



WHAT IS THE "WORKERS LEAGUE"?

Wohlforth's Latest Incarnation

What is the Workers League? And what are the political credentials of its "National Secretary," Tim Wohlforth? Wohlforth tours the country, presuming to speak in defense of the Russian October Revolution and to build for an American October.

The U.S. is no more immune from the contradictions of capitalism than many nations whose rulers once thought themselves secure and are now emigres, working as doormen or CIA agents or professors. Revolutionary class struggle is the inevitable prospect in the United States. But the struggle cannot emerge successful without a Marxist leadership--and Marxist political leadership does not fall from the skies. It must be built and tested. Those found wanting must be rejected in good time in order to avoid defeat through personal opportunism or downright betrayal in the heat of battle. The success of such a selection mechanism was in great part responsible for the victory of the Russian October. Wohlforth's record, recent and earlier, shows that he and his group must be rejected by all those now striving to build for the American October. Such a rejection will be a small but valuable step in the building of a qualified Leninist party in the U.S.

Crazy Electoral Gyrations

The opportunity for socialists to make an impact through electoral action is better today than at any time in the past 20 years. The widespread and deep disaffection over the Viet Nam war, the multitude of outbursts in the black ghettos and the rising line of sharp trade union struggles all testify to this. The Workers League's miscellaneous and contradictory electoral lines, found in recent issues of their paper, the Bulletin of International Socialism, would be merely funny if they didn't add their mite to a situation in labor and radical circles which already threatens to let slip a favorable opportunity for developing forerunners to a Labor Party. Consider the following sequence gleaned from the pages of the Bulletin: On 25 September we read that on the West Coast, Socialist Workers Party-Young Socialist Alliance members were allegedly "attacked, knocked to the ground, kicked and beaten" by supporters of Progressive Labor. The writer summarizes the incident: "Here is an incident of violence. On one side are those who...seek to defend...the Chinese Revolution.... On the other side are those who side with its enemies.... We have no difficulty in making that choice." Consistent with the Workers League's confusion of ultra-left hooliganism with class militancy, and the crude attempt to ingratiate itself with PL, the Bulletin followed this up on 9 October by concluding, regarding the presidential campaign of the SWP: "...It does not deserve the support of any militant, black or white worker or socialist." But lo and behold, on 30 October the Bulletin struck again, stating that since PL doesn't call for a Labor Party, therefore "a vote for PLP is a vote for the bosses." Were one to treat this spectacle literally and

logically it would be necessary to conclude that on 25 September Wohlforth had been siding with one pro-boss party against another. This is usually called class collaborationism, and would be especially serious since it would seem to involve justifying violence by a pro-capitalist force. Actually, of course, these incidents reveal petty opportunist concessions to passing moods, combined with wooden tactical inflexibility.

Last Year in Brooklyn

To top it all off, last year the Bulletin gave conditional support to a completely classless, petty-bourgeois Brooklyn peace candidate of the most banal sort, one Hal Levin: "We strongly favor socialists working in support of the Levin campaign, seeking to overcome its weaknesses." (Bulletin, 12 September 1966) Wherever possible the Spartacist League has always intervened in a Leninist fashion to critically support socialist candidates such as those of the SWP and PLP. But concerning the Levin campaign, Spartacist stated, "What we need is not, as Levin puts it, 'an independent movement, free from the corruption of machine politics of the two major parties,' but rather a class party of the working class." Moreover, Wohlforth's holier-than-thou attitude toward the sell-out line of the SWP on the Viet Nam war is of rather recent vintage. In Spartacist #10 we documented in the section, "ACFI Rewrites Its Past," the Wohlforth group's trailing after the SWP in supporting the politics of that shabby gang of revisionists and pacifists, the 5th Avenue Peace Parade Committee.

On the Organizational Side

A parallel organizational pattern of frame-ups, justifications of violence within the workers movement to suppress the expression of views, condoning the use of capitalist courts to silence working-class opponents, lies and the witting use of liars, is the characteristic trait of the Wohlforth group under its successive sets of names and initials. Frame up: Wohlforth's lies in the service of the revisionists set up the Spartacists for expulsion from the SWP by its Pabloist leadership. Violence and the cops: The "Tate affair," in which Wohlforth's English master, G. Healy, had a socialist opponent beaten, became an international scandal. Even worse were Healy and Wohlforth's justifications for using the capitalist courts to try to intimidate the victim into silence. The witting use of liars and political degenerates: The Wohlforth group has even stooped to the literary exploitation of a pathetic liar and political degenerate expelled from the Spartacist League, Robert Hartley Sherwood. Sherwood, already under a cloud for a number of gross deficiencies--the worst a crude insensitivity on the Negro question and a call to liquidate a centralized revolutionary vanguard organization into a centrist formation, the Workers Party of Maryland--was finally expelled by us when he, along with his factional cohort, provocatively tried to sign the name of the Spartacist League to the reformist April 15th "Spring Mobilization for Peace" call which called for "your government to negotiate for peace now," at just the time that our comrades across the country were opposing this demand and mobilizing to intervene in the demonstrations under slogans for "immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops!", and "victory for the NLF side!" and calling for a workers party in the U.S. This Sherwood immediately developed "third-camp" theories about the "state-capitalist" nature of the Sino-Soviet bloc, which he took with him into collaboration with Wohlforth. Part of the reason Sherwood broke out of our organization was that he knew that we are intolerant of both those who volunteer to become cops for imperialism and those who, faced finally with the draft, refuse to go, preferring jail or Canada or some other cop-out, instead of carrying their

ideas into the Army, where the poor working-class and Negro young men are taken. Robert Hartley Sherwood, when faced with the possibility of induction into the Army, removed himself to a place of legality, comfort and safety, probably never able to again be involved in class struggle in the U.S., and thus made a mockery out of the alleged politics and/or discipline of the Workers League. (Compare this action with the Bulletin of 5 June 1967, front-page Statement on the draft, entitled "No Individual Cop-Outs; Prepare a Mass Struggle.") But cynically ignoring the despicable history of its creature, the Bulletin is glad to provide an outlet for Sherwood's voluminous and spiteful attacks on the Spartacist League, heedless of what such methods must reveal about the integrity and credibility of the Bulletin to all serious militants and radicals.

Necessary Interrelationship

Taken separately, either the political gyrations or the organizational swinishness of the Wohlforth group are hard to understand, despite the mass of empirical testimony. But taken together each becomes clearer and points to the underlying quality of this marginal tendency. Wohlforth himself is a left-wing intellectual technician--energetic, personally ambitious, short-sighted and unstable. He has now been hired by Healy, reportedly an uneasy relation, Healy knowing something of the low caliber of the hireling. But Healy is only the most recent of Wohlforth's mentors and masters. Leaving the Shachtmanite movement for the SWP, Wohlforth fell under the influence of Murry Weiss, then flirted with Pablo, then in 1959 came under the sway of Arne Swabeck, as the latter was discovering the virtues of Mao and the "Great Leap Forward." Wohlforth then moved to the left for a time, principally under the influence of Shane Mage. Then he took a step to the right, under the tutelage of the state capitalist, Art Philips, as well as the Britisher Healy, and, rationalizing the attempt to draw close to the central leadership of the SWP, declared on breaking with the Spartacist tendency in 1962 that "the main political fight of the tendency must be directed against the right-wing elements in the Party, the Weiss group and the Swabeck tendency." Throughout, Wohlforth has maintained an underlying elitist, manipulative outlook, hostile and contemptuous of workers democracy. Wohlforth first embraced Swabeck with zeal because he saw himself, at least vicariously, lording it over the Chinese masses while "building socialism." This is why in the past few months Wohlforth has so easily reverted to enthusing support for the Red Guard facade of the army-backed Maoist regime in China and reverted to political sympathy for old Arne Swabeck. The deep cleavage that divides the Wohlforth group from the Spartacist League has been delineated in articles in Spartacist #s 6 through 10.

If Wohlforth is a political "operator," always on the lookout for a short-cut, the successive groups that he has built and had collapse have evolved into a centrist literary sect, notable for its vulgarity, superficiality and a James Burnham-like worship of "strong," violent masters like Healy or Mao. Thus, the Wohlforth-Workers League-Young Workers League is not the organization for serious, class-conscious workers or working-class youth or radical intellectuals or black militants either. A group such as Wohlforth's can make no contribution to the coming American October; it must be ruthlessly swept aside as divisive and parasitic.

Box 1377, G.P.O.
New York, N.Y. 10001

03 November 1967
Spartacist League of the U.S.