganda as the birthright of all who live in the realm of "free enterprise."

## The Necessity of Revolutionary Leadership

The attempt to reimpose capitalist exploitation on Eastern Europe will undoubtedly provoke massive resistance from the working class. But each defeat for the workers *in the present* weakens their capacity to fight back *in the future*. The Polish workers would have had a better chance of turning back the restorationist tide had they broken with Solidarnosc *before* it came to power. They will be in a stronger position by mounting a struggle against the Solidarnosc government *now* rather than waiting until millions are thrown out of the factories and living standards are slashed further.

The objective class position of workers in society makes their struggle for power possible, but it does not guarantee success. The workers are best able to fight when they are politically armed against the false conceptions that paralyze their capacity for struggle, and when they are alerted, *at every step of the way*, to the dangers that threaten them. This is the task of revolutionary leadership. Panglossian assurances that the "objective logic" of the class struggle will automatically lead the workers to reject false ideas, and act out their role in accordance with some predetermined "Marxist" script is, in the end, a rationale for abdicating the struggle for Marxist consciousness within the working class.

Such rationales are not new in the history of the socialist movement. Lenin's Bolshevik party was forged in struggle against a doctrine known as "economism" or the "spontaneity of the masses." According to the

economists, the day-to-day economic struggles of the class would somehow lead to the "historically inevitable" triumph of socialism. In rejecting such doctrines, Lenin counterposed the need to organize the politically conscious minority of the class into a vanguard party committed to combat bourgeois consciousness in the working class and win influence for the revolutionary program. Mandel's pronouncements to the effect that the workers "interests" and not their "ideological values" will determine their day-to-day behavior have far more in common with economism than with Leninism, a legacy the USec falsely claims.

### Workers Power: Left Face of the Third Camp

The British centrists of Workers Power, who can usually be found a step or two to the left of the USec, seem more alert to the dangers of capitalist restoration. The September 1989 issue of *Workers Power* proclaimed: "Poland—No Return to Capitalism!" In 1981, while the USec was singing the praises of the "dynamic" embodied by the counterrevolutionary Solidarnosc leadership, Workers Power took a more critical attitude. But a close examination of the political record reveals that Workers Power's "leftism" is nothing more than a posture. When the show-down came in December 1981, as the Stalinists moved to suppress the counterrevolutionary leadership of Solidarnosc, Workers Power joined the USec and various other fake-Trotskyist outfits in defense of this openly capitalist-restorationist movement. Eight years later the same Solidarnosc leadership, espousing the same program, has finally made it into the halls of power, intent on setting up a market economy. When it counted, Workers Power was on the wrong side of the barricades.

The March issue of *Workers Power* rationalizes its Stalinophobia as follows:

"spontaneous working class opposition to Stalinism is likely to equate Stalinism with the revolutionary movement to which it owes its origins. This confusion can be overcome, not by siding with the Stalinists against the working class, but by basing ourselves on the mobilised working class in its progressive struggles."

"Progressive struggles" are all very well, but when the working class is mobilized by the forces of clerical reaction and capitalist restoration, as it was in Poland, Workers Power falls right in behind.

Despite its ostensible Soviet defensism, Workers Power has not travelled very far from its origins in Tony Cliff's International Socialists. An article on German reunification in the November 1989 *Workers Power* called, "For the expulsion of foreign troops from both states." This is nothing more than a concretization of the Cliffite slogan, "Neither Washington Nor Moscow." The March 1990 issue notes that "NATO is an imperialist alliance" and proclaims, "we fight for its dissolution and for the unconditional withdrawal of all its forces to their country of origin." Very good. But the article continues:

"The Warsaw Pact was created in response to the imperialist threat to the Soviet Union and those states it had conquered. Whilst its troops were and are a form of



ERIC BOUVET—GAMMA LIAISON

### Soviet tank units leave Hungary: Stalinophobic Workers Power is glad to see Warsaw Pact disintegrate

defence of the post-capitalist property relations of those states, the only combat they have ever undertaken has been the suppression of the insurgent working classes....and *we are in favour of its dissolution and the withdrawal of its troops.*"

—emphasis added

If the Warsaw Pact increased the defensive capacity of the deformed workers states against imperialist assault, why call for its dissolution? This is not just muddle-headedness. As its defense of capitalist-restorationist Solidarnosc demonstrates, Workers Power represents the "left" face of Stalinophobia in the ostensibly Trotskyist milieu.

The attitude of revolutionaries toward the Soviet military in the deformed workers states depends on the concrete circumstances. Insofar as it represents a bulwark against imperialist military pressure, or domestic counterrevolution, we defend it. Unlike Workers Power, we did not oppose Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Had the Soviet Union intervened in Vietnam against the imperialists, as the Chinese army did during the Korean War, we would have supported it militarily.

Where the Soviet army is used against the working class, as in the DDR in 1953 or Hungary in 1956, we demand its immediate withdrawal and defend the insurgents. In the DDR last fall Soviet troops did not pose any immediate danger to the mobilizations of the working class. Given the relative disparity between the military and economic weight of the DDR and West Germany, the withdrawal of the Soviet military presence would significantly weaken the defense of collectivized property. While paying lip service to the distinction between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, Workers Power's position of even-handed opposition to both is pure third campism.

## Spartacist Hallucinations and the Political Revolution

The U.S.-based Spartacist League (SL), and its satellites in the "International Communist League" (ICL) recognize that capitalist restoration, and not a resurgent Stalinist bureaucracy, is the main danger facing the workers of the region. For this reason we extended critical support to the candidates of the "Spartacist Workers Party" (SpAD) in the March 18 elections in the DDR (see statement reprinted in this issue).

Yet while the SpAD calls for the formation of "Leninist-Egalitarian" parties in East Europe, the ICL itself is little more "egalitarian" than Ceausescu's Romania. Any recruits to the SpAD who think they are joining a democratic group are in for a rude awakening.

The ICL's departures from Trotskyism go beyond the autocratic nature of its internal regime. There is a strain in their treatment of the crisis of Stalinism that dovetails with the pseudo-optimism of the U.Sec. Immediately after the Tiananmen Square massacre last year, *Workers Vanguard* (WV, 9 June 1989) triumphantly proclaimed: "Chinese Stalinism has provoked a political revolution that may well spell the doom of this bureaucratic, anti-worker regime" (emphasis added). The article concluded, "That revolution has now begun." But there was no political revolution in China last spring. In our statement on the Beijing massacre, we commented:

"Various impressionistic self-proclaimed 'Trotskyists'—from Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat to the Spartacist Tendency—declared that a full-fledged political revolution was underway. While the upheavals were enormous in scope and certainly *potentially* revolutionary, they did not constitute what Trotskyists could characterize as a political revolution. First, any serious attempt to replace the CCP would require revolutionary institutions capable of challenging and ultimately replacing the existing bureaucratic state power. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which *was* an attempted political revolution, threw up workers councils, which could have become the main institutions of *state power* had the workers prevailed. But the Chinese 'democracy movement'...created no organizational forms which could have constituted a framework for state power. The aim of the movement was not to destroy but to *reform* the institutions of bureaucratic rule.

"Secondly, a political revolution in a deformed workers state would aim to throw out the bureaucracy, while preserving state ownership of the means of production. The 'democracy movement' possessed no such clarity regarding its objectives."

Some people interpreted the Spartacist references to political revolution in Beijing as only a premature and over-enthusiastic reaction to the Chinese upheaval. But the same error reappears in the group's coverage of events in the DDR. A front-page article in the 29 December 1989 *Workers Vanguard* begins: "A political revolution is unfolding in the German Democratic Republic..." The 26 January WV features an article headlined: "A Chicago College Student Sees It Firsthand—The Political Revolution in East Germany" which reports from "the midst of the unfolding workers political revolution against Stalinist bureaucratic rule."

Why do the Spartacists insist on seeing proletarian political revolutions where none exist? Veterans of the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.) of the 1960s and 70s can recall their leadership's attempts to win new members and reassure old ones with claims that every organizational initiative would result in a "broader, deeper, more profound" mobilization of the masses. The same "everything's going our way" syndrome that prompts Ernest Mandel to argue that the objective logic of the class struggle will lead inexorably to the triumph of the political revolution, leads James Robertson to claim that it is already in progress.

You've heard us talk a lot about the political revolution, Robertson might tell a starry-eyed Chicago college student or an older member whose commitment is waning, and if you belong to that small minority of our members still in the habit of reading, you've probably read about it in *The Revolution Betrayed*. Well, now you can *see* the political revolution with your very own eyes. Join (or stay in) the Spartacist League and go to the DDR!

So a few college students sign on and perhaps some long-suffering cadres dig a little deeper, hoping that maybe this will turn out to be the big wave they've been waiting for. But temporary organizational gains made by such methods tend to dissipate very quickly when the promised breakthrough doesn't materialize. As Robertson well knows, the drunken euphoria of a Saturday night can turn into in a pretty wicked hangover on Sunday morning. And right now, after months of frantic activity, the mood in Robertson's German "party" appears to be a bit down.

The 20 March issue of *Arprekorr* (the Spartacist's DDR newsheet) contains a short article entitled "They Stole the Wrong Cars," which reports that two star DDR recruits recently decamped, taking a number of their friends with them. Apparently the dissidents had grown tired of the commandist leadership style of Robertson's lieutenants. One of those to leave was Gunther M., who had only recently been added to the editorial board of the German *Spartakist*, the main journal of the SpAD. *Arprekorr* claims that those who walked out, who we have heard numbered about a dozen, took a portion of the group's assets, including automobiles, books and mail. To add insult to injury the SpAD dissidents immediately registered as a political group with the DDR government using "copies of the program and statutes of the SpAD."

### For Leninist Realism—Not Idiot Optimism

The Spartacists, Cliffites and Mandelites are, each in their own way, inclined to substitute a more congenial reality for the one that exists. The arc of history bends toward socialism, but that arc can be long, and lead through many episodic defeats. The will to survive those defeats and persevere until victory requires tempered commitment—not fairy tales, idiot optimism or sugary-false hope. The class struggle will not disappear, regardless of the outcome of events in Eastern Europe. The future belongs to socialism, because it alone charts a path out of the barbarism and pathology of the imperialist world order. ■

## Geoff White Interview (Part 2)

# The Struggle for Trotskyism in the SWP

The following is the second part of an interview with Geoff White, an early leader of the Spartacist League (SL) and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In the first part of the interview (1917 No. 7) White described his years as a cadre of the American Communist Party, and how, in the course of the dramatic developments in the Stalinist movement in 1956—Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the subsequent crushing of the Hungarian workers—he gravitated toward the then-Trotskyist SWP. In this installment White recounts how the RT came into existence in the Bay Area SWP over opposition to the leadership's infatuation with Fidel Castro and his July 26 Movement.

Geoff White played an important role in the RT's fight in the SWP, both as the tendency's principal organizer on the West Coast and one of its central national leaders. He originally drafted the initial RT declaration, "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective," a document which the Bolshevik Tendency stands on today. In opposing the SWP's prostration before the Castroists, which was to lay the basis for a 1963 "reunification" with the impressionist International Secretariat of the Fourth International (IS), led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, the RT carried forward the best traditions of the SWP. In 1953 the SWP had broken with the revisionist Pablo current over the latter's abandonment of the necessity of a conscious Marxist leadership and initiated the International Committee of the Fourth International (IC). (For a critical appreciation of the significance of the IS/IC split see our letter to the Gruppe IV. Internationale reprinted elsewhere in this issue.)

In a speech reprinted in a 1979 Spartacist League internal bulletin, James Robertson (who today presides over the degenerated political obedience cult which the once-revolutionary SL has become), described White as perhaps "the highest level Communist Party leader ever to be recruited to the [American] Trotskyist movement after the initial split" of 1928 involving James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern. Robertson begins his account by remarking that, after joining the SWP in the Bay Area as a leader of a left-split from the Shachtmanite Independent Socialist League:

"I didn't know that the SWP was very uncomfortable with their new acquisition, and on being run out of town to New York, the new Trotskyist youth organization which we had built was dismantled... And here's another lesson from party history... You do not destroy a factional opponent by wiping out his local organization and sending him to the party center. A year later I was back in the Bay Area organizing into a left opposition against the



Geoff White, 1965

SWP majority many of the people who'd run me out of town—including Geoff White!"

—*International Discussion Bulletin* No. 11, June 1979

Robertson's version of the origins of the Bay Area RT doesn't exactly correspond to White's recollection. This can perhaps be attributed to the former's fondness for colorful polemical exaggeration and apocryphal stories. In the summary to his speech Robertson commented that, after leaving the CPUSA, White:

"became a rightwing member of the SWP. And I was a leftwing member of the SWP. He was more able and better connected than I and he saw to it that my operation in our common local area was destroyed and I was deported. A year later we were the leaders of our faction. Rather an argument I think against holding old grievances. Already he felt damaged and would not move to the center and become the national chairman with me as the national secretary, which is the way it should have been because he looks like Gregory Peck, very wholesome American, unlike me."

1917: When did you move out to the Bay Area?

GW: I came out here in February 1958. So that gives me a year in Boston. I came here to register at U.C. Berkeley because I had been here when I was in the Navy and I liked it, and there didn't seem to be any reason to stay in Boston any longer. The politics didn't attract me



WIDE WORLD PHOTO

### Castro's popularity led to political adaptation by the SWP

anymore, my marriage was up—I had a job there, but it was a lousy job.

*1917: So, you went to graduate school here. Did you join the SWP as soon as you came out?*

GW: Not as soon as I came out, it was a couple of months. It was something I knew I was going to do but I wanted to really think it over carefully, take my time with it and maybe I was enjoying not having organizational business for a while. I worked pretty hard, I was really gung ho. I worked very hard and very closely with the SWP, and they weren't particularly pressuring me to join because perhaps they thought that I was as useful to them as an independent.

I was extremely hostile not only politically, but also personally and emotionally to the CP, and I think I still am. I think even in the late days of the Spartacist League, I was still affected by this history in a subjective way, and I really enjoyed bashing the CP. There were opportunities to do that out here. My main negative feeling about the SWP was that they let the Stalinists get the better of them sometimes.

There was something called the IPAUC (the Independent Political Action Unity Caucus), which of course ended up in a split which everybody knew it was going to—but first it went on and on for months. There were these independent elements who were sort of oppor-

tunists and playing a game in the thing, and there were soft and hard CPers, there were the SWPers, and then there was me and some other ex-CPers who were like-minded. It got really pretty hairy. The Trotskyists were winning all the debates but the CP was making all the right organizational moves. They knew how to make things happen, but in any semi-intellectual confrontation, the CP got wiped up. It was a lot of fun, it was very intense, and we worked hard.

*1917: Did you have any problems of a political nature coming to the SWP? Did you have any misgivings about any particular question?*

GW: Well, I don't want to project present attitudes back on that period, but I'm thinking about what I read by the Shachtmanites and I think I always had a little disturbance at the back of my mind about the nature of the Soviet state—a very fundamental question—and one which separated the sheep from the goats. Other than that, I don't think I had any problems and I put that out of my mind pretty much. I fully accepted and was able to argue with the Shachtmanites on this question. I really believed it. If I get into something like that I really have to accept it. I thought I learned a lesson in the CP on that, but you don't change temperaments, you change politics.

Of course, there might have been some details. I remember arguing against how they handled themselves

in the National Maritime Union during a certain crisis point. I thought at that point that they were wrong. I thought when I joined the SWP that they had been wrong. I remember meeting some guys who had been in the maritime fraction and arguing with them about it. That was okay in the SWP.

*1917: When you joined the SWP, what did you think about the branch out here?*

GW: I have to be careful again not to project later consciousness onto this period. I joined the Berkeley/Oakland branch. One of the things that struck me immediately was that it didn't have the tight organization that the CP had. The demands were pretty high, almost as high as the CP, in terms of your time. The atmosphere of discussion, however, was far, far freer and on a much higher level. We really talked politics those days in the SWP. People had opinions and they had different opinions, and they would argue these things out. And I'd think, "Gee, what's going to happen now?" But nothing. Except when things hardened into factions which were making a bid for power there was, to me coming out of the CP, a remarkable amount of democracy. And later, as events came up, I saw what the limits of that were. But even when I was being expelled from the SWP, I still thought that, while perhaps not up to the ideal standards, compared to my experience with the CP and Stalinism, this was a very democratic organization.

Another thing that I was impressed with was that they did not interfere with you in non-political matters. Their definition of what was personal and what was public was much different from the CP. When I was living in Providence I had a print by Raoul Dufy on my wall. It was a nice thing, I really liked it. A guy who was a functionary, an organizer, for the CP came in and looked at it and said, "Well, I guess that's alright—that is—just barely acceptable." But if it was a bit further off than Dufy, he'd have said take it down. And you could say that kind of thing to people and get away with it in the CP. Nobody would even think about that in the SWP. In fact the organizer did come in and look at some of the stuff we had and said, "I don't like that kind of stuff," and we said well, we do. And he was just making a personal comment. He never had any idea of taking it down. I use that as an example of the kind of differences I noticed.

I also noticed that the SWP was not fast on its feet organizationally. I had expected it to be. We had a case where we had two guys in one union local. It seemed to me that would be a major concentration for the branch, and that these guys would be getting day-to-day guidance because I had been in a situation exactly like that in Rhode Island. There were two of us in a local, a small local and not terribly important, but that was what we were in. And, by god, the CP organizer I was working with at the time, although he had never met them, *knew* the personalities and histories of everybody who was of any importance in that local. We'd talk it over and work really long and hard on that kind of stuff. And we did that in other movements too. The politics was something else—sometimes we'd come a cropper on that account—but organizationally the CP was very good.

I remember looking for this in the SWP but couldn't get any real interest in changing things operationally. But when something political came up, like a position paper on the use of cosmetics or something like that, then boom, everybody was off and running—everybody had an idea. It was very attractive in some ways but it was a little disappointing on the empirical level. I was, or became shortly after I joined, a shop steward in the union I was in.

*1917: Were you still going to school?*

GW: No, I stopped going to school. I decided I didn't want to do it. So I went to work back into the shops and I got to be a shop steward and I expected some help and some guidance. And I got neither help nor guidance. They were happy with whatever I did. I learned fairly soon that I couldn't expect it. It was very abstract.

*1917: Did they have any industrial fractions left in maritime?*

GW: Yes, they had one, maybe two, people in the SUP [Sailors Union of the Pacific] and they had one person who was very prominent, and one other, and I think maybe a third in the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union].

*1917: Did they discuss union work in the branch meetings?*

GW: No. The ILWU work was in the San Francisco branch, so I wouldn't know for sure. But my impression is that they didn't because one of the guys who was in it was over in our branch and I think I remember talking to him about it and finding out that they were not doing anything. They had to work on their own pretty much, even occasionally at cross-purposes.

*1917: How large was the East Bay branch?*

GW: When I joined it was a little larger than two dozen, maybe thirty.

*1917: You mentioned coming into contact with Shachtmanites and arguing with them.*

GW: Yes, they were very active around here. We had a youth movement, and there were people in the YPSL [Young Peoples Socialist League—youth group of the American social democracy], I believe, who were actually Shachtmanites, not social democrats, and the question was whether they were going to break or be thrown out of the YPSL. At any rate, there was a lot of pushing and pulling in the youth movement between the Shachtmanites and us.

*1917: When you came out here, had the Robertson/ Magel Wohlforth grouping already split from the Shachtmanites?*

GW: I think when I arrived they were in the process of splitting. I don't know if they had actually carried out the organizational conclusions, but they were close to us. We knew that they were our friends.

*1917: Was Robertson the only one to come over to the Bay Area branch?*

GW: Robertson was the only prominent one. He was the main figure. There was one guy who was active but not in any sense in the leadership whom I liked very much

and with whom I am still friends. Robertson I didn't like personally, but politically he was no problem. I got to like Robertson better personally when I liked him less politically. He had an abrasive personality, very polemical. It seemed to me that he had, in some respects, a Stalinist personality. I could hear echoes of the old CP and that got my back up. He really felt at the time that the future of the working-class movement was dependent on how these things were going to come out in the YPSL or the ISL [Independent Socialist League] or whatever. He was lacking a sense of proportion.

1917: *Was there much factionalism in the SWP before the RT?*

GW: Compared to the CP there certainly was. There were two Marcyites here. There were a couple of people ideologically connected with the Washington group, the Fraserites. There were little dissident things, but the factionalism didn't strike me as being out of hand or particularly disruptive. When the issues came up we would discuss them and people would say well, so-and-so is a Fraserite, which means on this question he will say this and things like that. But relations were very amicable.

1917: *The Marcyites would have split pretty soon after you had joined, but it wasn't a big event?*

GW: No, no big splits. None of the differences at that time looked as though they were going to lead to splits, they just seemed to be little encapsulated differences that the SWP could live with, and the minority people could live with. There would be ephemeral minorities. Some issue would come up and some minority would organize itself. But if it was not central, it would disappear after the issue was settled. Things were working pretty much the way they were supposed to on paper to put it in a nutshell.

1917: *Did you always feel that you were on the left of the SWP?*

GW: No, I actually felt that I was somewhat on the right. I defined that not so much in terms of basic ideology, but in terms of style and on tactical questions. In the SL, I was also on the right in the sense that I was more interested in united fronts, and in co-operating with other groups. I was less interested in smashing the Shachtmanite betrayers of the working class and all that kind of horse-shit. I'm saying that now and that makes me sound good, but it also meant that I tended to be somewhat soft on some ideological questions where perhaps a sharper attitude was called for. I didn't consider myself on the left of the SWP but I was aware from the beginning that I was one of the people who was more anti-Stalinist. I also felt there was plenty of room for that. There were a lot of people like that. It didn't look like any kind of a divisive issue.

1917: *Was there any issue before the Cuba question that drew lines prefiguring the RT, or did it only begin over Cuba?*

GW: All of it became clear to me over Cuba. There may have been something there which would have indicated what was coming up, but I remember I was always on the side of the central party leadership in the minor issues that did come up before that. I don't remember what they were because they weren't terribly important. But I thought that I was a cadre and a really loyal SWPer. At

the same time, from my experience in the CPI knew that things could go rotten. One person once said to me, "Well, in a certain sense you've got your bags packed," and I said I didn't check my brains at the door, but the SWP doesn't ask for that.

1917: *How did the RT initially crystalize?*

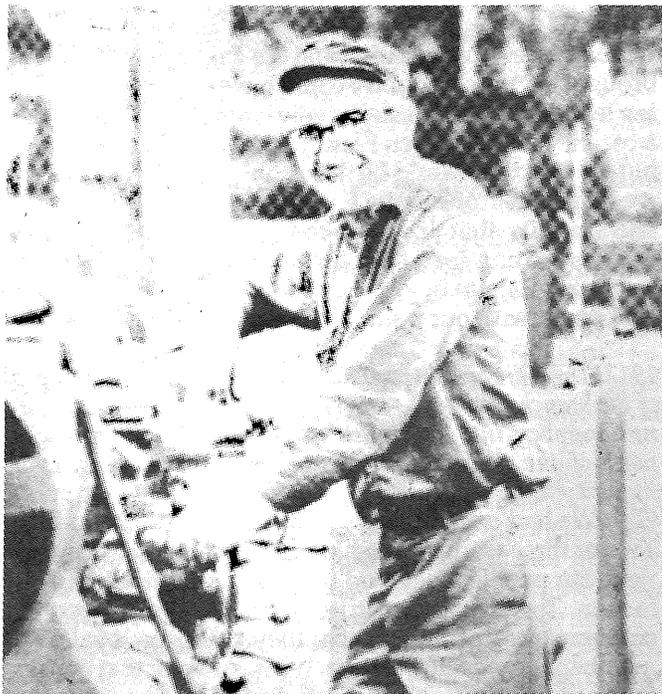
GW: Well, I don't know about nationally but I know what happened here. I can tell you exactly what happened here. There was a plenum of the National Committee [NC] and nobody was anticipating anything false—nobody here at any rate—and I think I would have known. I wasn't on the National Committee or anything, but I was *au courant*.

We had already gotten involved in Cuban work, the defense of the Cuban Revolution. Everybody thought this was a good thing, there didn't seem to be any difference of opinion about that. The NC members went off to New York for the plenum. The day they came back I was at a meeting addressing a bunch of Shachtmanites. I knew it was going to be a bear-baiting session because that's what it's all about, but I didn't mind that. Under the right circumstances I quite enjoy that kind of stuff. So there I was and they had got hold of an issue of the *Militant*. Well, I was not the most religious reader of the *Militant* because frankly, even when I was a loyal member, I didn't enjoy reading it much. Dull paper, even worse than the *Worker*. They'd just gotten the latest issue and it had a report on the plenum declaring that Cuba was a workers state.

A guy got up—I remember who he was because he was a guy who had been in the SWP and we were sort of personally friendly—and said, "Do you think Cuba is a workers state?" And I said of course not, don't be silly, that's a ridiculous idea. And he said, "Well, it says here that your party says it is." I was really stumbling at that point because I was just not prepared. I knew I had to defend the party's position but since I didn't even know what it was that this guy was reading me out of the paper, I think I ducked it. I said, "I haven't read that report and I gave you my own personal opinion, and if that's what the party says, then that's what the party says, and I'm really not prepared to discuss it." I really didn't think I could shift right there, especially since he'd already trapped me into saying it wasn't a workers state.

So I was a little upset about the thing and the next evening we had a branch meeting. There was a report on the plenum by Art Sharon from the National Committee. He was the real heavy, the other guy was not quite as heavy. So he came in and talked about this, that and the other thing, and then he incidentally threw in the business about Cuba being a workers state as if it weren't terribly important. I also got the impression—and I've nothing to back this up, but I got the impression—that he was a little uneasy about it himself. But nothing in the subsequent course of the debate ever indicated there was any truth in this.

A whole bunch of us in the branch, the majority of the people in the branch, got up on the floor and said, "How can you say this? This isn't Trotskyism. This is Stalinism." We weren't prepared so some of our presentations were a bit incoherent, but a lot of people got up and expressed



**Ed Lee**

extreme dissatisfaction. Some people spoke in favour I recall, but they didn't really have a lot to say. The lines weren't drawn, I mean nobody knew. It was the first contact with this thing. I'd had this experience the night before which had perhaps sensitized me a little bit.

But the guy who took the lead was Ed Lee. He was a wonderful person. He had been the branch organizer and he had been in the CP for a long time, and he was expelled at the time of the Oakland General Strike in 1946. During the RT days, when we were still in the SWP, Ed Lee was very highly respected by everybody, including the opposition. He had long, long years of experience and he was a guy with a fine mind and a first-rate person in every respect. People had tremendous respect for him and when he supported us, that carried a lot of weight. He was a guy for whom I had great respect and great personal affection to the day he died.

After the meeting a bunch of us, who all knew each other, and identified who was who, retired, as people frequently do. We went off to eat after the meeting to talk about this thing. All the people there opposed this position. As we talked it over amongst ourselves we began to get more of a line and we saw that just at this big table we had a majority of the branch. Subsequently, two or three people, under pressure from the leadership, defected. But initially there was no question.

*1917: There were no branch leaders?*

GW: Well, Ed Lee. He had just resigned as organizer and some very unpleasant fellow from the East had taken over as organizer, which didn't help matters any. The thing which hung us up was Wohlforth and Robertson. Wohlforth was the sole dissenter on the National Committee and Robertson was the only other guy who was prominent who had taken a position against this thing at the plenum. The only other name we knew was Mage, who meant nothing to us. Wohlforth and Robertson, who

did, meant something rather negative. Most of the people in the room didn't want to be involved with Robertson and Wohlforth so it was a bit of a dilemma.

*1917: Did you know Wohlforth?*

GW: No, I didn't know him. Some of the people knew him because there was a lot of back and forth. I had met him a few times when he came through.

*1917: Was he a big name, having come over from the Shachtmanites?*

GW: Yeah, he was a name, but not a terribly big name. We read his stuff and knew something of his style.

*1917: You did know Robertson?*

GW: I did know Robertson but didn't much like his style either. So there was this potential problem right from the beginning.

We talked about it at great length, we were up till one or two in the morning. The general conclusion we came up with was that this was wrong and that it was a very fundamental question, because we saw right away it was not just petty questions about what was going on in Cuba. It had to do with the whole question of Stalinism and the Soviet Union and that kind of stuff. We decided, no, we were going to fight this thing, and if it meant joining up with Wohlforth and Robertson, we had to do that.

*1917: Your position, in this first elaboration, was that Cuba was not a workers state?*

GW: That was the only thing: Cuba was not a workers state. We in the RT out here never came to the formal conclusion that it was a deformed workers state, although that was what most of us thought before the end of it. It was a negative position that this was not a workers state, because they were saying it was a workers state with certain bureaucratic distortions.

*1917: Like Russia in 1920?*

GW: Yes, and we were not going to buy that—we were not going to buy that one little bit. It was pretty clear that Ed Lee and I would be the main people to push this thing. Ed Lee, I think, had even more misgivings than I about some of the sectarian tendencies of Robertson and Wohlforth which had been perceived at the time. He was also older than I, and with one thing and another, it fell mainly to me to organize the tendency. Within a week we knew we were going to have a tendency. I forget who wrote the initial letter to Wohlforth and Robertson.

*1917: Robertson was living in New York at this time?*

GW: My impression is that he was because I know he wasn't at the meeting. If he had been, I don't know what would have happened.

*1917: He had been in the branch here for a couple of years?*

GW: Yes, we'd had a lot of experience with Robertson.

*1917: You never felt, or none of the other people who were subsequently associated with the RT ever felt, any particular affinity to Robertson on a political level?*

GW: There were two people, young people in the tendency, who might have. I can't say nobody, but the core of the tendency, the older people, no. He had no base out here. I don't know who wrote the letter to Wohlforth, whether it was me or Ed, saying that so many people in the branch had declared their opposition to the thing, and let's talk about what we're going to do. However, very rapidly we became the East Bay branch affiliate of the RT.

We didn't feel that we were joining an established group. We felt we were constituting something new; it happened very rapidly. Then we found we had friends in San Francisco (not as many, it was clearly a minority, but I'd say about 30 percent), so we had a little over 50 percent of the East Bay branch and maybe 25-30 percent of the San Francisco branch. So then we began this long fight.

Very rapidly our initial misgivings about the kind of leadership we had in New York—they probably didn't disappear, but became inoperative. They were not a problem. We were conducting a common struggle and it was comradeship. You define your comrades according to your politics and the New York people were our comrades, although we were always aware of a difference in style between the East and the West coast. We were a little more conciliatory in the way in which we carried things out but I don't think there was any political or ideological conciliation because we saw this as a fight against Stalinism. I certainly did, and I think Ed Lee did, because he'd been through the CP experience too. This was the essence of the thing.

There were a couple of younger people who had been brought up in the Robertson school of politics and one of our problems was to keep these people from antagonizing everybody and getting us totally isolated in the branch because we wanted to get control of the branch. It was all nip and tuck. At the same time, we still considered ourselves to be loyal members of the SWP and we wanted the SWP to be able to function in the area. We didn't want to paralyze it. As time went by, we saw we probably didn't have a hell of a lot of a future in the SWP. Yet, even after the Cuba question was resolved at the convention, and we theoretically put that behind us, we still felt even then that maybe there was a future for us. We were obviously still a minority.

1917: *These young people who were, as you say, "brought up in the Robertson school," they didn't have any prospect of taking the leadership of the opposition?*

GW: No. None whatsoever. They represented the minority in the YSA [Young Socialist Alliance—SWP youth group] out here. There were some people in the YSA who had more of our style of things but what we are really talking about is not politics but style. They had this Robertsonian style.

1917: *Initially you had a majority in the East Bay, then there were a few defections. So did you end up being a large minority of the branch?*

GW: It varied from week to week. Sometimes we were the majority, sometimes we were the minority. At a couple of points we could have taken over the branch forever but we didn't want to do that. We thought that

would be very provocative and we avoided it. If we had brought everybody out we could have deposed the existing leadership and elected a new committee. There were a couple of times when New York wanted us to do that but we said this would be the wrong thing to do because we had some irons in the fire in Seattle and Los Angeles and stuff like that. If we looked like disloyal types, who were preparing for a split and trying to provoke a split, it wasn't going to do our politics any good and we were concerned with our politics—not running the branch.

1917: *There are certain factional advantages to having control of the branch: you get to set the agenda and you get to accept new members into the branch and set the tone, and probably most of the new recruits to the branch are going to be minorityites.*

GW: We had trouble getting our people into the branch. Two or three were rejected for membership because they were our people. They said we pre-recruited them to our faction. The charge was true but we felt that given the circumstances of the branch, they could be loyal SWP members, as we felt we were. We had to pay that penalty for not taking over the branch. But I felt that if we had provoked a split by trying to take it over, the penalty would have been very high. I think we were correct in that. One thing we did learn was that the correct line doesn't solve all your problems. It just solves some of them.

Things had become quite bitter, but there was a *modus vivendi* worked out. For instance, there were local elections in the spring that year, and the majority ran all the candidates in Oakland and we ran all the candidates in Berkeley. There was never any formal agreement, but everybody understood. There was a certain amount of refraining from stepping too hard on peoples' toes, although the polemic was quite sharp and there was a certain amount of bitterness and a certain amount of organizational nonsense involved too—people using

## On Revolutionary Continuity

"On the basis of a long historical experience, it can be written down as a law that revolutionary cadres, who revolt against their social environment and organize parties to lead a revolution, can—if the revolution is too long delayed—theyself degenerate under the continuing influences and pressures of this same environment.

"The basic ideas of Marxism, upon which alone a revolutionary party can be constructed, are continuous in their application and have been for a hundred years. The ideas of Marxism, which create revolutionary parties, are stronger than the parties they create, and never fail to survive their downfall. They never fail to find representatives in the old organizations to lead the work of reconstruction."

—James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

parliamentary maneuvers and whatnot.

1917: *Did the majority people work for the minority candidates?*

GW: Yes, but not very hard. Essentially the kind of campaign we were running was not one that involved a lot of people. It was a matter of candidates getting up there and making speeches to various groups of the *hoi polloi*—talking to everybody from the League of Women Voters to the Associated Firemen.

1917: *Were you one of the candidates?*

GW: Yes, I was. Other RT candidates were Marion and Rose.

1917: *Rose was in the Berkeley branch at that point?*

GW: Yes, by the time the election came around. I think when the tendency was initiated she was still in New York. She was not one of those people around the table. As a matter of fact we sort of wondered if maybe she was coming out to keep an eye on us. I still wonder. If she did, she did it in a way that we couldn't take much exception to. It didn't really matter. We weren't trying to play a game with the East, we just didn't trust their judgement on some things.

1917: *So for a while you had a reasonable relationship with the majority given the situation. You said things got pretty bitter pretty quickly. Was that a local development or do you think it was directed from New York, from the national leadership of the SWP? Was it pretty clear that they thought you were a faction that was not going to fade away and perhaps had to be removed?*

GW: No, I didn't see any evidence that they really expected a split. I think they thought it was a possibility, and we thought it was a possibility too. We still at that point hoped to avoid it, and still had reasonable expectations that maybe we could. As for them, I don't know. There were "hards" and "softs." Art Sharon was a hard but he was very principled. I've great respect for Art. He was wrong, dead wrong on this thing, and I think he's even wronger now that he's with Barnes, but he was principled. The guy who was the branch organizer was a real soft-shoe artist and I never had any respect for him from the first day that I met him. He was a schmuck. He helped to make it hard, but he would also ask, "Can we make a deal?" He dirtied the waters considerably and one individual can do a surprising amount to make things tougher. We had our "hards" too, mostly under the age of 25.

1917: *Did you recruit much to the tendency after you got established? Did you lose many people to the majority after the lines were drawn?*

GW: The lines were clearly drawn but it was always stable. In the beginning people were slow to make up their minds so there were shifts. We lost one person because she suddenly developed a personal relationship with some guy who was in the opposite faction. Her convictions were less strong than his and so we lost her. That's to be expected. Things like that happen once in a while. I think there were some people who were

frightened at the prospect of launching a major attack on something important that the national party leadership pushed. When they were writing idiotic pamphlets like *Too Many Babies?* or the big controversy on cosmetics, you could afford to be in opposition but this was more serious. So I think we lost a couple of people that way quite early. Then we picked up these people from San Francisco and after that I don't think there were any major shifts.

1917: *Was there any sociological or age differentiation between the minority and the majority, more students or workers?*

GW: No. We didn't have many students. I don't think there was any sociological difference. We were stronger in the East Bay than in San Francisco but that was just happenstance.

1917: *Was the political fight inside the branch fairly organized or did the differences come up on all kinds of things?*

GW: It was pretty organized and I think both sides were trying to minimize the spillover. Though of course there would be some. There was a formal discussion period and this kept coming up. Both groups were still in *de facto* existence at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and we all worked together pretty well on that. Although, I know some of the minority got very disgusted by some of the rhetoric that was being used, particularly by one National Committee member in San Francisco. He went around wearing a *Patria o Muerte* button, and some of us called him "Patria o Muerte." He was a real Cuban patriot—that was pretty disgusting.

1917: *You mentioned earlier that you had some other irons in the fire in L.A. and Seattle. Seattle would be the Fraserites. Did you mean to link up with them or were there some people with them you thought you might get?*

GW: We didn't think we could link up with the Fraserites because we saw them as a right tendency within the party and even as a pro-Stalinist tendency because of their analysis of the Chinese question. We thought of ourselves as a left tendency which I think we were. I surprised myself a little bit to find myself in a group that was labelled sectarian, but that's the way the cookie crumbled. But where there was dissidence of any kind there was openness. Later on, during the Pablo controversy, I remember going up to Seattle to make a presentation of our views and being pretty well received. We had people in Los Angeles who had perhaps more of an organizational sympathy than political sympathy. We had hopes in both Seattle and Los Angeles of recruiting people to the tendency. It never came off.

1917: *What do you mean "organizational sympathy?"*

GW: People who said: "Don't let the people from New York, the central party leadership, push you around," people who were interested in preserving our party rights because they had some ideas of their own. The Weissites would fall in that category, the Fraserites also, and there were some individuals in L.A. too. Eventually Swaback ended up defending us on an organizational rights basis.

1917: So after the 1961 convention you supposedly dissolved, although given that no one had changed their minds, it wasn't a very dissolved tendency.

GW: I don't remember whether we formally dissolved it or not. I know we stopped meeting. We tried to let things ride, but we all knew, or at least most of us knew, that this wasn't just some isolated thing around Cuba. There was a real ideological problem. Some people would say, quoting the Stalinists, well having said "B" you must say "C." I knew, and some other people knew, that was not necessarily so. That may be true in logic but not in life. It can take you a lifetime before you get to "C." You may never get there. We were prepared for more trouble but we were hoping there wouldn't be. We had a suspicion that maybe Robertson, Mage and Wohlforth were looking for their own independent group.

1917: What kind of contact was there between the Bay Area and New York?

GW: There was a tremendous amount of correspondence with Wohlforth and some with Robertson. Later on, it

became more with Robertson. All the position papers were drafted here or there and I think it was a pretty even distribution. They would be sent back and forth through the mail. It seems to me that there were a couple of visits by Robertson and Wohlforth. I can't recall the circumstances but they did come out.

1917: So after the SWP majority opted for Castro, there was the move to reunify with Pablo's International Secretariat.

GW: There was the International Committee which was pretty much Gerry Healy's operation, Pablo's International Secretariat, and Posadas had a split-off in South America. That was a wild card in the deck. When the move came on, it didn't come like a bolt from the blue like this business about Castro did. We were halfway expecting it. Once the Pablo question was posed, we knew this was it. Tactically we wanted to stay in the SWP as long as possible but we knew we were either going to get expelled or would have to withdraw. We knew that the thing had gone too far for us to coexist. ■

[TO BE CONTINUED]

# Revolutionary Continuity & the Split in the Fourth International

*The following letter, which deals with the historic split of the Trotskyist movement in the early 1950s, was addressed to the German Gruppe IV. Internationale [GIVI]. Like the Bolshevik Tendency, GIVI was founded by former cadres of the international Spartacist tendency. The letter is a response to GIVI's equation of the revisionist International Secretariat of the Fourth International (IS), headed by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, with the forces organized as the International Committee of the Fourth International (IC), initiated by the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP). The 1963 "reunification" between the SWP and Pablo's International Secretariat, which produced the United Secretariat (USec), was sealed by the expulsion of the SWP's Revolutionary Tendency (forerunner of the Spartacist League—SL). The RT opposed the reunification and defended the original split with the Pablo current as "essential to the preservation of a principled revolutionary movement."*

14 March 1989

Comrades:

We have discussed your document, *Continuity or New Program—A False Alternative*, and we find ourselves in sharp disagreement with your conclusion that the 1951-53 split was essentially politically inconsequential. In our view this represents a step away from the tradition from which both of our organizations derive.

Let us say at the outset that our knowledge of the political activity of the IC sections outside North America in the 1950s is limited. What we do know about their activity is not impressive, to say the least. We are some-

what more familiar with the record of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in this period which shows consistent rightward motion, including the call on the U.S. imperialist army to act as an instrument of struggle against racism.

We consider "Genesis of Pabloism," [*Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972], the Spartacist League's major study of the crisis of postwar Trotskyism, to be a fine document. As you point out, it stops at 1954—and while it refers to the activity of the Healy grouping within the Labour Party as "arch-Pabloist...opportunism," it omits mention of the IC's craven political adaptation to Messali Hadj in Algeria, or Peron in Argentina. "Genesis of Pabloism" also ignores the Bolivian disaster in 1952 and the role of the Cannon leadership in covering up for the Menshevism of the POR's [Partido Obrero Revolucionario] "critical support" to the bourgeois-nationalist MNR [Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario] government. This is a particularly significant omission because of the existence of a tendency within the SWP's Los Angeles branch (the Vern-Ryan grouping) which explicitly criticized this policy at the time.

The SL's observation that a key to forging an authentic Trotskyist current internationally is "an understanding of the characteristics and causes of Pabloist revisionism and the flawed response of the anti-Pabloists who fought, too little and too late, on national terrain while in practice abandoning the world movement" is one with which we heartily agree. We make no excuses for the national parochialism of the Cannon leadership, nor its conception of a federated "international," nor its abstention

from criticism of the opportunism of its bloc partners. Nor do we agree with the Proletarian Military Policy, nor the positions taken on Yugoslavia and China.

At the same time, it is necessary to judge political currents in their totality, taking into account their history and the social reality which they confronted. The world after World War II was a very different place than Trotsky had projected. The SWP was socially isolated with an aging cadre under tremendous pressure from the domestic witchhunt. It was clearly badly disoriented by the postwar events and poorly equipped to understand or deal with them theoretically. The Cannon leadership largely shared, or at least acquiesced to, the "new world reality" impressionism of Pablo which led inexorably to the conclusion that many of the lessons of the "old Trotskyism" no longer applied. This is evidenced by the SWP's support for the decisions of the 1951 Third World Congress.

But, as the fight with Cochran revealed, it would be a mistake to simply equate Cannon and Pablo. The SWP leadership, while it was slipping badly, was not definitively *hardened* around this revisionism. When confronted with the implications of the liquidationist course of the Pabloites on their own domestic terrain, the Cannon leadership resisted. In this fight we take a side, without endorsing the way the fight was conducted or even many of the arguments used by the majority—for example, Hansen's defense of the proposition that Stalinism is always and everywhere "counterrevolutionary through and through."

While the direction of evolution of the Cochranites was sufficiently clear at the time of their suspension from the SWP, it became even more blatant when they set up shop for themselves. Six months after leaving the SWP they brazenly declared that in the postwar period:

"...there has been a clear test of the ability of Trotskyism to create an independent movement on a program broadly confirmed by the new revolutionary developments...the old Trotskyist perspective has become outmoded. As before the war, the vanguard seeks to realize its revolutionary aspirations within the old parties, leaving no room for a new revolutionary mass organization. Thus the Trotskyist movement...was doomed to remain isolated. The test was made for a whole historic era, both in periods of reaction and revolution, and is therefore a decisive one."

—"Our Orientation," reprinted in *International Secretariat Documents 1951-54*, Vol. 4

We think that the PCI [Parti Communiste Internationaliste] leadership was correct in voting against the main document of the IS leadership at the 1951 Congress. The fact that the SWP did not support them in this, or that the PCI leadership did not carry out this struggle to the end, does not negate the fact that there was a significant political differentiation which clearly had a left/right axis. You admit that, "in the document *Where Is Comrade Pablo Going?* written by Favre/Bleibtreu in June 1951, they tried to defend Trotskyism" but conclude that because they "capitulated to the bureaucratic maneuvers of the Pabloites within the PCI" and unfortunately retreated from their earlier opposition to the line adopted by the Third World Congress, they "sealed their fate." While

this maneuver obviously significantly weakened their political opposition to the new revisionism, the fact is that they did continue to oppose the Pablo leadership and their French adherents. The next year Bleibtreu agreed with Healy and a representative of the Swiss section to "undertake together the defense of Trotskyism against Pablist revisionism and the struggle against the liquidation of the Fourth International" at the upcoming Fourth World Congress (*International Committee Documents 1951-54*, Vol. 2). Cannon and the SWP leadership apparently aborted this with their "Open Letter," issued the next month.

It is quite correct to point to the inconsistencies and inadequacies of the PCI and SWP, and the passive and inadequate fashion in which they carried out the fight against the Pabloist leadership. "Genesis of Pabloism" is certainly not uncritical on this count:

"Despite a considerable body of mythology to the contrary, both the PCI and SWP vacillated when revisionism manifested itself at the head of the Fourth International, balking only at applying it to their own sections. Both groups compromised themselves by uneasy acquiescence (combined in the case of the PCI with sporadic resistance) to Pablo's policies until the suicidal organizational consequences to their sections necessitated sharp fights. Both abdicated the responsibility to take the fight against revisionism into every body and every section of the Fourth International...The IC from its inception was only a paper international tendency consisting of those groups which had already had splits between pro-Pabloist and orthodox wings."

You observe that: "The sound political impulse to fight Pabloism, which had been developed by some IC components, was half-hearted in a programmatic sense and a disaster concerning its political practice." True enough, but though the fight against Pabloism was profoundly flawed, it was not without political substance. The issues posed in the SWP's Open Letter (the East German uprising and the French general strike) were not inconsequential. It is therefore a mistake to equate the positions adopted by the IC sections on these events with those of the Pabloites. As in the Cochran fight, *despite* our criticisms of Cannon et al, we cannot accept the position that this was a case of two "complementary" revisionist positions which were qualitatively similar. That is why the course toward "reunification" with the Pabloists over a shared capitulation to Castroism was a significant development, which signalled the irreversible consolidation of the SWP leadership around revisionism, while simultaneously initiating the Revolutionary Tendency (RT).

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We find your notion of "continuity" to be rather one-sided. You suggest that "the exponents of 'continuity'" see it as "an uninterrupted development of Trotskyism." This is an easy position to argue against, but it is a simplification which ignores the crucial distinction between "developing" Trotskyism and defending it—even if partially and inadequately. We do not view "continuity" as a kind of metaphysical laying on of hands which can guarantee the apostolic succession of authentic Trotskyism. Nor does it consist in simply repeating the answers to yesterday's problems in response to the new

questions which arise today.

The fight against Pabloism in the SWP meant that, unlike the Cochranite formation, it possessed the capacity for its own political regeneration. This is borne out by the fact that the political demarcation of 1951-53 was a starting point for the RT within the SWP eight years later, when the latter finally converged with the IS leadership. In some important ways the RT/SL represented a positive *development* of Trotskyism after Trotsky—something that is not true of any other international current. But it did so on the basis of the prior struggles upon which it was based, including the fight against Pabloism in the early 1950s, imperfect as the latter was.

It is at least abstractly possible that a genuinely revolutionary proletarian current could arise somewhere in the world which would be capable of developing autonomously the essential programmatic positions of Trotskyism and applying them to such difficult problems as interpenetrated peoples in Israel/Palestine, the popular front, special oppression, the genesis of Cuba and the other deformed workers states, without ever learning of the existence of the Spartacist tendency or the RT or the IC or even Trotsky.

But the fact is that the RT was not replicated, to our knowledge, in any other ostensibly Trotskyist grouping internationally. Nor have any of the myriad currents spawned from the New Left/Maoist movement, in its various national permutations, spontaneously approximated the program of revolutionary Marxism defended and developed by the RT/SL.

It is in this sense that the question of continuity has meaning. It has a great deal to do with answering questions about how revolutionaries should have responded to various difficult problems posed by the international class struggle. The fact that the RT developed in the SWP and not, for example, in Livio Maitan's Italian organization in the early 1960s, is not entirely fortuitous. In its 1962 founding document "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective," the RT posed itself as the continuator of the struggle against Pabloism begun in 1953.

"In 1953, our party, in the 'Open Letter' (*Militant*, 11/11/53), declared that *The lines of cleavage between Pablo's revisionism and Orthodox Trotskyism are so deep that no compromise is possible either politically or organizationally.* The political evaluation of Pabloism as revisionism is as correct now as it was then and must be the basis for any Trotskyist approach to this tendency."

The RT's founding document charged that, "the SWP leadership has accepted the central theoretical position of Pabloite revisionism." The RT was critical from the outset of the conduct of the IC's struggle against the Pabloists, as well as the SWP's temporizing and American exceptionalism. Yet it stood on the SWP's eventual declaration of intent to "carry through a political struggle against Pabloism on a world scale in order to maintain its domestic revolutionary perspective."

While standing on the fight against Pabloism in the SWP in 1953, the RT did not take the position that the IC was the simple lineal continuity of the Fourth International. Indeed, the Spartacist grouping had to struggle to successfully *reestablish* revolutionary political continuity. In its resolution on the world movement presented at the

1963 SWP Convention in counterposition to the majority's document motivating "reunification" with the IS, the RT noted, "the disappearance of the Fourth International as a meaningful structure" while correctly arguing that reunification with the Pabloists was "a step away from, not toward, the genuine rebirth of the Fourth International."

At the London Conference in 1966 the Spartacist group stated forthrightly that "Pabloism has been opposed within the movement by a bad 'orthodoxy' represented until the last few years by the example of Cannon." Robertson noted further that:

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

We see our struggle, in the first instance, as one to ensure that the precious political legacy of the RT and the revolutionary SL is not lost with the irreversible slide of its leadership into political banditry. Of course we do not contend that *only* groupings emerging from the RT/SL can be revolutionary, but we do think that would-be revolutionaries who study the history of the Trotskyist movement must come to see that in a vital programmatic sense the RT/SL tradition, and it alone, represents the authentic continuity of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International under Trotsky. And this continuity itself has a history, one which runs through the "ragged" and "partial" split that produced the "paper international tendency" that was the IC.

Your attitude to the tradition of the RT/SL seems, to us, ambiguous. On the one hand it seems that you find our declaration in the first issue of the *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* that we proposed to act as a "beacon of orthodox Spartacism" objectionable, and view our position on the 1951-53 split as a "hereditary vice." On the other hand you "take into consideration the revolutionary heritage of...the iSt" without necessarily identifying yourselves too closely with it. Indeed you consider that the iSt *remains* revolutionary, and yet even though it is perhaps fifty times larger than yourselves, you do not propose unification. It seems to us that this is a peculiar kind of indifferentism on the question of revolutionary continuity. This impression is reinforced with your assertion that your assessment of:

"the points of break in the development of Trotskyism in no way expresses neutrality or agnosticism, it only evades the time-machine-effect: How would we have acted, if...? This method is inoperational."

We fail to see any merit in "evading" the issues posed in the organizational breakup of the Trotskyist movement. What seems "inoperational" in this is your claim not to be agnostic or neutral, at least as regards the IC/IS split. If indeed the two sides in the 1951-53 fight were complementary forms of revisionism (or "centrist equivalent[s]"), you *must* be neutral in the falling out; as we are, for instance, in the breakup of the Lambertiste/Morenoite bloc several years ago.

Fraternally,  
Bolshevik Tendency

# Black Liberation...

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persons, black income is well below 60% of white income, and other indicators find blacks at an even greater disadvantage."

## Why American Blacks are Not a Nation

Racism is a social phenomenon intimately connected to the rise of capitalism as a world system. The whole idea of racial inferiority/superiority first appeared as a rationale for the inhuman brutalities inflicted on the indigenous peoples of the "New World" by the Christianizing European conquistadors. A bit later similar theories were used to justify the slave trade. In fact, slavery was gaining commercial importance just as the revolutionary bourgeoisie was proclaiming "liberty, equality and fraternity" as the fundamental principles of human society. The logical contradiction posed by the slave trade was resolved by redefining "human" to exclude all but white European men.

One response to the pervasive racism of American society has been "black nationalism." This was the dominant strain in the black movement of the late 1960s, and it remains widely popular today. Black nationalism has existed in other periods in American history as well. Sometimes it has meant a call for black "self-improvement;" other times it has taken the form of Pan-Africanism, or the demand for a separate black state. Today, black nationalists tend to focus on assertions of black "cultural identity" and a sentimental harkening back to "African roots." What all forms of this ideology have in common is the belief that American blacks have an identity and a destiny separate from the rest of the American population.

Contrary to the nationalists, Marxists assert that blacks in America are *not* a nation but an oppressed race-color caste. A nation is a stable group of people with a common language and culture, common history, common territory, and a common economy. Blacks in the U.S. do *not* occupy a common territory, although there are large concentrations of blacks in all major urban centers, and particularly in the strategically important sectors of the proletariat. They do not speak a separate language, nor do they have a separate economy.

Far from being a separate nation, or a "colony" of white America, American blacks are *integrated* into the U.S. economy, while simultaneously *segregated* at the bottom of it. Wherever capitalism exists, it has produced a large group of workers who live on the margin of society, without steady employment or the resources or opportunities available even to the average member of their class. This layer (Marx called it the "industrial reserve army") provides a pool of low-paid workers who can be relied upon to do the dirtiest jobs, and are available to be thrown into new branches of industry. Their low wages tend to depress wages in general.

In the earlier phases of European capitalist development, the "reserve army" belonged to the same ethnic and national group as all other classes; it was distin-



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Washington civil rights rally, 1963

guished only by its poverty and destitution. In contemporary Europe, this layer is mostly comprised of immigrants and "guest workers" from poorer countries. When American capitalism hit full stride after the Civil War, it had a ready-made labor reserve army in the multi-millioned black population, *already* branded from birth due to the ideology of racial inferiority handed down from slavery. Thus the *specific* features of American history combined with the *general* needs of capitalist development to create a black color-caste, forcibly segregated at the bottom of society.

The term "caste" is useful because it describes the social hierarchy of color which is superimposed on the class structure of capitalist America. Of course not all blacks are poor, nor are all poor people black. But blacks are barely represented among the rich and powerful, and even a black millionaire can never completely escape the social stigma that a racist society attaches to the color of his or her skin.

## Black Separatism: A Product of Defeat

The late Richard Fraser, a long-time Trotskyist leader, was a pioneer in analyzing the historical dynamics of the struggle for black liberation in America. Fraser noted that upsurges in separatist sentiment tend historically to follow setbacks in the struggle for equality. More than a quarter of a century ago he observed that:

"Because of the utter irrationality of race as a reason for social partition, segregation is absolutely required for the perpetuation of racial exploitation and because of this interdependence of segregation and discrimination, the Negro movement for nearly two centuries has directed its main line of struggle against segregation, against that barrier which prevents Americans from becoming a whole people, from becoming themselves."

"Revolutionary Integration," 1963

It is significant that the first movement for black separation was initiated not by blacks, but by white slaveholders. The American Colonization Society was founded in 1816, with the aim of deporting all free blacks from the country. Free blacks, in the eyes of the Southern planters, were a living refutation of the ideology of white



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### 200,000 black soldiers fought in the Union Army to smash the Confederate slavocracy

supremacy. After all, slavery was supposed to be the "natural condition" of black people. In answer to the Colonization Society's schemes, free blacks launched the Convention Movement in 1817. Its members pledged to stay in the U.S. and fight for unconditional emancipation. That was the program of the first national black organization in American history.

In the ensuing decades, the abolitionist movement, with support from both blacks and many Northern whites, grew in size and militancy. The abolitionists suffered what seemed a historic defeat with the Dred Scott decision of 1857. Scott was a slave who claimed that his residence in Illinois made him a free man, and petitioned the Supreme Court for his freedom. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, representing the court's proslavery majority, rejected Scott's claim with the infamous decision that black people "have no rights that white men are bound to respect." Moreover, Taney ruled, because he was black, Scott could not be a citizen and therefore had no right to sue in a federal court. This decision sanctioned the activity of slave catchers, and was interpreted by many as legalizing slavery in every state in the Union. The Southern slave power appeared to have a firmer grip on the national government than ever before.

Many blacks began to feel that the program of emancipation was "unrealistic." Even a section of the abolitionist movement turned temporarily toward separatism. Martin Delany, a prominent black abolitionist who is often referred to as the "father of black nationalism," concluded that the fight against slavery was becoming hopeless. He went to England to negotiate for a piece of Africa in which to establish a black state. But this flirtation with separatism was short-lived.

When the Civil War broke out, and the anti-slavery fight began in earnest, Delany was one of almost 200,000 blacks to enlist in the Union Army. Another 30,000 blacks served in the Navy. The courage and determination with

which they fought for their freedom, as well as the efforts of the estimated 300,000 who provided logistical support, was a decisive factor in the victory of the North and the destruction of the slave system.

The Civil War was followed by Reconstruction, the most dynamic and progressive period in Southern history. Blacks gained control of many state legislatures, and black and white poor farmers banded together in some areas to defend their common interests against the former slavocracy. But Reconstruction was betrayed in 1877 by President Rutherford B. Hayes, who agreed to remove federal troops from the South, thereby leaving blacks to the tender mercies of the ex-slaveholders. This resulted in the enactment of a spate of Jim Crow laws, which remained in force for nearly a century.

Under these conditions, black-separatist sentiments appeared once again. Booker T. Washington, who emerged as the principal representative of black America in the post-Reconstruction period, accepted segregation as a "necessary evil." He argued that blacks should forget about equality and concentrate instead on acquiring skills to "better their lot," with the aid of white philanthropists.

During World War I thousands of blacks flocked north to take jobs in industry, while many more joined the Army. According to Robert Mullen's *Blacks in America's Wars*, blacks comprised "more than one-third of the entire American forces in Europe." The American government responded to the revolutionary wave touched off by the Russian Revolution of 1917 with a reactionary campaign to deport foreign-born leftists. The nativist, anti-communist sentiments whipped up quickly spilled over into attacks on blacks, who were deemed to be especially susceptible to communism. The *New York Times* commented that there was "no use in shutting our eyes to facts...Bolshevist agitation has been extended among the Negroes" (quoted in *Red Scare*, R.K. Murray).

In addition to vigilante attacks on foreigners and leftists, the summer of 1919 saw murderous race riots erupt in 25 cities, aimed at driving black workers out of traditionally white jobs and housing.

By the mid-1920s, the Ku Klux Klan, which played a leading role in organizing and promoting the attacks on both blacks and "foreign subversives" in the post-war period, was at the height of its power. But something had changed. In many places "lynch law" terrorists were met by armed black self-defense. One of the more militant black groups which stood up to the racists was the African Blood Brotherhood, many of whose members later joined the Communist Party.

The white-supremacist terror campaign after World War I gave rise to Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa" movement, which combined militant denunciations of racism with declarations that integration was hopeless. Garvey's program was both utopian and reactionary: utopian because there was no way that most American blacks could or would emigrate to Africa; and reactionary in abandoning the fight for freedom at home.

### The CIO and the Struggle for Black Equality

The Garvey movement, which at one point claimed a membership of millions, was eclipsed in the 1930s by the rise of industrial unionism under the banner of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which rejected the Jim Crow craft unionism of the American Federation of Labor. From the Chicago stockyards to Henry Ford's auto factories, many employers routinely used blacks to break strikes. The CIO countered this by organizing black workers and actively seeking to break down barriers to working-class unity.

The 1939 convention of the CIO adopted the following resolution:

"Whereas, employers constantly seek to split one group of workers from another, and thus deprive them of their full economic strength, by arousing prejudices based on race, creed, color or nationality, and one of the most frequent weapons used by employers to accomplish this is to create false conflicts between Negro and white workers, Now, therefore, be it—Resolved, that the CIO hereby pledges itself to uncompromising opposition to any form of discrimination, whether political or economic, based on race, color, creed or nationality."

—quoted in *Caste, Class, and Race*, Oliver Cox

To a large extent the CIO lived up to that resolution. Blacks soon saw that unionization was a means to fight for a decent life and social equality, and they flocked to the CIO. Unlike the Garveyites' "Back to Africa" pipe dream, the CIO was *real*, and many former Garveyites became CIO organizers. Black union members played important roles in the militant battles that established the CIO as a vital factor in American social and political life, and black community organizations provided important auxiliary support in many battles with the bosses.

The relative success of the CIO in its first decade in breaking down racial barriers, despite the continuing backwardness of a large section of its white membership, was not attributable to the moral caliber of its leadership. It was a practical necessity of the class struggle. And it is



Integrated UAW workers picket Chrysler, May 1947

this connection of the *black* question to the *class* question that is the key to black liberation in America.

### From Civil Rights to Black Power

The civil rights struggles which erupted in the 1950s were, in part, the legacy of the industrial battles that created the CIO in the 1930s. It also resulted from the unwillingness of the half-million black soldiers, sent overseas to fight for "freedom" during World War II, to accept Jim Crow when they returned. The original goal of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s was the full *integration* of blacks into American society. The leadership of the movement thought that black emancipation could be won by removing the *legal* barriers to equality.

We do not in the least disparage the dedication and courage of the thousands of blacks and whites who risked (and in some instances, gave) their lives in the lunch-counter sit-ins, freedom rides and voter registration campaigns that demolished the framework of legal segregation in the South. But as the civil rights movement went North, it encountered an obstacle to equality far more formidable than legal segregation: the *economic* segregation of black people into ghettos, and into the lowest-paid and least secure sectors of the working class. It was chiefly as a result of the *failure* of bourgeois in-

tegrationism to overcome this obstacle that nationalist moods began to dominate the black freedom movement. When Martin Luther King Jr. went to Chicago in 1966, against the wishes of some of his fellow clergymen, he was stoned by white racists. This proved to be a turning point. Many black youth quickly grasped that racism was not just a temporary obstacle to the fulfillment of "the American Dream," but a fundamental part of the social order. Rejecting King's "love-your-enemy" pacifism, they were drawn to the militancy of the black nationalists, who proposed that the goal of the movement should be "self-determination," and asserted their right to self-defense "by any means necessary." The failure of liberal integrationism and the default of the ostensibly Marxist left, which for the most part adapted to the reformist leadership, led the best militants to reject the whole perspective of integration.

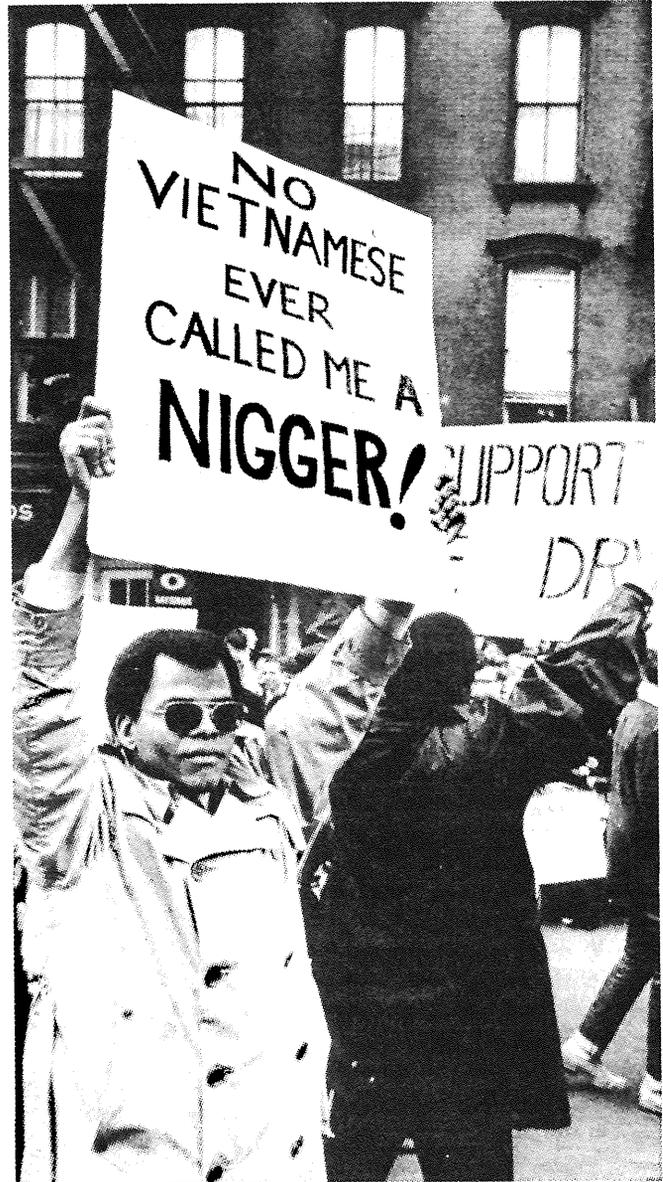
### Black Panthers: High Point of Black Nationalism

The early years of the Black Panther Party marked the high point of the black-nationalist movement. The Panthers proclaimed the necessity of a revolution to win black liberation. They took a militant stand against the pervasive police repression in the black community, and called for community self-defense. Initially, armed Panther patrols in Oakland met with success. However, they were soon targeted by a coordinated police campaign of state terror and assassination which, within a few years, had decimated their leadership. While those who survived ultimately degenerated into Democratic Party electoralism, the Panthers' courage, sacrifice, and revolutionary spirit continue to inspire black and radical youth today.

Yet the politics of the Panthers were fundamentally flawed. In common with the vast majority of 1960s radicals, both black and white, the Panthers considered white "Middle America" to be a solid, undifferentiated reactionary mass. The white working class was not seen as a potential ally in revolutionary struggle, but as part and parcel of the American imperialist Babylon—hopelessly racist, bought-off and corrupted by capitalist consumerism.

The New Left imagined that revolutionary potential existed in the ghettos, whose residents were supposed to be beneath the consumerist mentality, and on the campuses, where radicalized petty-bourgeois students were presumed to be above it. Given that radical students and ghetto youth were a minority of society, it followed that the main impetus for revolution would not come from within the U.S., but from without.

Consequently, there was a tendency to look for inspiration from Third-World liberation struggles, and particularly the Stalinist-led deformed social revolutions in China, Vietnam and Cuba. But all of these movements were peasant-based guerrillaist formations with little connection to the working class. As a result, the simplest elements of the class struggle in an advanced capitalist country (strikes, picket lines and trade-union solidarity) were completely foreign to the majority of the radicals of



ROBERT LEBECK—BLACK STAR  
Anti-Vietnam War demo, April 1967. Blacks have historically been immune to pro-imperialist chauvinism

the 1960s.

The Panthers saw the struggle of black people in America as one of self-determination. While they talked vaguely about socialism, their operational program focused on advocating "community control" of the ghettos. But Watts, Roxbury and Chicago's South Side are characterized by the *absence* of everything that makes life enjoyable and rewarding. The notion that the highest goal of black people should be to win "control" of these miserable slums is essentially defeatist in that it implicitly *accepts* the segregated and marginal existence to which capitalism has consigned them. Separate can *never* mean equal. Moreover, "community control," when generalized, encourages every racial and ethnic group to see itself as inhabitants of exclusive enclaves, fighting for control of its own turf. Thus, it tends to divide the working class, instead of uniting it in a struggle against capitalism.

While the road to revolutionary intervention in the working class is not a smooth or an easy one, it is not an impossible one either. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a wave of militant class struggle in this country. In 1970 there was a bitter strike by workers at General Electric. That same year there was a militant and successful national postal workers strike, where black and white unionists stood together on the picketlines. But the political potential of these integrated class battles was not seen by the Panthers. The class struggle simply did not enter into their strategy for black emancipation.

In the Detroit auto plants a black nationalist formation evolved, known as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW), which *did* orient to workers at the "point of production." The LRBW grew out of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), which was initially organized in the 60 percent black Chrysler Hamtramck plant in 1968. DRUM led a successful wild-cat strike against some racist firings and carried out several other actions. But DRUM's nationalist politics, which led it to exclude white workers regardless of their politics, prevented it from ever seriously challenging the pro-capitalist bureaucracy of the United Auto Workers. By 1971 the LRBW had decomposed into several competing factions which variously degenerated in economist, syndicalist and bourgeois-electoralist directions.

The decline of the powerful black movement of the 1960s is ultimately attributable to the inadequacies of the politics of its leadership, both the peaceful-legal reformism of the civil rights mainstream, and the more militant, but equally impotent, alternative posed by the younger nationalist radicals. Despite the heroism of thousands of subjectively revolutionary youth who embraced "black power," the net effect was to deepen the isolation of the most militant elements of the black movement from the mass organizations of the proletariat. The derailing of the potentially revolutionary social movement for black equality helped clear the way for the current right-wing assault on the rights of the poor and oppressed. Today many of the minimal gains of the civil rights period have been reversed. Instead of a "war on poverty," the ruling class has declared a "war on drugs," which is little more than a war on black neighborhoods.

### The Charles Stuart Case: Justice American-Style

The climate of bigotry is so pervasive today in America that, last fall, when a white Boston yuppie decided to kill his pregnant wife to collect a million-dollar insurance policy, he could think of no surer way to beat the rap than pinning it on an anonymous black man. The eagerness with which the police, the media and the mayor swallowed his story, despite strong evidence to the contrary, touched off a wave of racist hysteria. In the days that followed, seven hundred black men were randomly stopped and interrogated by the police. The mayor of Boston, Raymond Flynn, and Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis showed up at Carol Stuart's funeral. The whole affair became a major political event.

When Charles Stuart found out that his brother had

YUNGH KIM—BOSTON GLOBE



Victim of racist cop frame-up: William Bennett

gone to the authorities with the real story, he jumped off a bridge. But there is a lot to be learned about how the American "justice" system works by looking at what happened in the meantime. The police had already arrested a black suspect, William Bennett, and extracted a "confession" from him. They even got his nephew to testify that he had heard Bennett brag about the murder. To wrap up the case, the cops told Stuart who to point out in the line-up (a routine police practice called "coaching").

If Charles Stuart's brother had not come forward, Bennett would have been convicted. How many other black people have been jailed, hanged, electrocuted, or gassed after a "fair trial," simply because of their color? No one knows, but a conservative estimate would put it in the tens, if not hundreds, of thousands. Needless to say, the cops who framed Bennett are not going to jail. This is the juridical face of the color-caste system of American capitalism.

### The Crisis of Leadership in the Black Community

In the black community today there is not only a lack of revolutionary leadership, there is a virtual leadership vacuum. Even when the organs of state power are clearly exposed, as in the Stuart case, there is little or no pressure for any form of restitution or accountability. Black Democrats claim that the answer is electing more black officials to local and national office. Tell that to the victims of the MOVE massacre! If the eleven men, women and children murdered in Philadelphia in 1985 could speak today, they'd hardly be grateful to have been burned alive by a black mayor instead of a white one.

The Jessecrats, that is, the would-be socialists and nationalists who work for Jesse Jackson in the Democratic Party, sometimes like to pretend that they are "using" the Democratic Party as a springboard to build a powerful new movement for social justice and equality. But the Democratic Party is no springboard for social movements—it's a graveyard. From the days of the Populist movement of the 1890s, to the CIO of the 1930s, and more

recently the civil rights, women's and anti-war movements, the story is always the same. Once the Democrats lock on and coopt the leadership, the popular protests disappear.

Revolutionaries offer no support to Jackson, a Judas-goat for the capitalists. We call for a *break* with the Democrats, the "left" face of racism and imperialist war, and for the creation of a *workers party* based on the unions to fight for the interests of *all* the oppressed. Such a party must be organized around a perspective of class struggle—the expropriation of the capitalists and the creation of a workers government.

The absence of a militant leadership in the labor movement has opened the door for the likes of Louis Farrakhan, kingpin of the "Nation of Islam." Farrakhan is a dangerous, anti-Semitic demagogue, yet his denunciations of racism strike a powerful chord with many blacks. However Farrakhan can offer no road forward for America's brutally oppressed black millions. His program, apart from calling for veiling women and a prohibition on sex between unmarried people, proposes that blacks should liberate themselves through "black capitalism."

The strategy of "black capitalism" is a cruel hoax. There may be enough space for a few small-scale, sweatshop operations, but how many black entrepreneurs can afford to start up car plants or television networks? For the masses of black people capitalism can offer nothing but an endless cycle of poverty and misery. What Marxists counterpose to the fraud of black capitalism is the program of *workers power*, of socialism. Despite the illusions of the American proletariat, and the tremendous social and political backwardness that weighs it down, the working class is the only historical agency for the creation of a society that can provide for the needs of all of its citizens, and ensure real social equality for all.

The black question is key to the development of a revolutionary movement in this country because racism has historically been the most important obstacle to class-consciousness in the white working class. Black workers, because of their oppression and their strategic weight in the working class, are destined to play a leading role in the coming American Revolution. But American imperialism cannot be overthrown by a "Black Revolution." For a revolutionary movement to succeed, it must enjoy broad support from the whole proletariat. This means that it must be built on a program that, while championing the interests of blacks and other specially oppressed layers, is also capable of uniting *all* sectors of the working class.

### The Power of Ideas

One of the key tasks of American revolutionaries is to try to reach the most class-conscious elements of the black community, and win them to a materialist understanding of the origins of racial oppression. The starting point for this is the proposition that *ideas have no color*. Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky were all white men. But their revolutionary ideas contain powerful tools for *ending* the social system that perpetuates

racial oppression.

A socialist revolution of course is more than just a matter of ideas. It ultimately boils down to the question of state power—of defeating and disarming the thugs who serve and protect the system of forced segregation and racist terror. All the same, the battle of ideas—the struggle to change people's consciousness about their lives and the world they live in—is an important part of preparing the ground for revolutionary change. The capitalists do not rule by force of arms alone. They also rely on the dominance of bourgeois cultural and political values. The communications corporations—television, radio and newspapers—are all in the business of making money. However, at the same time, they are more than merely business enterprises, they are the chief purveyors of bourgeois ideology.

The role of capitalist ideological instruments is to shape perceptions of the world beyond the audience's direct experience in such a way as to make existing social reality appear natural and even inevitable. This is achieved through a process of selection, emphasis, presentation and exclusion; all guided by a tacit consensus about what exists, what's possible, what's worth covering and from what angle.

One of the most invidious implicit assumptions of capitalist propaganda is that of supposedly unlimited opportunities in the "home of the free." Every American is supposed to be the master of his or her fate. The implication is that poor people stay poor either because they do not *want* to better themselves or because there is something wrong with them. Accepting this notion leads to internalization of oppression, which is ultimately the most effective mechanism of control. One important function of a revolutionary movement is to enable the oppressed and exploited to see through the carefully constructed "reality" presented by the capitalist media, in order to understand how the world they live in really works, and how it can be changed.

### Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Because of the structural dependence of American capitalism on maintaining the racial divisions in the working class through promoting white chauvinism, the struggle for black liberation is tied, at every step, to the class struggle. Take the recent escalation of racist violence against black Americans. There are three interconnected levels to this. Firstly, there is the rising tide of police violence against blacks. Secondly, there is lynch-mob terror. (Michael Griffith was murdered in Howard Beach by a gang of white punks because he committed the "crime" of setting foot in a white neighborhood; Yusuf Hawkins was gunned down last year in Bensonhurst for the same reason.) The third level of this violence is closely connected to the first two, and that is the rise of organized Klan and skinhead terrorism against blacks and other racial minorities, gays and leftists.

How do Marxists propose to deal with this? First, we uphold the *right* of blacks (and others) threatened with racist violence to defend themselves. But that is not enough. It is also necessary to link the struggles of the

labor movement to those of blacks and other specially oppressed layers. It is not an accident that the rising tide of racism is paralleled by attacks on labor. The recent turn of corporate America to violent union-busting, and the widespread use of scabs in strike situations, means that the union movement is going to *have* to organize self-defense guards if it is to survive.

The fat-cat bureaucrats who are today running the unions into the ground are, of course, opposed to such tactics. But there is a lot of sentiment in the rank and file for doing something besides turning the other cheek, or going through the rigged "proper channels," when the bosses use the cops to start trucking in scabs. We call for organizing *workers defense guards* to counter the violent attacks of the bosses and their thugs. Such formations, which would inevitably be composed of the most militant and class-conscious workers, could be a natural starting point for organizing joint defense squads with members of minority communities against racist and fascist attacks.

The struggle against unemployment is another key issue in which unionists and members of the black community share common interests. Likewise, the struggle for the integration of black workers into the skilled trades, and other "non-traditional" sectors of the work force, is a vital part of the fight for real equality. During the height of the civil rights movement, marchers carried signs that read: "For Full Employment!" and "Jobs for All!" But with the decline of that movement, the watchword became "jobs for us." This sometimes goes by the name of "affirmative action," or "preferential layoffs." These policies were, for a time, being pushed by the government, partly as a response to pressure from the black community and the women's movement, but more importantly, as a pretext for encroaching on the seniority system and other union prerogatives. Today, with the union movement on the defensive, the Reaganite Supreme Court majority has come out against such programs as "discriminatory" against white males.

Whether or not the union bureaucrats are guilty of racist discrimination, or any other abuses of the membership, Marxists oppose calling on the capitalist courts to intervene. Such interventions can only open up the organizations of the working class to control by the class enemy. Instead, we counterpose a strategy which *unites* black and white workers around their common class interests against the bosses and their labor lieutenants in the union leadership. We call for reducing the hours worked per week without reducing the wage package to create jobs and end unemployment. Linked to this is the call for union hiring halls and recruitment programs to get women, black and other minority workers into skilled positions and other jobs that have been denied them in the past.

Another concrete demand which addresses the special needs of the black population is the call for free tuition and open admissions to universities. In addition, it is necessary to fight for special remedial programs and student stipends to make it possible for more blacks to go to college. In the public school system we support busing and any other measures which, although partial, represent a step toward greater equality for black students. For

BURT GLINN—MAGNUM



**workers  
have the  
social power  
to smash  
the racist  
oppression  
of capitalist  
society**

the same reason, we support special minority programs in schools—in fact, we think that black history should be part of the curriculum for all students.

### The Necessity of Revolutionary Leadership

We do not propose that black people should scramble for crumbs from the imperialist rulers. The capitalists are both unable, and unwilling, to integrate black Americans into this society on the basis of genuine equality. The struggle to end the oppression and degradation of black America requires nothing less than a socialist revolution. This is why the Marxist program for black liberation is one of *revolutionary integration*.

Only the organized labor movement has both the objective interest and the social power to lead a successful struggle against black oppression, because only the proletariat has the capacity to overthrow capitalism. Yet, in itself, the class is simply raw material for exploitation. For the labor movement to take up the struggle for socialism, it is necessary to organize a political struggle within the unions, led by organized formations, or caucuses, of individual militants committed to a program of consistent class struggle. Such caucuses must be constructed on the basis of a program which connects the immediate, day-to-day shop-floor issues with the historical necessity for the proletariat to expropriate the capitalists and establish its own government.

The establishment of an egalitarian, socialist society will not only benefit blacks but *all* the oppressed and exploited. All workers have a material interest in the fight for black liberation, which will prove a powerful motor force for proletarian revolution in the U.S. The road to black liberation lies in building a Leninist combat party capable of connecting the factories to the ghettos, and leading the struggle to uproot this system of exploitation and racial oppression. ■

# Will the Real Political Bandits Please Stand Up? Truth or Consequences

*The following is a letter to Workers Vanguard, newspaper of the Spartacist League/US, responding to an article slandering the Bolshevik Tendency.*

16 December 1989  
Comrades:

In replying to a *Workers Vanguard* (WV) polemic against the Workers League for its conduct in the Mark Curtis case, the 14 July 1989 *Bulletin* repeats several charges leveled against the Spartacist League by the Bolshevik Tendency. In your rejoinder ("Why Should Anyone Believe David North?," WV, 13 October 1989) you seize upon this opportunity to lump the BT with the Workers League (WL), citing the *Bulletin* article as evidence of our supposed shared anti-Sovietism, hostility to the black working class, bloodthirstiness, appetite for provocation and "petty criminal mentality."

Our attitude toward the Workers League has long been a matter of public record. We regard this unsavory gaggle of Gerry Healy's erstwhile American acolytes as one of the most perfidious examples of small-group psychosis and political banditry in the recent history of the U.S. left—exceeding even your own. Having considered all the available evidence, we concluded that Iowa SWP activist Mark Curtis was indeed the victim of a police frame-up. We endorsed his defense campaign a year and a half ago. The WL's attempt to bolster the prosecutor's case is one more episode in its decades-long, pathological crusade to destroy the SWP by any and every unprincipled means, including slander, cop-baiting and complicity with the capitalist courts.

Yet nothing prevents even the most unscrupulous

**James Robertson, Spartacist founder-leader, in 1977**



political operators from deploying the truth against opponents when it suits their purposes. How many times during the 1930s did the social-democratic and bourgeois press make use of Trotsky's writings to discredit the Soviet Union? And how many times did the Stalinists offer these citations from Trotsky in the bourgeois press as proof of his "hatred of Soviet Russia" and complicity with the imperialist powers? You now employ this same Stalinist technique of guilt by involuntary association against the Bolshevik Tendency because the WL, which is not particularly selective about the means it uses to discredit opponents, has found in our literature certain facts more damning to the Spartacist League than any lies it could invent. We will no more be deterred from publishing the truth about your organization because it can be cited by rightists, reformists or political bandits than Trotsky was from telling the truth about Stalinism because it could be used by the bourgeoisie for its own counterrevolutionary aims.

Your reply to the WL refers to the "Bolshevik Tendency's grotesque slanders of the Spartacist League," while studiously avoiding mention of exactly what "slanders" you refer to, let alone attempting to deny them. Indeed, the only specific charge which you take up is from an article in 1917 (*not* cited in the WL polemic) which compares the internal regimes of Gerry Healy and James Robertson ("The Robertson School of Party Building," 1917 No. 1). In this piece we noted that whereas Healy routinely had internal opponents beaten up, "This is something which the SL is not guilty of to our knowledge." You wax indignant because we also noted that "intimations of such appetites are increasingly common" among your leadership, but you refrain from commenting on the examples of such impulses which we quoted from a former leading member of the Spartacist League/Britain. He asked: "Perhaps you could explain why Len told [a former member] to remember what the Provos do to 'people like him.' Or why Ed felt moved to tell [another member] that 'if we were in [another country] we would beat you up.'" Reasonable people can only interpret remarks of this sort as intimating an appetite for the kind of violations of workers democracy which gave the Healyites such a deservedly bad name.

Your reply to the Northites is designed to give your readers the impression that the BT only makes vague insinuations about the SL. One would never suspect from your article that we have made a number of specific, concrete allegations concerning violations of Trotskyist principle, democratic centralism and proletarian morality on the part of your National Chairman, James Robertson, and his sycophantic clique. Several of these highly specific charges are repeated in the WL polemic. Yet you deliberately choose to ignore them. If these more specific accusations were false, you could justly indict us

not only for making insinuations, but (what is far worse), for concocting outright lies about your organization. But such an indictment would necessarily involve answering our charges directly—something you are not prepared to do for one very compelling reason: they are true.

In recent years, the SL leadership has found it necessary to give its members multiple choice tests in order to upgrade their general knowledge. To enhance public knowledge about the Spartacist League, we invite you to take the following "true or false" test, consisting of the *specific* allegations from our journal, 1917, which were picked up by the *Bulletin* (14 July 1989):

1. "In 1984, the Workers Vanguard carried a black-bordered death notice for Yuri Andropov, the KGB chief who played a major role in the butchering of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, claiming he 'made no overt betrayals on behalf of imperialism.'"

T\_\_ F\_\_

2. "Some Spartacist members who participated in a 1982 anti-Klan demonstration in Washington, DC billed themselves as the 'Yuri Andropov Brigade.'"

T\_\_ F\_\_

We are certain that even you would have no difficulty answering "true" to the above two questions, since the answers can be verified by consulting the appropriate back issues of *Workers Vanguard*. Publicly unacknowledged to date, however, are the following allegations contained in the *Bulletin* concerning the internal life of the SL:

3. "...the leadership has posted photographs of General Jaruzelski in the national office."

T\_\_ F\_\_

4. "Spartacist founder James Robertson had a six-figure summer home built [we said "bought"—BT] for himself on a marina in the San Francisco Bay Area, financed

by a special one-time assessment on the membership. 'Although the house is technically the property of the organization, it is clearly intended for the personal use of Robertson....'"

T\_\_ F\_\_

5. "'Adjoining his private office in the group's New York headquarters is a plush-carpeted playroom specifically designed for the nocturnal escapades that occupy an ever-increasing share of the National Chairman's attention.'"

T\_\_ F\_\_

6. "'Robertson has also had a hot tub installed in his extensive two-storied Manhattan apartment.'"

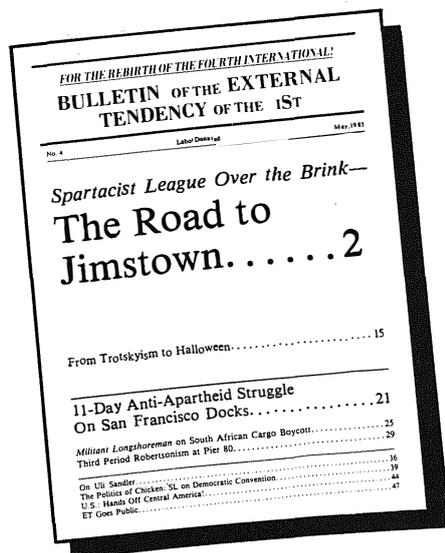
T\_\_ F\_\_

Like many other present and former SL members, we have personal knowledge that the answer to all the above questions is "true." We predict that you will not print this letter in its entirety. To do so would mean confirming or denying the above charges in print; to do either would be equally damaging to the reputation of the SL leadership. To deny them would contradict the direct experience of every SL member and sympathizer who saw the picture of Jaruzelski (clearly on display for months in the maintenance department of your New York headquarters), who contributed to Robertson's house, who spent many hours constructing the playroom and installing the hot tub. A direct denial would expose your leadership as cynical, unmitigated liars in the eyes of all these members and sympathizers.

If, on the other hand, you were to confirm these allegations, and say that, as head of a supposedly Marxist organization, Robertson is fully entitled to enjoy a materially privileged lifestyle at your members' expense, and that Jaruzelski deserves a place of honor on your walls, you would forever forfeit any claim to be taken seriously as a Trotskyist organization, and reveal yourselves to the world as the degenerate personality cult you have become. It would then be highly improbable that any rational human being would ever want to support or join the Spartacist League.

You therefore resort to the only dodge available to a culprit on the spot: to divert attention from the accusations by sowing confusion and defaming the accuser. An ordinary gangster might attempt to impugn the reputation of a witness against him by calling the latter a rapist or a drug addict; you respond to the testimony of the Bolshevik Tendency with a battery of epithets specifically designed to discredit us in the eyes of leftists and Trotskyists: anti-Soviet renegades, trade-union bureaucrats, racists, agent-provocateurs, etc. And just in case these specifically leftist terms of opprobrium do not have the desired effect, a few more ordinary accusations—e.g., "petty criminal"—are thrown in for good measure. These tactics—all in the worst traditions of Gerry Healy and David North—should prompt the more thoughtful readers of *Workers Vanguard* to ask themselves: "Why should anyone believe James Robertson?"

Yours for workers democracy,  
Jim Cullen (SL Member 1981-86)  
Dave Eastman (SL Member 1972-86)  
for the Bolshevik Tendency



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# Black Liberation & the Class Struggle

PIXFEATURE/STEIN



Of the many "Big Lies" pushed by the Reagan/Bush administrations in the 1980s, perhaps the biggest is the proclamation of a "post-civil rights era" in which black people have supposedly been assimilated into the mainstream of American society. The truth is that for black America things are bad, and getting worse, as the rulers of this country ruthlessly slash social programs and abandon all pretense of support for integration. The "freedom, justice and equality" that the American bourgeoisie is so concerned about for the Eastern Bloc remains a dream deferred for the overwhelming majority of black Americans.

According to the National Urban League's "State of Black America 1989," per capita real income for poor people (a category which is disproportionately black) fell

twenty percent in the decade after 1978. Black men working full time saw their real wages fall by ten percent in the same period. For those under thirty, average real income today is *half* of what it was in the early 1970s. Black unemployment, already more than double that of whites, is increasing. Infant mortality, already at Third-World levels in many ghetto neighborhoods, is also on the rise. Suburban segregation is rapidly catching up with the urban cores. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, in 1987 and again in 1988, life expectancy for blacks declined (the first back-to-back annual declines this century). White life expectancy went up both years. The Urban League concludes:

"It is ironic that in 1989, the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Constitution that defined blacks as 'three-fifths' of other

*continued on pg 31*