



Fifth International Conference of the ICL

Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period

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Spartacist Group of Poland Refounded

For New October Revolutions! Reforge the Fourth International!

Platforma **SPARTAKUSOWCÓW** 4

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Spartakusowska Grupa Polski odbudowana

Z dnia ogłoszenia... Platforma Spartakusowców... odbudowana...

The following is translated and adapted from the Spartacist Group of Poland's Platforma Spartakusowców (PS) No. 23 (May 2007), which was distributed at May Day demonstrations in Warsaw. A complete version of the English translation appears in Workers Vanguard No. 892 (11 May 2007).

We are proud to announce the refounding of the Spartacist Group of Poland as a sympathizing section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). The SGP will be part of our disciplined democratic-centralist international. We are committed to the fight for new October Revolutions worldwide, the fight for an international socialist society that will put the entire world's wealth at the disposal of humanity. The decision to refound the SGP was made earlier this year by the delegates of the Fifth International Conference of the ICL.

The SGP was first founded in October 1990 as a result of the fusion between the Young Left Movement (RML) of Poland and the ICL, following on the heels of the capitalist reunification of Germany and the ICL's fight against counterrevolution.

When in December 1981 General Wojciech Jaruzelski suppressed Solidarność's bid for power, the iSt [international Spartacist tendency, the ICL's predecessor] supported this measure. At the same time, it warned that the Stalinists

were capable of selling out the Polish workers state to capitalism, which they eventually did in 1989-90. The iSt's position was a direct application of the Trotskyist program of unconditional military defense of the bureaucratically deformed workers states against internal and external counterrevolution and for proletarian political revolution to oust the parasitic Stalinist bureaucratic castes and replace their rule with that of democratically elected workers councils based on the defense of collectivized property forms, the planned economy and an internationalist perspective.

The RML started to break from Stalinism under the impact of the events in Poland. They rediscovered and upheld a fine tradition of the early Communist International that had almost been forgotten in Poland by the late 1980s: to honor in the month of January the "Three L's," Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, outstanding leaders of Russian, Polish and German communism. In honoring the Three L's, the RML effectively broke from the Polish nationalism promoted by the Stalinist bureaucracy and set itself apart from other left organizations which at the time actively promoted Solidarność counterrevolution.

What particularly attracted the RML to the ICL was the ICL's fight for a red Germany of workers councils in a socialist Europe in the unfolding proletarian political revolution in the German Democratic Republic [East Germany] in 1989-90. The ICL was the only organization internationally that fought against the capitalist reunification of Germany. A May 1990 "Letter to Polish Workers" issued by the Spartacist Workers Party of Germany (SpAD), German section of the ICL, made clear the ICL's unflinching opposition to Solidarność counterrevolution. The RML shared this understanding and embraced the ICL's Trotskyist program.

In 2001, the International Executive Committee of the ICL decided to dissolve the SGP. The objective political situation in Poland was mistakenly viewed as bleak for the ICL in contrast to workers' and other social struggles occurring in West Europe at the time. However, the Fourth ICL Conference in 2003 undertook a critical review of internal problems stemming from the impact of capitalist counterrevolution on our organization. Following our 2003 conference we undertook a further re-examination of past practices and political questions [see Spartacist No. 58, Spring 2004].

One of the questions that came under review was our propaganda on Solidarność in the 1990s. After the destruction of the Polish deformed workers state in 1989-90, Solidarność had served its purpose as the spearhead for capitalist counterrevolution. Its peasant sector and many intellectuals

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decamped and founded their own bourgeois parties. Thus, Solidarność (and its offshoots like Solidarność 80 and Sierpion 80) became more akin to a trade union in social composition. During the first tenure of the [ex-Stalinist social-democratic] SLD-led government in post-counterrevolution Poland we observed that the "official Solidarność union now poses as a champion of working-class interests while revving up its anti-Communist demagoguery and making overtures to openly fascist forces" (WV No. 614, 13 January 1995; PS No. 5, Spring 1995).

However, taking into account only the latter, we argued one-sidedly in a 1998 article in PS that "the function of Solidarność has nothing to do with 'trade unionism' of any kind, 'militant' or otherwise." Following internal discussion within the ICL, we corrected this formulation in our 2005 article "Right Wing Wins Polish Elections" (WV No. 857, 28 October 2005 and PS No. 13, December 2005), noting that it wrongly denied the fact that Solidarność is *both* a trade union and a reactionary clericalist organization: "It organizes workers at the point of production, sometimes leading defensive economic struggles; at the same time it functions as a political movement closely allied to the Catholic hierarchy and explicitly right-wing nationalist parties." This article, which summarized the ICL's proud record of fighting against counterrevolution against the backdrop of the obscene 25th anniversary festivities for Solidarność, was written in close collaboration between the ICL and its sympathizers and supporters in Poland.

Despite the SGP's dissolution, the ICL, especially through the SpAD, continued to intervene in leftist events and class struggles in Poland, and pursued discussions with militants who were interested in our program and repelled by the Polish left's embrace of anti-Communism and Polish nationalism. This work was facilitated in large part by a founding cadre of the SGP who continued to closely collaborate with the ICL.

Our new members were recruited mainly on the proud record of the ICL's fight against capitalist counterrevolution and for Trotskyism in Poland. One of our comrades encountered the ICL at a march for women's rights on International Women's Day and was attracted to the ICL because of our fight for women's liberation through socialist revolution and for full democratic rights for homosexuals. Our left opponents talk to striking workers only about economic demands and refuse to combat reactionary prejudices like anti-Semitism, male chauvinism or anti-gay bigotry; when these opportunists go to demonstrations for women's rights, they promote bourgeois feminist ideas. In contrast, we intervene in all struggles and among all layers of society with the revolutionary program. We tell striking workers that for the proletariat to advance, it must actively champion the rights of the oppressed; and we tell women's rights activists that they must turn to the proletariat, which is the only class in society with the social power and the objective interest to overthrow the capitalist system to which the oppression of women is inherent. We fight to build a revolutionary party that must be, in Lenin's words, a tribune of the people.

On the way to re-establishing a Polish section of the ICL we discussed the Trotskyist position on World War II. The cynical propagandists of the capitalist class portray World War II as a war between democracy and fascism. Nothing could be further from the truth! In fact, World War II was a war between competing gangs of imperialist robbers. Our revolutionary predecessors, Trotsky's Fourth International,

took no side in the war between the imperialist Axis powers of Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan and the Allied imperialists of Britain, France and the U.S., who disguised their desires for world hegemony and unbridled imperialist exploitation of colonies with "democratic" rhetoric. During the Second World War, the Polish bourgeoisie was a lackey of French and British imperialism. It is for this reason that the Trotskyists did not take a side in the 1939 war between imperialist Germany and Poland, which was merely, to use Trotsky's words, a "'crippled' gangster of imperialism." In clarifying this question, we referred back to Trotsky's powerful 1938 article "A Fresh Lesson," written at the time of the Munich accords upon which Hitler's troops dismembered and annexed the Czech parts of Czechoslovakia:

"Even irrespective of its international ties, Czechoslovakia is an absolutely imperialist state.... A war, even on the part of isolated Czechoslovakia, would thus have been waged not for national independence but for the preservation and, if possible, the extension of the borders of imperialist exploitation....

"An imperialist war, no matter in what corner it begins, will be waged not for 'national independence' but for a redivision of the world in the interests of separate cliques of finance capital."

In the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, *we did have a side*. We stand in the tradition of the brave Trotskyists in the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw, who declared, "We defend the workers state, notwithstanding the Stalinist regime, like we defend every workers organization from blows of the class enemy, notwithstanding the reformist regime ruling it.... LONG LIVE THE RED ARMY! LONG LIVE THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION! LONG LIVE THE INTERNATIONAL REVOLUTION!" (*Czerwony Sztandar* [Red Flag] No. 6, July 1941).

By re-establishing the SGP, the ICL is provided with an important window into East Europe. This is an important step toward reorganizing the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution. *Workers of the world unite! For new October Revolutions! Join us!* ■

ICL Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program

The Declaration of Principles of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is a concrete expression of our purpose: to build national sections of a democratic-centralist international which can lead the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution. This important document, which was adopted at the Third International Conference of the ICL in early 1998, was published in the four language editions of *Spartacist* and additionally in ten other languages.

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Our comrade Diana Kartsen died on April 12 from ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known as “Lou Gehrig’s disease”). Although increasingly paralyzed as the disease progressed, Diana fought with every ounce of strength to contribute to party work and discussion, and for the preservation and continuity of the Prometheus Research Library where she was Librarian.

Diana’s death is a painful blow to our comrades internationally, and to no one more than her companion and comrade Ed Kartsen. Our hearts go out to Ed, to Diana’s family and to others close to her. We are bitter that we were robbed of a comrade of Diana’s caliber, not least because backward religious elements at the helm of the U.S. imperialist ruling class have condemned millions to suffer hideously by blocking stem cell research that might lead to a cure for ALS and other diseases. Diana’s dedication to human emancipation was also a struggle to free science from subordination to reactionary obscurantism through international socialist revolution.

Memorial gatherings for Diana were held internationally. Written tributes were sent in from all over the world, including from scholars who had worked with Diana at the Prometheus Research Library and from young women cadres of the International Communist League who saw in Diana the kind of communist they would like to be. It is our custom in the communist movement to honor fallen comrades at the graves of their revolutionary predecessors. Thus comrades gathered at the grave of Karl Marx in London, at the Wall of the Communards in Paris, at the memorial to the Haymarket martyrs in Chicago, and at the graves of heroic Soviet spies Richard Sorge and Ozaki Hotsumi in Japan.

Friends and family gathered at memorial meetings in New York on May 27 and in California on June 10. At both memorials, displays of photographs and documents highlighted in particular Diana’s role as a leader of our interventions at numerous demonstrations and as head of the PRL. As Ed Kartsen stated at the New York meeting: “She radiated strength, determination, competence, discipline, accountability, love, intelligence, objectivity—what can be summed up as the highest levels of comradeship.”

Comrades who had the privilege to know and work with Diana benefited from her camaraderie in multiple ways: as a political and military leader in demonstrations; as a department head who ensured that comrades were given a thorough political briefing and overview as the precondition to any assignment, no matter how pressing the tasks or short the time at hand; as a wry wit and sympathetic friend to share a drink with; as a moral person with a strong sense of

Diana Kartsen

1948–2007



right and wrong whom you could count on for good advice. In a letter to comrades on the day Diana died, Ed Kartsen succinctly conveyed her strengths:

“Diana has been correctly honored for her military command capabilities and as an inspiring leadership role model for many of the younger cadre. Of course she should also be honored for her lifelong work in the party to preserve the political history of our movement in her library work. This was an expression of her understanding of the importance of historic knowledge for the development of Marxist theory and program. She had a clear comprehension of the unity of mental and physical labor, that is, of theory with practice. She appreciated the value of maintenance, and the concept of systems.

“Her understanding of the value of knowledge included the understanding of the critical importance of acquiring new knowledge about the political and natural world. Diana’s pursuit of knowledge was driven with the same determination she showed on the battlefield and she took an active interest in learning the principles of dialectics. Diana combined organization and theory and understood both to be necessary in the fight for a socialist future of the human race.”

Diana was won to Marxism and the Spartacist League as a student at the University of Chicago during the tumultuous period of the Vietnam antiwar movement. One comrade recalled seeing “this striking young woman with red flowing hair and a visible hammer and sickle pin on her jacket striding across campus.” While a graduate student specializing in Islamic art, she was won from the orbit of the International Socialists to authentic Trotskyism—to the importance of defending the gains of the Russian Revolution and building a party capable of leading the fight for new Octobers.

After working for a period of time as a close supporter of our Revolutionary Marxist Caucus in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in October 1971 she became a founding member of the Chicago branch of the Revolutionary Communist Youth, youth group of the Spartacist League. Shortly thereafter she went to live and study in India, where she functioned under the political direction of the party. She joined the Spartacist League in 1974 after her return.

That same year, a Perspectives and Tasks document passed at the SL/U.S. Fourth National Conference stated:

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

"We recognize that archival work constitutes an important party task and project the regular assignment of a qualified comrade to direct this work."

Diana was the qualified comrade found to lead the work of the Prometheus Research Library, drawing on her experience as an assistant at the Tamiment Library at New York University. The Prometheus Research Library's collection grew out of the 40-year accumulated and organized collection of SL National Chairman James Robertson. With Diana as Librarian and Jim as Director, the PRL accumulated over 6,000 books and periodical volumes. Particular emphasis is on minutes of leading committees and internal discussion materials from our revolutionary forebears. She also led the Library through the painstaking archival research and other work involved in the publishing of two books on historic American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon (*James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* and *Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933*), a publication of Trotsky's *Third International After Lenin* in the original Russian and six *Prometheus Research Series* bulletins.

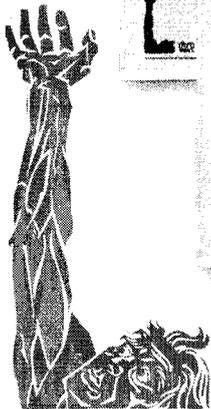
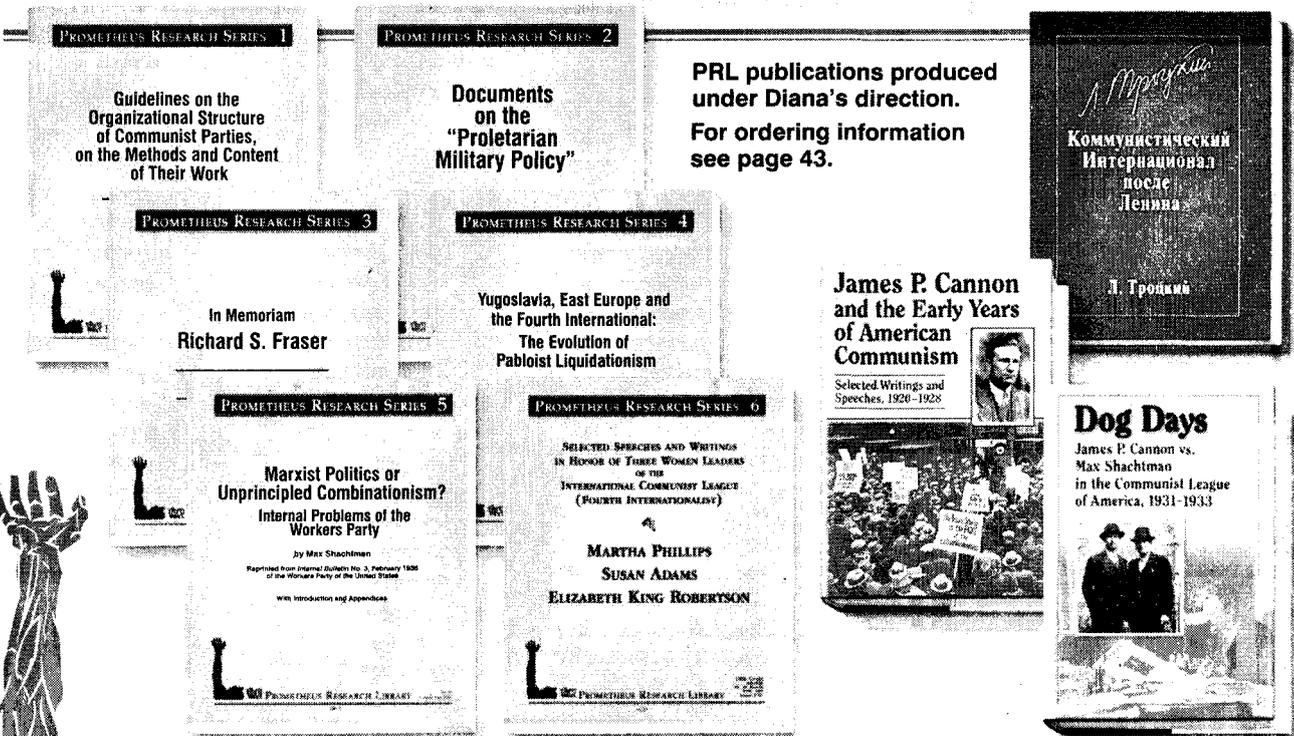
There are few positions in top party leadership and administration where Diana did *not* serve. The delegates at the SL's Sixth National Conference in 1980 elected Diana as a candidate member of the Central Committee. For a period of time she was department head for the International Secretariat while also holding down the Library. Elected a full member of the Central Committee in 1983, Diana was later elected to the SL/U.S. Political Bureau and to the office of National

Secretary, paying particular attention to the often conflicting demands of central office departments and SL locals and to politically organizing the necessary discussion to prioritize our work. She also served for some years as Political Bureau secretary. Diana's objectivity, fairness and integrity particularly suited her longtime role as the Central Committee representative to the party's Central Control Commission.

Diana was also recognized as the party's best military leader. In May 1981, she received a battlefield promotion from candidate to alternate member of the Central Committee and won a commendation from the Political Bureau for fighting to marshal our forces against a daisy-chain goon squad set up by the reformist Workers World Party to seal off a rally by our Anti-Imperialist Contingent at an El Salvador demonstration in Washington, D.C. While Workers World appealed to Democratic Party "doves" to set a more "humane" policy for U.S. imperialism, our contingent drew the class line over the civil war raging in El Salvador with the slogans "Military Victory to Leftist Insurgents!" and "Defense of Cuba, USSR Begins in El Salvador!"

From that day forward, Diana was a central military and political leadership component of almost every mass labor/black mobilization initiated by the Spartacist League or Partisan Defense Committee to stop the KKK and Nazi fascists, and dozens of other demonstrations.

With pain and sadness, and determination to continue the struggle to which Diana dedicated her life, comrades worldwide give the party's best military commander a last, strong comradely salute.



Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period

The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) held its Fifth International Conference in Europe early this year. As the highest body of our democratic-centralist international tendency, the conference was charged with assessing our work in the period since the last conference, in late 2003, and charting our course in the coming period, resolving outstanding political differences and electing a new International Executive Committee (IEC) to lead the organization until the next conference. The conference was preceded by three months of vigorous pre-conference discussion, which included the production of ten internal bulletins containing contributions by comrades throughout the organization. Elections for conference delegates, based on political positions, were held in all the national sections of the ICL. The delegates debated, amended and adopted the main conference document, "Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period."

While soberly acknowledging the strains and pressures on our small Marxist vanguard in this generally reactionary period, the conference registered a number of significant steps forward. Notable among these was the decision to reconstitute the Spartacist Group of Poland, dissolved in 2001, as a sympathizing section of the ICL. The conference took note of the significant improvement in the quantity and quality of our propaganda regarding the Chinese deformed workers state, as well as in our intensified efforts internationally to win freedom for U.S. death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. As part of an ongoing review mandated by the previous conference, an entire agenda point was devoted to a fuller assessment of our intervention in the incipient political revolution in East Germany (DDR) in 1989-90.

Most significantly, the conference reconsidered the earlier practice in the Marxist movement of running candidates for executive offices like mayor or president, as opposed to running for legislative or parliamentary office. It resolved that we categorically oppose running for executive positions in the capitalist state. The wide-ranging discussion on this question before and during the conference made clear that this is not simply a matter of electoral tactics but goes to the root of the Marxist view of the bourgeois state as an instrument of class oppression. As stated in the relevant section of the conference document reprinted in this issue, "In adopting the position against running for executive office, we are recognizing and codifying what should be seen as a corollary to Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which are really the founding documents of the Third International.... Thus we are continuing to complete the theoretical and programmatic work of the first four Congresses of the CI [Communist International]" ("Down With Executive Offices!", page 20).

The understanding that the proletariat cannot lay hold of



Fifth International Conference of the ICL

the capitalist state and wield it for its own class interests is the dividing line between reformism and Marxism; all the more is this the case today, when the bulk of the reformist left barely gives even lip service to the aim of socialism or communism, and the pressure to conform to bourgeois-liberal ideology is pervasive and intense. The question of the class nature of the state was, in fact,

an overarching theme running through many of the conference discussions, not least in addressing our perspective for labor-centered mass mobilizations to free Mumia Abu-Jamal as against the liberals and leftists who counterpose reliance on the supposed justice of the capitalist courts. This question also figured centrally in reviewing our fight against capitalist counterrevolution and for defense of the DDR and Soviet workers states, and in hammering out differences over our program for unconditional military defense of and proletarian political revolution in China. Reaffirmation of the Marxist view of the state is central to maintaining our programmatic bearings in this period of post-Soviet reaction.

Imperialist Depredations, Defensive Struggles

The conference document laid out the international political context in which we struggle and intervene as a revolutionary propaganda group. This continues to be defined by the impact of the 1991-92 capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet Union, the homeland of the October Revolution of 1917. The destruction of the USSR, following decades of bureaucratic Stalinist misrule, was an unparalleled defeat for working people all over the world, decisively altering the political landscape on the planet. It benefited the strongest and most dangerous imperialist power, the U.S., enabling it to extend its dominant influence over the world. In collaboration with Japan, the American imperialists have built up a strong military presence in the Pacific region, primarily threatening the Chinese and North Korean bureaucratically deformed workers states. This poses with increasing urgency our call for unconditional military defense of those states—and of the Vietnamese and Cuban deformed workers states—as well as the need to mobilize the proletariat internationally in opposition to the U.S.-led occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and other imperialist depredations.

Unlike in 2003, however, when the Bush administration was gloating over its easy win against the Saddam Hussein regime, U.S. imperialism now finds itself mired in a hugely unpopular and bloody occupation of Iraq. Moreover, as we have noted, "The unchallenged global military hegemony of the U.S. stands in sharp contradiction to its declining economic base. The tendency of the Bush administration and correspondingly wide sections of the American ruling class to view the world through the apocalyptic theological lens of Armageddon has its roots in this objective contradiction" ("Defend China, North Korea! U.S.

Hands Off the World!”, *Workers Vanguard* No. 843, 4 March 2005). More generally, the document noted, the future of the world economy is unpredictable and murky, with numerous signs that we are on the edge of a depression or major recession.

The Iraq war brought to the surface fissures between the U.S. and its militarily far weaker European rivals, particularly France and Germany. Seeking to improve their competitive position, the European imperialists have targeted the “welfare state,” which they regard as economically expensive and politically superfluous in the post-Soviet world. Workers in West Europe have resisted these attacks through significant defensive struggles, and France has also seen combative mobilizations by students and by oppressed minority youth of North African origin. The conference document underlined the need to combat economic protectionism and anti-immigrant chauvinism in the imperialist countries.

In Latin America, resentment over escalating impoverishment, privatization, debt bondage and the other ravages of imperialism, combined with Washington’s difficulties in Iraq, have propelled a substantial growth in populist nationalism, exemplified by the Chávez regime in Venezuela and López Obrador’s bourgeois-nationalist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in Mexico. Mexico has seen a series of protracted and bitterly fought strikes and massive protests, including a huge plebeian upheaval against increases in the price of basic foods. That upheaval came to a head even as our conference was meeting. The delegates resolved to assist our comrades in Mexico in intervening in the volatile social struggles erupting in that country with the aim of breaking workers and radical youth from illusions in the PRD and other populist nationalists.

Swimming Against the Stream of Post-Soviet Reaction

The point, to paraphrase Karl Marx, is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it; and to effect revolutionary change requires the forging of a revolutionary leadership. Necessarily so, the principal focus of the conference delegates was on the state of our own organization, the nucleus of the Leninist vanguard party needed to lead the proletariat in the struggle for state power and a global egalitarian, communist society. Our last international conference took place

amid a crisis in the ICL (see “The Fight for Revolutionary Continuity in the Post-Soviet World,” *Spartacist* No. 58, Spring 2004). That crisis stemmed from a failure to fully assimilate the material and ideological impact of capitalist counterrevolution. As our article on the Fourth International Conference explained:

“At the crucial hour, in sharp contrast to much of the left, the ICL stood at our post in defense of the gains of the October Revolution of 1917. Nonetheless, the weight of this world-historic defeat has affected us as well, serving to erode the understanding of our revolutionary purpose in the fight for new October Revolutions.”

The bourgeoisie’s ideologues seized on the collapse of the Soviet Union to proclaim the “death of communism” and to pronounce Marxism a “failed experiment.” These falsehoods were parroted by the former Stalinist bureaucrats whose betrayals and misrule had paved the way for capitalist restoration, as well as by the many reformist leftists in the West who had aided and abetted the imperialist-led drive for counterrevolution. That world-historic defeat led to a profound retrogression in proletarian consciousness, albeit uneven in its impact around the world: today, even more politically conscious workers in the capitalist countries by and large no longer identify their struggles with the ultimate aim of achieving a socialist society. Even a leading spokesman for the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which cheered most loudly over the “collapse of Communism” in 1991, recently had to admit in an SWP internal bulletin that the SWP had misjudged the “effects of the collapse of Stalinism” and that in fact “it was perceived by millions, indeed hundreds of millions, as the defeat of socialism” (John Molyneux, “Why I Intend to Stand,” published in *Weekly Worker*, 5 January 2006).

Accepting the “death of communism” proclaimed by the bourgeoisie, most of the so-called “left” no longer sees socialism as possible and instead promotes liberal democracy and the “welfare state” as the aim of social struggle. There is a huge gulf between such opponents of revolutionary Marxism—and the radical-liberal youth they may attract—and our program of proletarian revolution. The main document of the Fourth ICL Conference noted: “Failure to recognize the period we are in and the necessary relationship of our small revolutionary vanguard to the proletariat, and the absence of the Soviet Union as an active and defining factor in politics,

Spartakist



ICL fought for internationalist program of proletarian political revolution against capitalist counterrevolution in East Germany, 1989-90. Banner at 250,000-strong Treptow mobilization, 3 January 1990, reads: “Down With NATO! Defend the Soviet Union!” First issue of daily *Spartakist/Arprekorr*, 7 December 1989, demanded: “No Sellout of the DDR! Workers and Soldiers Councils, Now!”

have led to disorientation. Frustration and impatience over the disparity between our small size and slender roots in the working class and our proletarian internationalist purpose have led both to opportunist lunges and sectarian moralism."

The 2003 crisis posed a sharp fight to maintain and defend our programmatic integrity, i.e., our revolutionary continuity with the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky. Regaining and retaining a Marxist compass in this reactionary period has not been automatic or uniform. The 2003 conference mandated continued review and re-examination of unresolved questions and past and present party work in order to get a better sense of what lay at the root of our political disorientation. Through these reviews, and internal debates over disputed questions as they arise, we have restored and strengthened the internal corrective mechanisms that are the essence of our democratic-centralist practice. Comrades came to understand, as the Fifth Conference document states: "*The chief pressure operating on our party, especially in this period of post-Soviet reaction, is Menshevik, i.e., social-democratic, opportunism, not ultra-left sectarianism.* And the essence of Menshevism in this period is capitulation to bourgeois liberalism."

Writing in 1937, Trotsky stressed that in a reactionary period, "the task of the vanguard is above all not to let itself be carried along by the backward flow: it must swim against the current. If an unfavorable relation of forces prevents it from holding the positions that it has won, it must at least retain its ideological positions, because in them is expressed the dearly purchased experience of the past" ("Stalinism and Bolshevism," August 1937). In speaking of the centrality of this struggle to maintain our revolutionary continuity in this period, we have referred to ourselves as a "programmatic holding operation." As our Fifth Conference document states, "*Program is decisive.* Without our programmatic integrity our intervention into the world can only be revisionist."

But defending our program also means figuring out its extension to new situations, testing it in active polemical engagement and exemplary intervention. There can be no "finished program" for a living, fighting party. The reconsideration of our earlier attitude toward running in elections for executive office was an example of this. Our central purpose in such discussions is to arm our party to intervene more effectively into such class and other social struggles as arise. As a recent resolution voted by our Mexican section and reaffirmed by the conference stated:

"The most profound attitude of communists is to struggle, right now, as in the past and in the future. Although we are living in a reactionary period since the fall of the Soviet Union, a period characterized by a general throwback of consciousness, we are a *fighting* propaganda group. Central to maintaining our programmatic compass is our intervention into existing struggles with our program."

Continued Struggles to Reorient the Party

Discussion on the main conference document opened with reports by two members of the outgoing International Secretariat (I.S.), the IEC's resident subcommittee in our international center. Comrade J. Blumenfeld drew a balance sheet of the struggle to reorient the ICL in the years since our last conference, addressing issues where we have made substantive correctives and pointing to areas where a re-examination of past work is underway or remains necessary. Combatting the pressures of bourgeois ideology as they manifest themselves is an ongoing necessity for a Leninist vanguard; our sections are made more permeable to such pressures insofar as ear-

Priest on the barricades of U.S.-backed forces of capitalist restoration in Moscow, August 1991. British Socialist Workers Party and other social-democratic leftists hailed "democratic" counterrevolution.



Der Spiegel

lier unclarity are not reviewed and resolved. The second reporter, J. Bride, focused on an important debate over our stance toward the Chinese deformed workers state today, relating this to the lessons of our fight for proletarian political revolution and against capitalist counterrevolution in the DDR in 1989-90, and addressed our tasks in intersecting the social struggles taking place in Mexico. In their remarks, both comrades spoke to the importance of the proposed line change on running for executive office, which was taken up in more depth under a separate agenda point later in the conference.

Comrade Blumenfeld noted how "a major pressure on our party leadership is the wide gulf that exists between us and our program and that of the opponents." One of the most crucial fights to reorient the ICL in the recent period was over our attitude to the World Social Forum and its regional offshoots in Europe and elsewhere, which have been championed by a host of reformist left outfits including the British SWP and the fake-Trotskyist "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" (USec). This fight was key to deepening our understanding that, particularly in this period, adaptation to Menshevism is the chief danger facing our party. Prior to 2005, we had failed to characterize the social forums as *popular-frontist*—i.e., class-collaborationist—alliances run by bourgeois liberals and pro-capitalist social democrats and directly funded by capitalist governments and institutions.

A memorandum adopted by the IEC that year corrected this and affirmed: "We do not give critical support to nor enter the popular front. We don't peddle our wares in the shadow of the popular front. Therefore, we are not part of and do not organize activities under the auspices of these social forums." We made clear that our political interventions into such events must be from the standpoint of forthright and irreconcilable opposition. Following this clarifying discussion, the Spartacist League/Britain produced a sharp polemical article in *Workers*



Hammer (No. 191, Summer 2005), “Social Forum Con Game,” which was translated and reprinted in other ICL publications.

The reporter addressed a debate over formulations in our press that implied that the retreat in political consciousness we see today grew out of a more or less continuous process beginning in the late 1970s. For example, our *Spartacist* polemic against “anti-globalization” ideologues Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri stated: “Hardt and Negri are representative of what we have described as a profound retrogression in political consciousness—especially pronounced among the leftist intelligentsia—which prepared and was in turn deepened by the final overturn of the October Revolution and imperialist triumphalism over the supposed ‘death of communism’” (“The Senile Dementia of Post-Marxism,” *Spartacist* No. 59, Spring 2006). Running counter to the thrust of the article itself, this statement greatly underplays the impact of the counterrevolution. The article compounded the problem by favorably quoting an argument against post-modernist idealism by British historian Eric Hobsbawm:

“Most intellectuals who became Marxists from the 1880s on, including historians, did so because they wanted to change the world in association with the labour and socialist movements. The motivation remained strong until the 1970s, before a massive political and ideological reaction against Marxism began. Its main effect has been to destroy the belief that the success of a particular way of organising human societies can be predicted and assisted by historic analysis.”

—*Guardian* (London), 15 January 2005

There was indeed a shift to the right beginning in the 1970s, one manifestation of which was the advent of Eurocommunism, a rejection of even nominal allegiance to the Soviet Union by some Communist parties in West Europe. The *Spartacist* article failed to point out that Hobsbawm himself supported the Eurocommunists around the journal *Marxism Today* in Britain, which alibied then Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock’s strikebreaking against the 1984-85 British miners strike. But such ideological shifts in the late 1970s were quantitative and could have been reversed if, for example, the British miners had been victorious in their bitter year-long strike or, obviously in a more profound way, if we had succeeded in leading a political revolution in the DDR. The end of the Soviet Union had massively greater consequences. As a comrade argued: “The reversal of October turned quantity into quality, not just on the ideological but on the material, military and political terrain as well.” Comrade Blumenfeld noted, by way of example, “The Soviet Union was really the powerhouse, economically speaking, in East Europe, but it also made it possible for a Cuban workers state to come into being and to exist. Now that is not the world we live in anymore.”

The conference document noted that prior to the 1991-92 Soviet counterrevolution, the other historic nodal point after the October Revolution was the failure of the 1923 German Revolution. This “marked the end of the post-WWI revolutionary wave and signified a temporary stabilization of the capitalist order. This signified the isolation of the besieged and economically impoverished Soviet workers state for the next period and led the Soviet workers to despair over the prospects of international proletarian revolution, ushering in the rise of the Stalinist bureaucratic caste, whose policies deeply undermined the consciousness of the proletariat over the following decades. By the mid 1930s [when the Comintern openly embraced the popular front], the Stalinist parties internationally were reformist props of the bourgeois order. This was qualitatively more significant than the Eurocommunism

phenomenon of the 1970s.” It bears repeating, however; that the current reactionary period is uneven and will not last forever; the workings of capitalism continually give rise to class and other social struggle and will lead to new revolutionary upsurges.

The 1960s and early ’70s had seen several proletarian revolutionary upheavals—notably the May ’68 general strike in France—and an international radicalization, especially among petty-bourgeois student youth, out of which most of the left grew enormously. This dissipated rapidly with the end of the Vietnam War, which was followed by Washington’s drive under Democrat Jimmy Carter for “human rights” rearmament against the Soviet Union. Over the next period, huge numbers of once-radical “children of ’68” became anti-Communist social democrats who actively promoted capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR and East Europe. In the ’60s and early ’70s the pseudo-Trotskyist USec, then led by Ernest Mandel, argued impressionistically that the march to socialism was irreversible, portraying “red universities” as revolutionary bastions while discovering multiple “new mass vanguards” to replace the need for a Leninist-Trotskyist party. Today the USec et al. are abject reformists who act as though capitalism is irreversible.



Workers Vanguard

Sign at April 2006 New York City antiwar protest calls on U.S. imperialists to invade Darfur, Sudan. Collapse of Soviet Union led to huge throwback in consciousness.

The conference document cited a 2000 Spartacist League/U.S. document, produced to accompany the SL/U.S. programmatic statement, which succinctly described our current left-wing competitors as “Opponents of the Revolutionary Internationalist Workers Movement” and noted:

“All of our party’s activity is directed to organizing, training and steeling the proletarian vanguard party necessary for the seizure of state power. In contrast, the politics of the reformists and centrists consist of oppositional activity completely defined by the framework of bourgeois society. The latter was sharply characterized by Trotsky as ‘the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state.’ Such accommodation to capitalist class rule by organizations nominally claiming adherence to Marxism is, if anything, more decisively pronounced today in a world defined by the final undoing of the Russian Revolution and the triumphal assertion by the imperialist rulers that ‘communism is dead.’”

—Spartacist pamphlet, *For Socialist Revolution in the Bastion of World Imperialism!* (November 2000)

The predominant consciousness among today’s political activists—spanning the so-called left and the anti-globalization

miliou—is bourgeois-liberal ideology. But the clear implications of this understanding for our opponents work were not followed consistently and were sometimes disregarded. In particular, conference delegates re-examined our work around the anarchoid youth milieus that grew substantially starting in the late 1990s. We correctly projected that anarchist tendencies would experience a recrudescence in the post-Soviet period, given the pervasiveness of “death of communism” ideology. But we ended up investing these radical liberals with a leftist character they do not have, falling into a pattern of opportunist conciliation. This came out most sharply in our propaganda around the protests against the 2001 Group of 8 imperialist summit in Genoa. Unlike most of our fake-Trotskyist opponents, we defended the militant Black Bloc anarchists against vicious state persecution. But, in the course of this elementary defense of militants under state attack, we prettified their politics.

We wrote of “a clear left-right division—written in blood—within the ‘anti-globalization’ movement. That division is not primarily over protest tactics, or ‘violence’ versus ‘nonviolence.’ Rather, at root what is at issue is the question of the ‘democratic’ legitimacy of the existing parliamentary capitalist government. On that question, we stand with the anarchists against the left social democrats, including those who occasionally masquerade as Marxists or Trotskyists” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 762, 3 August 2001). The assertion that modern-day anarchists reject the legitimacy of the bourgeois order is an invented reality. In the U.S., for example, most self-described anarchists join the “Anybody but Bush” crowd in voting for the Democrats or the bourgeois Greens in elections.

The political signature of today’s anarchists is pure anti-Communism: they all hailed triumphant counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and East Europe. The conference took note that our 2001 pamphlet *Marxism vs. Anarchism*, an otherwise excellent historical exposition, failed to deal substantially with the October Revolution, or with the anarchist hue and cry over the necessary crushing by the Bolsheviks of the 1921 Kronstadt mutiny and the counterrevolutionary Makhno movement. (For more on this question, see “Kronstadt 1921: Bolshevism vs. Counterrevolution,” *Spartacist* No. 59, Spring 2006.) The living experience of the Russian Revolution won the best of the anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists in Russia and elsewhere to the Bolsheviks’ side. In sharp contrast, a multitude of muddle-headed liberal anarchists chose to bloc with the monarchists, imperialists and other unsavory forces against the Revolution. Our propaganda needed to explicitly distinguish between today’s passionately anti-Communist anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists who solidarized with the Russian Revolution.

We must guard against any tendency to embellish bourgeois democracy, as our opponents do routinely. Buying into the lie that communism is the embodiment of totalitarian brutality, they appeal to the rapacious, blood-drenched imperialist rulers to conform to a bogus ideal of bourgeois democracy. An example in this regard is the widespread use by liberals and leftists of the term “gulag” to describe what they see as “excesses” of capitalist state repression and torture. This term—referring to Soviet labor camps during the Stalin era—has long been a Cold War anti-Communist battle cry. That it found its way into an article defending victims of the U.S. “war on terror” in *Workers Vanguard* (No. 842, 18 February 2005) was a warning sign that we had to maintain utmost vigilance against getting injured to pervasive “death of

communism” ideology. Acknowledging our error, we wrote in a polemic against the liberals and leftists for whom anti-Communism is common coin:

“The Soviet Union may be gone—but the necessity of defending the Russian Revolution is as vital as ever. The imperialists and their liberal torchbearers seek to rewrite history in order to ensure that the rule of capital is never again challenged. They would like to wipe out of the consciousness among the proletariat and the oppressed any attachment to the program or ideals of communism.”

—“U.S. Torture Machine,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 863, 3 February 2006

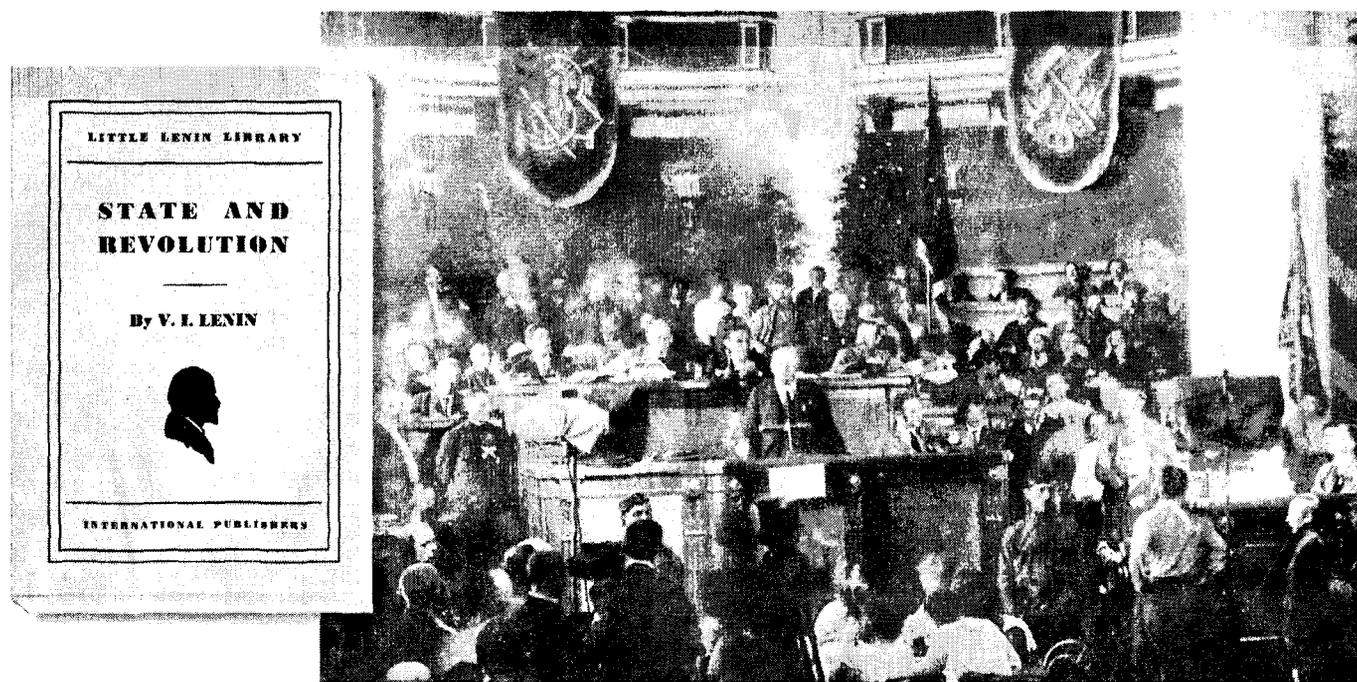
Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State!

Comrade Bride began his report by noting the importance of our discussion on communists running for executive office: “The *fundamental* point that’s posed here is the line between reform and revolution, between the *reformist* strategy of taking hold of and administering the bourgeois state apparatus versus the *revolutionary* strategy, which means smashing the existing state organs and replacing them with organs of workers rule. Communists do not join, support or take responsibility for the administration of the bourgeois state. And when you run for, as well as hold, executive office, you are legitimizing exactly that—the executive authority.”

The position that communists should under no circumstances run for executive offices of the bourgeois state is an extension of our longstanding criticism of the entry of the German Communist Party (KPD), with the support of the Comintern, into the regional governments of Saxony and Thuringia in October 1923. The KPD’s support to these bourgeois governments run by “left” Social Democrats—first from outside the government and then from within—helped to derail a revolutionary situation (see “A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern,” *Spartacist* No. 56, Spring 2001). Our new line clears up a confusion in the communist movement that has been present since the CI Second Congress in 1920. The reporter noted: “We are trying to do what in the main the Third International did do, which is clean up the act of the Second International on the state; they just didn’t finish the job. Because when they had that discussion at the Second Congress, they were doing battle with the Bordigists and ultralefts, who in principle didn’t want to run for office. But no distinction there was made between running for parliament and running for executive office.”

Our earlier line, affirmed at the 2003 ICL Fourth Conference, was that Marxists could run for executive posts so long as we made clear in advance that we would not assume office if elected. Comrade Bride noted that this issue had first been raised internally in 1999, when the party was deeply disoriented, then was raised again after the 2003 conference, leading to the reopening of discussion. He commented, “I think our slowness to grapple with this has a lot to do with the state of the party and the prevailing conception, in fact, that the overriding problems were sectarianism and not Menshevism.” The subsequent fights and discussions to reorient the ICL have greatly strengthened our ability to address such questions, drawing crucial lessons from the history of the workers movement to apply to our work.

The executive office question was a major subject of debate in the buildup to our Fifth Conference, with many contributions by comrades at pre-conference meetings and in internal bulletins. A number of research documents were produced, examining a variety of historical situations, among them the



V.K. Bulla

V.I. Lenin addresses Second Congress of Communist International, 1920, which debated theses on parliamentarism. Lenin's 1917 book reaffirming Marxist position on the state should be seen as a founding document of CI.

ministerialism (holding positions in bourgeois governments) of the Second International; the electoral work of the Bolshevik Party and its attitude toward bourgeois municipal administrations during the period of dual power in 1917; the work of the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists in the years before and after the Russian Revolution; and of early Communist parties in France, Mexico and elsewhere. Further historical research remains to be done, with an eye to publishing more extensive propaganda on this critical question in the future.

Our change of line remained controversial up to the eve of the conference. Some comrades initially argued for running for president in "exceptional" circumstances as a means of gaining a broader hearing for Marxist ideas. Another comrade, pointing to the practice of early Communist parties in running local administrations, even wrote that if we won a majority in a municipal council, we should take office or risk being seen as "abstentionist." A comrade responded sharply: "Our position is not *abstention*, as suggested by some, it's *opposition*. Please be very clear, we're not *neutral*, we're *opposed* to the executive of the capitalist state." The comrades who initially argued against changing our line eventually saw that their argumentation skirted dangerously close to reformism, and in the end the conference voted unanimously for the new position.

A recent polemic by the Internationalist Group (IG) provides a crude rehash of the worst arguments in favor of running for executive office. The IG's article, "France Turns Hard to the Right" (*Internationalist* supplement, May 2007), deals with the recent French presidential elections, where the USec's flagship group both ran a candidate and, after he was eliminated in the first round of voting, called to elect the candidate of the pro-capitalist Socialist Party. In the name of "fighting the right," in 2002 the Mandelites even called to re-elect France's right-wing bourgeois president, Jacques Chirac, against his opponent, the fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen. Citing our new position as summarized in an article on the

French elections (*Le Bolchévique* No. 179, March 2007; translated in *Workers Vanguard* No. 890, 13 April 2007), the IG ludicrously charges that our policy of refusing to run for president or other executive office "reveals a parliamentary cretinism similar to that of the Mandelite pseudo-Trotskyists"—because we recognize a difference between parliamentary and executive positions!

The IG shows touching faith in the capitalist state and its democratic trappings. Marxists have always distinguished between executive offices like president or mayor, which by definition entail administering the bourgeois state, and legislative positions like parliamentary deputy, which communists can use as a tribune to help rally the masses against the bourgeois order. Not so the IG, which obliterates that distinction in favor of one between "democratic" and "anti-democratic" bourgeois institutions. They write: "We are also opposed to the existence of a second, supposedly higher, legislative chamber as inherently anti-democratic. Should we therefore also refuse to run candidates of the Senate?" To base participation in elections on how democratic the institutional facades of the capitalist state are is truly parliamentary cretinism. Does the IG think the lower chambers of bourgeois parliamentary republics are truly democratic institutions? If they think the French Senate is undemocratic, they should look at the Russian tsarist Duma, which the Bolsheviks effectively utilized to propagate their revolutionary program. As far as the IG is concerned, communists can run "for whatever post." Judge? Sheriff? Indeed, if it's OK to run for commander-in-chief of the imperialist military, why not for local sheriff?

As our conference document states: "The problem with running for executive offices is that it lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state." When you run for such offices, workers will understand that you cannot be but aspiring to administer the capitalist state. For the IG, running candidates for president or mayor "in no way implies that they intend to occupy these positions within the

framework of the bourgeois state.” After all, “In the unusual case in which a revolutionary candidate had enough influence to be elected, the party would already have begun building workers councils and other organs of a soviet character. And the party would insist that, if elected, its candidates would base themselves on such organs of workers power and not on the institutions of the bourgeois state.” With this line, the IG leaves open, and certainly does not disavow, the possibility of not only running for executive office but of taking such office in a revolutionary situation, as in the Saxon and Thuringian bourgeois governments in 1923. And what if a “revolutionary candidate” wins a municipal post like mayor in a local party stronghold in the absence of a nationwide social crisis that poses the question of proletarian power? This was the not-so-unusual case with the early Bulgarian and French Communist parties, among others, which controlled hundreds of such local administrations. The IG is mum on what its winning candidate should do in such circumstances.

The IG upholds the tradition not of Lenin but of Karl Kautsky. Amid the revolutionary upheaval that swept Germany at the end of World War I, the Kautskyites claimed to support both the workers councils and the bourgeois provisional government, the Council of People’s Representatives, which they joined in November 1918. They thus played a key role in co-opting and defeating the revolutionary upsurge. It is precisely in revolutionary times that illusions in the capitalist state are most dangerous. After Lenin laid out the Marxist perspective of the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeois state in *The State and Revolution* (1917), he was furiously attacked by Social Democrats who accused him of going over to anarchism.

The IG—whose core cadre defected from our Trotskyist organization in 1996 in pursuit of their opportunist orientation toward various Stalinists, Latin American nationalists and other petty-bourgeois milieu—sees our new position as further evidence of our break with “the continuity of genuine Trotskyism.” What they mean here, without saying it, is that in 1985 we ran Marjorie Stamborg, now an IG supporter, as the Spartacist candidate for mayor of New York (see, for example, “Vote Spartacist!”, *Workers Vanguard* No. 390, 1 November 1985). The IG’s line that it could accept executive office in certain “unusual” cases, as we have noted elsewhere, “is not in ‘continuity’ with our earlier position of ‘run but do not serve.’ It is, rather, a rightist resolution of the contradiction inherent in that line” (“The IG and Executive Office:

Sewer Centrism,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 895, 6 July 2007).

In a document written during our pre-conference discussion, one comrade drew a useful analogy between the past practice of Marxists running for executive office and Lenin’s pre-1917 slogan of a “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” (RDDPP) for tsarist Russia. Noting that “some policies can serve revolutionaries for a long time before they are ultimately revealed in the development of the class struggle to be unfit,” the document continued:

“Lenin had not been a class traitor when he wielded that defective slogan against the Mensheviks and Liberals. And nor had Trotsky, Cannon, or we ourselves, crossed the class line in seeking to oppose Menshevism with a latently defective policy.

“But after the successful 1917 Revolution and the strangled 1927 Chinese Revolution, the earlier ‘latent’ defect of Lenin’s RDDPP formula took on an overt, conscious and redirected character. To uphold it then against Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution was a betrayal. And the same can be said of clinging to a past practice inherited from our predecessors that had not yet had its built-in defect revealed. We had the responsibility, and now we have the benefit, of learning from the disastrous consequences of the German (and Bulgarian) failures of 1923. To deny the connection between the Comintern’s unfinished break from social-democratic ministerialism evident in Bulgaria and Germany 1923, and the *ECCI*’s [Executive Committee of the Communist International’s] *simultaneous promotion* of campaigns for executive office, is to be willfully blind.”

Or, in the IG’s case, willfully confusionist and centrist.

Historically speaking, the idea that communists should campaign for administrative positions in the state of the ruling class they want to overthrow is grotesque. The fact that this is defended in the workers movement today is a measure of the success of democratic duplicity, directly reflecting the political strength of the capitalist order. History is littered with examples of self-professed Marxists who have gone over to directly administering the capitalist state against workers and the oppressed. An example is the British Labourite Militant Tendency (now Socialist Party), which was the employer of over 30,000 Liverpool municipal workers when it controlled the local council there in the mid 1980s. At one point, these “socialist” bosses actually threatened to lay off the entire city workforce, claiming this was a “tactic” to deal with a budget crunch imposed by the central (Tory) government. More recently, a leader of the Brazilian USec group accepted a portfolio as minister of agriculture in the bourgeois Lula govern-

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Spartakist

May 1991: ICL literature table at meeting of Soviet officers and soldiers in former DDR to commemorate anniversary of Red Army victory over Nazi Third Reich. During incipient political revolution in DDR 1989-90, we called for revolutionary unity of Soviet, German and Polish workers and sought to revive internationalist tradition of "Three L's"—Lenin, Liebknecht, Luxemburg.

ment, thus taking direct responsibility for evicting militant activists of the Landless Peasants Movement.

During our discussion on executive office, one comrade noted a crucial distinction between capitalism and previous class societies like feudalism. Those societies were marked by clear class and caste relationships that defined one's place in the social order. Capitalism disguises the nature of its class exploitation behind concepts like "the market," "supply and demand" and, especially in the more advanced industrial world, the trappings of "democracy" that supposedly afford equal rights and opportunities to exploiters and exploited alike. Our task as communists is to tear off this mask and expose the reality of a brutal social system that is nothing other than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Lessons of the DDR, 1989-90...

The conference agenda point devoted to reviewing our intervention into the incipient political revolution in East Germany in 1989-90 was a part of our efforts toward a fuller evaluation of this largest and most sustained intervention in the history of our tendency. The two reporters were comrade F. Zahl, a senior leader of the ICL's German section, the Spartakist Workers Party (SpAD), and R. Henry of the outgoing I.S. Referring to the revolution in Spain in the 1930s, comrade Henry cited a 1931 passage by Trotsky that countered the defeatist view that victory is impossible absent a pre-existing mass party: "The advantage of a revolutionary situation consists precisely in the fact that even a small group can become a great force in a brief space of time, provided that it gives a correct prognosis and raises the correct slogans in time" ("The Character of the Revolution," June 1931, in Trotsky, *The Spanish Revolution* [1973]). She added: "What I want to say here is that *we were that organization*. We had the correct program for intervening into the DDR."

We unconditionally opposed capitalist reunification with imperialist West Germany and called for proletarian political revolution in the East and socialist revolution in the West, as the road to a red soviet Germany in a Socialist United States of Europe. The power of our program was particularly evi-

dent in the 250,000-strong demonstration on 3 January 1990 against the fascist desecration of a monument in East Berlin's Treptow Park honoring the Soviet soldiers who died liberating Germany from the Nazi scourge in 1945. We initiated the call for that mobilization, which was then taken up by the ruling Stalinist SED/PDS (Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism) because it feared how much our program resonated among East Berlin workers and felt compelled to mobilize its base. As the main document of our Second International Conference in 1992 asserted:

"As Treptow later showed, from the beginning we were in a political struggle with the abdicating Stalinist regime over the future of the DDR. While we were calling for a government of workers councils, the Stalinists were consciously acting to prevent a workers insurrection by demobilizing all army units that had formed soldiers councils as a result of our early propaganda. Although shaped by the disproportion of forces, there was in fact a contest between the ICL program of political revolution and the Stalinist program of capitulation and counterrevolution."

—"For the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky!", *Spartakist* No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93

This was the overriding point, notwithstanding numerous problems and difficulties in implementing our program at the time, many of which were forthrightly addressed in the 1992 document. These include the lateness in setting up local Spartakist Gruppen (Spartacist Groups) as transitional organizations for all the many political activists throughout the DDR who identified with our program and wanted to distribute *Arbeiterpressekorrespondenz* (*Arprekorr*—Workers Press Correspondence), our Trotskyist paper published almost daily during December 1989 and continuing once or twice a week through early April 1990.

We stand on the 1992 assessment and seek to deepen our understanding of those events in light of the histories and memoirs that have been published since then. To this end, we put out six new internal bulletins on the DDR intervention before the conference. One of these was a compilation, in English, of all 30 issues of *Arprekorr*. Other bulletins contained eight research papers produced by comrades, based on our own documentary record of the period and newly published materials, on subjects such as: developments in the

abdicating Stalinist SED/PDS; our political work in various factories; efforts directed to Soviet and NVA (East German army) soldiers; and the crucial March 1990 election campaign in which we ran the only slate of candidates unambiguously opposed to capitalist reunification. One topic of discussion was the underestimation in our work on the ground of the importance of the factory militias (*Betriebskampfgruppen*), which could have been the military/political locus for a proletarian political revolution. In light of the discussion at the conference, several additional research papers were commissioned.

Not surprisingly, comrades have shown some unevenness regarding an appreciation of our impact in the DDR; this discussion is very much a work in progress, with a number of questions still to be resolved. Our aim is to deepen the understanding of our own comrades of the 1989-90 events, and also to produce propaganda for a future issue of *Spartacist*. In motivating the review, the conference document noted:

"The ICL's struggle in Germany for workers political revolution and for revolutionary reunification of Germany was a direct challenge and the *only* challenge to the sellout of the DDR to West German imperialism by the Moscow and East Berlin Stalinists. But communists, who seek to learn from history—not least of all their own—should understand that that means being able to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of how we intervened as revolutionaries."

...And the Fight for Political Revolution in China

That assessing our intervention in the DDR is not simply a matter of historical interest but of direct relevance to our tasks now and in the future was made vividly clear by a sharp dispute during the discussion on the main conference reports earlier in the agenda. Much of the first round of that discussion focused on differences raised by one comrade regarding our program for unconditional military defense and proletarian political revolution in China. He had first raised his differences over a year ago, provoking considerable written discussion. Shortly before the conference, he submitted a second document linking his views on China to his appraisal of the lessons of the defeats in the DDR and the Soviet Union. Though not a delegate to the conference, the comrade was granted presentation time by the body to defend his views in order to allow for the greatest possible clarity on the issues under dispute. At the end of the discussion, he stated that he was reconsidering his views in light of the arguments.

In his document, the comrade cited a statement we had made in our article, "How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 564, 27 November 1992), which indicted the Stalinist bureaucracy for poisoning the consciousness of the Soviet proletariat with lies, bureaucratism and nationalism. In the article, we observed that the Soviet working class didn't rally to defend the workers state because of its atomization in a political sense, reflected in the absence of an anti-capitalist leadership, and its lack of coherent and consistent socialist class consciousness, including profound



Thousands protest near municipal government office in Xi'an, in China's Shaanxi province, 2006. Banner reads: "Government Take Pity on Laid-Off Workers Who Need Food to Eat."

skepticism about the possibility of revolutionary struggle in the advanced capitalist countries. The comrade seized on this observation to argue that the working class in China today, as earlier in the DDR and the Soviet Union, lacks any understanding of the need to defend the social gains embodied in the workers state. From there, he argued that since the workers lacked such consciousness, the Stalinist bureaucracy remained the only conscious force defending the workers state, if only in order to defend its own power and privileges. By this logic the call for proletarian political revolution would become a call to overthrow the only remaining conscious factor defending the workers state!

Trotsky noted in the 1930s that the Stalinist bureaucracy—a parasitic caste resting on the collectivized property forms—no longer defended the USSR out of subjective identification with socialism but only insofar as it feared the proletariat. In the end, far from defending the collectivized property, the Stalinists *gave away* the workers states. The Stalinist bureaucracy in the DDR disintegrated in the face of a political revolution. The East German Stalinists went along with the Soviet bureaucracy under Mikhail Gorbachev when it gave a green light to the DDR's annexation by West Germany.

In a somewhat confused manner, the comrade also asserted that, based on our experience in the DDR and the Soviet Union, our call for unconditional military defense of the Chinese workers state, however bureaucratically deformed, would not apply during a political revolution. He added that a political revolution would destroy that state, arguing that "at bottom what we defend is not the 'Special Bodies of Armed Men, etc.,' but the social structure of those societies," in other words, the collectivized property. This poses a false distinction between the armed bodies of men that defend the workers state and the collectivized property forms on which that state is based. At bottom, this argument dismisses the central importance of the proletarian conquest of state power, i.e., the need for the working class to establish its own class dictatorship. Moreover, it contradicts our own experience in the DDR, where our propaganda had a huge impact on East German and Soviet soldiers, many of whom were very conscious of being the front line of defense of the workers states,

facing the NATO troops across the border in West Germany.

In his report on the conference document, comrade Bride recalled Lenin's insistence that "politics is concentrated economics," meaning economic questions are subordinated to political ones. He said: "The political question is: what class rules, which means whose state is it, and not how much property is in the hands of the government at any given time." The October 1917 Revolution created a workers state, but the bourgeoisie was not expropriated at the economic level until later. As Trotsky put it, "The victory of one class over another signifies that it will reconstruct the economy in the interests of the victors" ("Not a Workers' and Not a Bourgeois State?", November 1937).

Refuting the notion that the DDR proletariat lacked sufficient consciousness to act in defense of its workers state, comrades pointed to the massive turnout for the pro-Soviet Trepow rally, to the enormous resonance our propaganda had among thousands upon thousands of workers and youth, to the emergence of soldiers councils in various NVA units under the impact of our slogans. And unlike in the DDR, workers in China already have a pretty good idea of what their future capitalist masters will look like should there be a social counter-revolution. China has witnessed huge and convulsive strikes and protests in recent years, as workers, peasants and others fight to defend themselves against the ravages and inequalities produced by the inroads of the capitalist market. "Consciousness" is not something static and permanent. The question of proletarian consciousness cannot be separated from the question of a Leninist-Trotskyist workers party, which is the most conscious expression of the socialist aspirations of the working class. Our program is the basis for breaking the proletariat from the Stalinist dogma of "socialism in one country" and winning it to revolutionary-internationalist consciousness.

This fight graphically confirmed the programmatic danger of looking at events in the DDR through the prism of determinism in hindsight: that because we were defeated, defeat was the only possible outcome. As comrade Bride pointed out, to accept the notion that workers in the Soviet bloc could not achieve the consciousness necessary to defend the workers states is to imbibe the falsehoods manufactured by anti-Communist ideologues like Hannah Arendt in the 1950s that workers in the Soviet bloc were simply victims of Stalinist "totalitarianism," which reduced them to mindless, soulless slaves forever incapable of struggle. This is essentially the view of the so-called Bolshevik Tendency, which argued in 1990 that there never really was any possibility of a proletarian political revolution in the DDR. In his summary, comrade Bride cited Trotsky's comment in *The Lessons of October* (1924) that if the Bolsheviks had failed to lead the working class to power in 1917 there would have been reams written about how it had been impossible for the Russian workers to take power in any case. As we wrote in our conference document:

"We threw our small revolutionary forces into a struggle for power. We were defeated, but we fought. What is crucial is to learn to apply the lessons to future struggles."

As the section of the Fifth Conference document dealing with China (see "China and the Russian Question," page 22) indicates, the dispute at this conference was only one of a number of internal fights and discussions on that question in recent years. Only through such internal struggle and constant re-examination of the empirical situation can we clarify and refine our understanding of the deeply contradictory

situation in the Chinese deformed workers state today. Many of these fights have centered on a tendency to telescope developments in China, falsely seeing the "market reforms" introduced by the Beijing bureaucracy as leading imminently to capitalist restoration. Such a view buys into the outlook of our reformist opponents, who have largely written off China as already capitalist in order to justify their refusal to call for its unconditional military defense against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution.

Already in June 2000, we acknowledged in an I.S. motion that a proclivity to premise our conclusions exclusively on the actions and intentions of the bureaucracy "relegates the proletariat in China to the role of being merely the passive object of either the Stalinist bureaucracy or the imperialist bourgeoisie, not a force capable of its own independent action." The market reforms have fostered and emboldened the forces of capitalist counterrevolution, but they have also helped produce significant economic growth and a further development of the industrial proletariat, thus sharpening the contradictions in China. While a fledgling capitalist class exists on the mainland, it is not a politically conscious class with its own political party or the equivalent. Sooner or later, the explosive social tensions will shatter the political structure of the ruling bureaucratic caste. Then the choice will be starkly posed: capitalist restoration or a proletarian political revolution under the leadership of a Leninist-Trotskyist party, section of a reformed Fourth International.

Mexico and the Fight Against Bourgeois Populism

While the current period is reactionary, this by no means forecloses opportunities for intervention in social struggle. We are not sealed off from a potential audience through repression or intense anti-communism, and in every country where we have sections defensive struggles have created openings for our communist propaganda and, on occasion, exemplary actions. Indeed, an important part of being a fighting propaganda group is to scan for such opportunities. The conference document cited the mobilization of forces internationally to assist our French section during the mass student-centered protests in 2006 against government attempts to further erode the rights of young workers. More generally, the document stressed the need for sections to revive and reinforce party youth fractions with the task of carrying out consistent campus work.

The conference document noted how Mexico in particular has been extremely volatile over the last several years. A special commission involving delegates from the Grupo Espartaquista de México (GEM) and other knowledgeable comrades was convened to discuss our intervention there. This discussion was then brought into the conference as a whole.

The mass protests against a sharp rise in the price of food followed other struggles against the hardships created by U.S. imperialism and the domestic bourgeoisie. There is considerable ferment in the rural south, shown dramatically in the months-long occupation of Oaxaca by striking teachers, peasants and students. There have been important workers struggles, and PRD candidate López Obrador's loss in the presidential elections last year saw huge protests by his supporters against vote-rigging by the ruling right-wing party. As one delegate noted, the policies of the Bush administration and the Mexican regime have had the effect of welding together in struggle the proletariat, the urban poor and peasantry. All proportions guarded, there has been a certain radicalization in

Mexico, dating back with ebbs and flows to the 1999 student strike at Mexico City's UNAM university.

However, the perceived radical wing of recent struggles has been petty-bourgeois nationalist populists such as the Zapatistas and the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), who are in turn tailed by most Mexican left groups. As the conference document stated, "The main thrust of left-populism is to liquidate the strategic centrality of the working class, dissolving the proletariat into the 'people'—in order to subordinate it to the bourgeoisie." A leaflet issued by the GEM shortly before the ICL conference elaborated:

"Populists confine their program to democratic reforms within a capitalist and narrow nationalist framework. Regardless of their militancy and intentions, the 'radical' populists such as the EZLN [Zapatistas] and the APPO end up orbiting around the PRD and trying to put pressure on it."

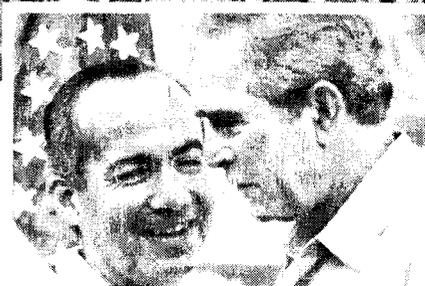
—"For Labor Mobilizations Against Starvation Policies, Repression!", *Workers Vanguard* No. 891, 27 April 2007

In turn, organizations like the IG or the Morenoite LTS orbit around the "radical" petty-bourgeois forces pulled in by the PRD. The conference document noted that the GEM's recent polemics against the Zapatistas are "a de facto correction to the overestimation of consciousness of the Zapatista movement that we published in 1994 in *Spartacist* [No. 49-50, Winter 1993-94], where the article "Rumblings in the 'New World Disorder'" glorifies the Zapatista struggle as a refutation of the bourgeoisie's 'death of communism' lie, without addressing that the Zapatistas consciously reject a program for proletarian revolution."

In contrast to the reformists who tail the bourgeois populism that is currently resurgent in much of Latin America, the ICL fights for the Trotskyist perspective of permanent revolution. As Trotsky stated in a 1938 discussion: "The working class of Mexico participates, cannot help but participate, in the movement, in the struggle for the independence of the country, for the democratization of the agrarian relations and so on.... It is necessary to lead, to guide the workers—issuing from the democratic tasks to the taking of power" ("Latin American Problems: A Transcript," November 1938). This perspective is necessarily linked to the fight for proletarian revolution in the U.S. and other imperialist centers, the only ultimate guarantee of socialist advance. The conference voted to produce an article on Trotsky's development of the theory of permanent revolution to assist the GEM in addressing young activists in Mexico today.

Fighting Protectionist and Anti-Immigrant Chauvinism

Several controversial or otherwise important questions facing our organization were first thrashed out at a number of special commissions convened by the conference before being presented to the body as a whole. One commission discussed the status and struggles of women workers in China with the aim of informing future propaganda. Another examined the ICL's work in Poland and recent disputes leading up to the decision to reconstitute a Polish section of the ICL (see "Spartacist Group of Poland Refounded," page 2). A third, dealing with class-struggle defense work, focused on international efforts to mobilize a proletarian axis in the fight to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Another dealt with the work of our trade-union supporters in the various sections. A meeting of members of the Editorial Boards of the quadrilingual *Spartacists* discussed plans for future issues.



AP photos

Massive protest against increase in tortilla prices, Mexico City, 31 January 2007. Policies of right-wing regime of Felipe Calderón (left) and U.S. president Bush have had effect of welding together workers, urban poor and peasants in struggle.

The most controversial of these was the Trade Union Commission, which took up a lively pre-conference discussion on harbor union-busting schemes in Europe. As part of a "port package" intended to attack the dockers unions in Europe, the harbor bosses proposed to use predominantly foreign seamen to load and unload ships ("self-handling"). The Hamburg dockers union opposed this measure from the standpoint of chauvinist protectionism, raising the job-trusting slogan, "Harbor work for harbor workers."

The line of the labor bureaucracy found an echo in the ICL, as shown by a January 2006 leaflet of the ICL's German section, the SpAD, which had been written in collaboration with comrades in our international center. The leaflet had two counterposed positions. Against the union bureaucracy's attempt to exclude and segregate the foreign seamen, it correctly demanded that work done loading and unloading ships, *no matter by whom*, should be paid at Hamburg Harbor union wages, opening up a perspective of international collaboration between German dockers and foreign seamen. At the same time, the leaflet asserted that "self-handling means destruction of the harbor workers unions and even worse working conditions for seamen," meaning that harbor work should not be done by seamen! The SpAD national conference in August 2006 had voted to correct this adaptation to the chauvinist protectionism of the reformist labor bureaucracy, but the question was not fully resolved until the discussions around the international conference.

The slogan "Harbor work for harbor workers" is nationalist and protectionist, not just potentially so, as was previously stated in our propaganda. In context, it means: "German work for German workers." As one speaker at the conference remarked, an internationalist perspective starts

from the standpoint of reaching out to the heavily Filipino seamen with our revolutionary program and seeking to unite them with their German class brothers and sisters in struggle against the capitalists. The conference document reaffirmed our opposition to protectionism in imperialist countries: "For the bourgeoisie, protectionism and 'free trade' are options that it can debate. For the proletariat to choose protectionism is to reject the program of internationalism, i.e., to renounce revolution. The solution to the crises produced by capitalism can only be an international socialist planned economy."

The adaptation to protectionism over the Hamburg "port package" was another expression of the increased pressures of bourgeois liberalism, as refracted through the prism of labor reformism. Capitalist restoration in East Europe and intensified imperialist exploitation of the semicolonial world have precipitated new waves of immigration to the metropolitan centers of the West. Sections of the bourgeoisie and the social-democratic and trade-union bureaucracies promote economic nationalism as a means of channeling discontent over unemployment and declining living standards into hostility toward foreign workers and immigrants. In Germany, a prime exponent of protectionist poison has been Oskar Lafontaine, leader of the left social-democratic Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice (WASG), which has now fused with the ex-Stalinist, social-democratic PDS to form Die Linke (The Left, also known as Left Party). Both the WASG and its successor party have been embraced by much of the fake-Trotskyist left.

We fight instead for an internationalist vanguard party to act as a "tribune of the people," championing the defense of immigrants and ethnic and national minorities. Our call for full citizenship rights for all immigrants is critical for defending the integrity of the working class, undercutting the ability of the capitalists to subject the more vulnerable layers of the population to superexploitation and serving as a measure in defense of all working people. But much of the minority populations in West Europe are not immigrants, but the

children and grandchildren of immigrant workers who were brought in to fill the labor shortages resulting from the devastation of World War II. Today these youth bear the brunt of joblessness and racist police repression. Thus, addressing oppression of ethnic minorities is not simply a matter of fighting for democratic rights but a struggle for economic survival based on the Transitional Program—e.g., organize the unorganized, for decent jobs for all through a sliding scale of hours and wages—which poses a struggle against the capitalist system itself.

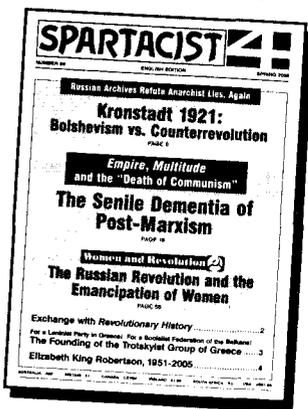
The alternative to this revolutionary perspective is a form of vicarious reformism that seeks to somehow reapportion the misery capitalist exploitation inflicts on those at the bottom of society. This is reflected in the debate in the U.S. labor movement over whether immigrant workers drive down the wages of other low-paid and specially oppressed sectors of the working class, particularly black people. The main conference document noted: "From our vantage point the question of immigrant rights is a political not an economic question. Our demands are negative, encapsulated in the demand for full citizenship rights for anyone who has made it into this country, in opposition to the policies of the bourgeois state. We do not have a positive program. That is, we do not advocate a different set of immigration policies under capitalism.... We will worry about the ebbs and flows of the world economy when we run it." The document reaffirmed "the progressive role that foreign workers play in breaking the labor movement out of its national insularity."

Campaigning to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

Discussion at the Legal/Defense Commission centered on the urgent need to redouble our international efforts to win freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, whose case is now ominously on a judicial "fast track." A supporter of the MOVE organization, Mumia was a Black Panther Party spokesman in his youth and went on to become an eloquent journalist who speaks out powerfully on behalf of the oppressed. He was

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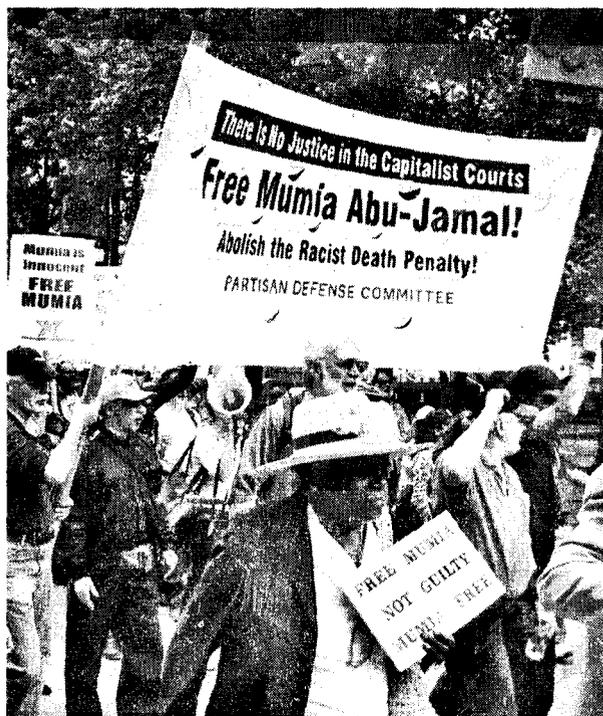


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Workers Vanguard

Partisan Defense Committee contingent at May 2007 Mumia protest in Philadelphia. As part of international effort to fight for Mumia's freedom, brochures documenting his innocence have been issued in a wide range of languages.



framed up by the racist American “justice” system for the December 1981 killing of a Philadelphia policeman. The U.S. rulers are determined to kill Mumia or bury him alive in prison forever as a way to send a message of intimidation to anyone who would dare defy their system.

We fight for a *class-struggle* defense strategy, seeking to mobilize labor's unique social power and to bring to workers the understanding that Mumia's fight is their fight, which has to be a fight against the capitalist state. Comrades stressed that key to mobilizing the mass labor-centered protest movement needed to win that fight is combatting the efforts of the bourgeois liberals and reformist leftists who promote illusions in the capitalist courts. These types subordinate the fight for Mumia's freedom to the demand for a “new trial” by the same legal system that railroaded him to death row. This call is a deliberate break from the generations of past protest movements that demanded “Free Sacco and Vanzetti,” “Free the Scottsboro Boys,” “Free Angela Davis,” etc. Many of these same groups and individuals have sought to denigrate and bury a particularly powerful piece of evidence of Mumia Abu-Jamal's innocence, the sworn testimony of Arnold Beverly that he, not Mumia, killed the Philadelphia policeman and that Mumia had nothing to do with the killing.

The liberals and reformist hangers-on look to clean up the image of America's judicial system; thus they must paint the state vendetta against Mumia as an aberration and “miscarriage of justice.” They find the Beverly confession “incredible” because they do not want to believe what millions of people around the world have no trouble understanding: that Mumia was the victim of a concerted government frame-up. There could be no clearer example of how our reformist opponents have become overt proponents of bourgeois democracy in this period, working to block the development of anti-capitalist class consciousness that could come out of mobilizations to free Mumia. By peddling deadly illusions that the

capitalist courts could bring “justice,” these forces *demobilized* the mass protest movement that must now be revitalized.

The need for us to politically combat the demobilizing efforts by the liberals and reformists was posed urgently from at least the late 1990s. But it took the clarifying internal struggles that followed our 2003 party crisis for us to be able to effectively take this on. The precondition for reinvigorating our campaign to free Mumia was reversing a previous denigration of defense work as somehow inherently opportunist. As the conference document noted, this “required a review of our work, going back to 1987, when we adopted Mumia's case, at the [2004] SL/U.S. conference. It was we and we alone who made his case an international cause that focused not just on Mumia, but on the barbarity of the racist death penalty in the U.S.” We succeeded in our efforts to galvanize much larger social forces to fight on behalf of Mumia: it is not an overstatement to say that our work, including our assistance to others who took up Mumia's case, is responsible for prolonging his life.

At the same time, we recognized that these other forces were hostile to our communist politics and our involvement in the case. However, this understanding was then used as a rationale for withdrawal from political and polemical combat with our reformist opponents around Mumia's case. Speaking of a number of such instances of sectarian withdrawal in the years following the destruction of the Soviet Union, a comrade noted some time ago that the party had been “retreating from a newly alien world, into our castle, hauling up our drawbridge and hiding out.” This was followed, the comrade observed, by adaptation to Menshevik opportunism, “by lowering the drawbridge, rushing outside to mingle with who we found out there, and leaving our banners in the castle.”

In politically rearming the party, our recent internal fights have enabled us to make important progress in the campaign to free Mumia. The Partisan Defense Committee and other frater-

nal defense organizations associated with ICL sections have initiated "Free Mumia" rallies in the U.S., Canada, Britain, Germany and other countries, featuring a wide array of speakers from the labor movement and elsewhere. Pamphlets have been produced in English, French and German documenting his innocence and the years-long fight for his freedom, including polemics against our opponents' reliance on the bourgeois state; brochures on Mumia's case have been distributed in a wide range of languages. The PDC and the other fraternal defense organizations have obtained many hundreds of signatures, especially from the labor movement, to a PDC-initiated statement, "We Demand the Immediate Freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal, an Innocent Man," which cites the Beverly confession and has been published in ads in black and liberal publications in a number of countries. Mass labor organizations such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the Scottish Trades Union Congress have adopted resolutions championing Mumia's innocence and demanding that he be freed.

We have organized public meetings explaining how the fight to free Mumia is part of our struggle for black liberation through socialist revolution in the U.S. Mumia's case is a microcosm of capitalist class rule and the black oppression that is intrinsic to it. In the U.S., the barbaric death penalty is the legacy of chattel slavery, the lynch rope made legal. Mumia was framed up and sentenced to death because of his history as a fighter against racist and capitalist injustice, going back to his teenage days as a member of the Black Panther Party.

The Panthers attracted the best of a generation of young black militants who recoiled at the crawling conciliationism of the mainstream pro-Democratic Party civil rights leaders. But the Panthers' black nationalism, which despaired of the possibility of integrated class struggle against racist American capitalism, was no less a dead end than the liberal-integrationist pipe dream that black people can achieve social equality within the confines of American capitalist society.

Black people in the U.S. are not a nation. They are an oppressed race-color caste: from the earliest days of the slave system, they have been an integral part of American class society while segregated at the bottom. The road to black freedom lies in the struggle for *revolutionary* integrationism—the full integration of black people into an egalitarian, socialist America. Forty years after the civil rights movement, black people in the U.S. face mass incarceration and immiseration, worsening health care and increasingly segregated schools. But black workers remain a key component of the multiracial U.S. proletariat. The fight for black freedom is the strategic question of the American proletarian revolution. There can be no socialist revolution in the U.S. unless the proletariat takes up the fight for black freedom—opposing every manifestation of racist repression and discrimination—and there can be no liberation of black people short of the overthrow of this racist capitalist system.

The conference document noted that our fight to free Mumia "has provided the rare instance where our intervention can change the course of events in a matter of great concern to masses of people." Discussion at the conference emphasized that much more is needed in the fight to win Mumia's freedom. Our central task in the course of this work is to draw the political lessons—from the nature of the capitalist state to the black question in the U.S.—and win workers, minorities and youth to a perspective of class-struggle defense and the broader program of fighting for socialist revolution to sweep away the capitalist system of injustice and repression.

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The Struggle for Revolutionary Continuity

The refounding of a Polish section of the ICL was a highlight of the conference. The section was dissolved in 2001, and a correction of false positions taken by the international leadership around that time was crucial to reforging the group. Most important was clarifying the evolved role of Solidarność following the restoration of capitalism in Poland as both a right-wing political organization and a trade union that has led economic struggles. A further important discussion in consolidating the group was on the Trotskyist position on World War II—revolutionary defeatism toward the imperialist combatants, and by extension toward allied Poland, combined with unconditional military defense of the USSR. The refounding of our Polish group gives us a crucial, if slender, toehold in East Europe.

The conference affirmed the centrality of defending our Marxist programmatic integrity—through external intervention and polemical engagement, internal political struggle and

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clarification and, not least, systematic cadre education to instill and critically review the lessons of historical experience. The main document noted: "Given the nature and difficulties of the period, we cannot anticipate substantial growth right now. The ICL is stretched very thin." Nonetheless, it is important to maintain our geographical spread, since it is not possible to know where outbreaks of class struggle will occur. This underlines the need to establish and stick to priorities. Crucial in this regard is maintaining the biweekly *Workers Vanguard*, newspaper of the Spartacist League/U.S., which serves an important role in politically cohering the entire ICL.

A Nominating Commission was established to consider proposals by the outgoing leadership and by the delegates for a new IEC, which is charged with leading the ICL until our next conference. Unlike the 2003 conference, when the party crisis led to significant changes in IEC composition, the IEC elected at this gathering saw much more continuity, reflecting the progress made in reconstructing the party and its leadership. The new IEC, elected by secret ballot following discussion in the final conference session, does contain a layer of younger comrades from sections throughout the ICL.

Since the last ICL conference, we have made progress in recognizing and fighting against the pressures to adapt to liberal-bourgeois consciousness, and in applying the norms of democratic centralism to our internal deliberations. Nonetheless, as the main document soberly noted, "We need to do a lot better when it comes to instilling a sense of purpose that our small forces through the power of our program have

an impact on social struggles, and that we are the only ones with a program for abolishing capitalism, the source of exploitation, imperialist wars, racist discrimination and women's oppression." We spent several decades searching for co-thinkers among ostensible Trotskyist groupings from France to Sri Lanka, Greece and other countries. But at the end of this we realized that we are in substance the only Trotskyist organization in the world.

We won many revolutionary-minded cadre from in or around various centrist and reformist groups internationally, allowing our tendency to break out from national isolation in the U.S., first to Australia and Europe and then to Japan, South Africa, Mexico and elsewhere. Such international extension was and remains absolutely critical in enabling the ICL to survive politically against the deforming pressures that weigh down on any nationally limited political organization. Today the ICL has an international cadre, including younger layers who have come forward in the process of the party's reconstruction. The challenge is to pass on to those who will lead our party in the future the accumulated programmatic experience of earlier party generations. This includes education in the Marxist classics and the study of our own history, and also continuing struggle to hone and further develop our Marxist program in this period of post-Soviet reaction. In this, as in all the work of the ICL, our aim is nothing less than the re-forging of an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International to lead the proletariat in sweeping away capitalist barbarism through new October Revolutions around the world. ■

Down With Executive Offices!

We print below a section of the ICL Fifth Conference document, "Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period," February 2007.

* * *

A necessary element of maintaining our revolutionary continuity is to assimilate the lessons of the struggles in the international workers movement through cadre education and critically reviewing the work of our revolutionary predecessors. This is vital to formulating programmatic positions for today. We stand on the first four Congresses of the Communist International. But we are not uncritical of the early CI and from the early years of our tendency expressed reservations over the resolutions on the "anti-imperialist united front" and "workers government" at the Fourth Congress. "A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern" (*Spartacist* No. 56, Spring 2001) investigated the mistakes of the KPD and CI leaderships that led to the abortion of the German Revolution. In *Lessons of October*, Trotsky pointed out how the Bolshevik Party, under the leadership of Lenin, overcame the resistance of the Kamenevs, Zinovievs and Stalins who flinched when the question of power was posed. In Germany, however, the politics of capitulation triumphed and a revolutionary opportunity was wasted, with disastrous consequences. This work by Trotsky may have been in part a personal self-critique: Trotsky had been a component part of the CI leadership that bore its share of responsibility for the German debacle. However, neither Trotsky nor his supporters ever carried out a systematic and thorough review of the CI and KPD intervention into the events of Germany in 1923 nor did they criticize

the flawed resolution on workers governments at the Fourth Congress. This resolution opened the door for the KPD's policy of joining the provincial governments in Saxony and Thuringia in 1923, which Trotsky had wrongly supported as being a "drill ground" for revolution. But the maneuver in Saxony and Thuringia simply reinforced existing prejudices about the bourgeois state. If these were indeed "workers governments," as the masses had been told, then presumably extraparlimentary revolutionary struggle, the formation of workers councils and workers militias, would be totally superfluous. The 1923 fiasco is a clear example of how cutting corners programmatically, rather than taking a straightforward Leninist position on the state, will lead to disaster.

The Fourth ICL Conference voted a line that communists could run for executive offices like president or city mayor, provided we declare that we don't intend to assume such offices. Comrade Robertson challenged this line at the 2004 SL/U.S. conference. He noted the contradiction between our principled refusal to run for county sheriff in the U.S. and the fact that we say we can run for sheriff of U.S. imperialism. Our attitude should be "Down with executive offices!" Running candidates for executive office is counterposed to the Leninist understanding of the state. The executive office discussion should critically review early Comintern practice, where its sections ran candidates for executive offices and regularly assumed positions as mayors of municipalities, or in the case of Germany even had ministers in bourgeois regional governments. We see no difference in principle between national, regional or local capitalist governments—bourgeois institutions of local government are part of the

mechanisms of the capitalist state which must be destroyed and replaced with organs of workers rule, i.e., soviets.

The fundamental line between reform and revolution is the attitude toward the bourgeois state, i.e., the reformist view that one can take hold of the existing state apparatus and administer it in the interests of the workers, versus the Leninist understanding that the capitalist state apparatus must be smashed through proletarian revolution. The problem with running for executive offices is that it lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state. There is a rotten history of social-democratic and Stalinist reformists administering the state in the interest of capitalism. The executive authority commands the "armed body of men" who are the core of the state apparatus; the revolutionary shattering of that state inevitably entails reckoning with the executive. Even in the great bourgeois revolutions in England and France, the Cromwellians and Jacobins who established a base in parliament had to get rid of the king and set up a new executive organ.

The Dreyfus case in the 1890s provoked a serious social crisis in France. It also polarized the French workers movement, with some socialists failing to understand the need to defend the Jewish military officer Dreyfus against bourgeois reaction and anti-Semitism. To defuse the social crisis and liquidate the Dreyfus case, the new prime minister (*président du conseil*) called for the socialist Alexandre Millerand to be seated in a government of bourgeois Radicals and republicans, with the butcher of the Paris Commune, General Galliffet, as minister of war. Millerand obliged, entering the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet as minister of trade and industry in 1899. Millerand's betrayal, supported by Jean Jaurès, divided the French Socialists. Characteristically, the Second International gave an ambiguous answer to ministerialism. At the Paris Congress in 1900 a compromise motion by Kautsky won. This motion criticized Millerandism...except when it was a matter of national survival: "The fact that an isolated socialist enters a bourgeois government cannot be considered as the normal beginning of conquering political power, but only as a forced, transitional and exceptional expedient. If in a particular case the political situation requires this dangerous experiment, it is a question of tactics and not of principle." An amendment put forward by Guesde that sought to forbid participation under any circumstances was rejected. The revolutionary wing of Social Democracy including Lenin and Luxemburg vehemently opposed Millerandism. Luxemburg wrote, "The entry of a socialist into a bourgeois government is not, as it is thought, a partial conquest of the bourgeois state by the socialists, but a partial conquest of the socialist party by the bourgeois state" ["The Dreyfus Affair and the Millerand Case," 1899].

The early American Socialist Party had no understanding of the importance of the issue of the state. The reformist wing, including such vulgar chauvinists as Victor Berger, indulged in the practice of running municipalities, which more militant socialists derided as "sewer socialism." Although more left-wing, Eugene Debs had illusions that the existing capitalist state could be used to advance the cause of the proletariat and argued that the task of the Socialist Party was "to conquer capitalism on the political battlefield, take control of government and through the public powers take possession of the means of wealth production, abolish wage-slavery and emancipate all workers" ("The Socialist Party and the Working Class"). Debs' campaigns for the American presidency set a pattern that was later followed by the Ameri-

can Communists and Cannon's Trotskyists.

The Second International could not resolve the issue of executive offices because it was not revolutionary. Lenin's Bolshevik Party demonstratively showed its total hostility to ministerialism through its intransigent hostility to the popular-front Provisional Government. However, Lenin sharply distinguished between assuming executive office, which necessarily means administering capitalism and hence class betrayal, and the revolutionary utilization of parliament. Referring to the Bolshevik work in the tsarist Duma, Lenin noted: "At a time when nearly all 'socialist' (forgive the debasement of the word!) deputies in Europe have proved chauvinists and servants of chauvinists, when the famous 'Europeanism' that once charmed our liberals and liquidators has proved an obtuse habitude of slavish legality, there was to be found in Russia a workers' party whose deputies excelled, not in high-flown speech, or being 'received' in bourgeois, intellectual salons, or in the business acumen of the 'European' lawyer and parliamentarian, but in ties with the working masses, in dedicated work among those masses, in carrying on modest, unpretentious, arduous, thankless and highly dangerous duties of illegal propagandists and organizers" ("What Has Been Revealed by the Trial of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Duma Group").

However, the Comintern never pursued the issue of Millerandism to a satisfactory conclusion. The Second Congress "Theses on the Communist Parties and Parliamentarism" contain contradictory language on the appropriateness of Communists running municipal councils. Thesis 5 notes correctly that "the bourgeoisie's institutions of local government...are in reality organizations similar to the mechanism of the bourgeois state, which must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and replaced by local soviets of workers' deputies" (*Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* [Pathfinder, 1991]). But Thesis 13 states that Communists who "hold a majority in institutions of local government" should "organize revolutionary opposition against the central bourgeois government." This provision was proposed particularly in connection with the "model" of the Bulgarian Communists and served as a justification for the practice of running municipal councils. Administering local councils has historically been used as a mechanism by which the bourgeoisie has co-opted reformist parties into the capitalist order, as was the case with the post-WWII Communist Party in Italy. Our opposition to running for and holding executive office applies equally at the local and national level. While some of the early leaders of American Communism drew a distinction between running for legislative and executive office, sometime after the formation of the United Communist Party in 1920 this differentiation ceased to exist. In 1921 the Communists ran a campaign for mayor of New York City and from 1924 onward ran in every presidential election. The Socialist Workers Party ran for president from 1948 onward. The French CP ran a campaign for president in 1924 and numerous campaigns for mayor. In Germany the KPD ran Ernst Thälmann for president in 1925 and then again in 1932. The shrill Third Period rhetoric notwithstanding, the KPD's electoral campaign for president in 1932 as well as its campaigns for the Reichstag (parliament) in the early 1930s were not a staging ground for extraparliamentary struggle but in fact a noisy disguise for the bankruptcy of the CI and the KPD, which refused to engage in united fronts with the Social Democrats and mobilize workers militias to smash the Nazis. Notably when

the Nazis marched on KPD headquarters in Berlin on 22 January 1933 the Communist leaders ignominiously refused to mobilize the workers to defend Karl Liebknecht House, instead telling them to appeal to the Prussian police while calling on them to vote KPD in the Reichstag elections scheduled for March. By then the KPD had been banned by Hitler. Hitler was allowed to take power without a shot being fired. When the Comintern passed over to the popular front a couple of years later, this resolved any remaining pretensions that the CI drew a line on the question of the state.

While Trotsky of course sharply denounced the policy of the popular front, he did not come out in opposition to running for executive office. In 1940, expressing concern that the SWP was adapting to the pro-Roosevelt trade-union bureaucracy, Trotsky proposed that the SWP launch its own campaign for president or fight for the labor movement to run such a campaign. When the SWP did nothing to implement this, he proposed that they consider critical support to the CP candidate, Browder, in the context of the Stalin-Hitler pact where the CP had come out against Roosevelt. We also need to review our own past practice, including the fact that we have run candidates for such local offices as mayor.

In arguing against running for executive office, we do not want to preclude giving critical support to other workers organizations in appropriate instances where they draw a crude class line. This was the case in Trotsky's proposal around Browder. When a Leninist organization gives critical electoral support to an opponent, it is clearly not because we think it will apply the same principles as we do. Indeed, otherwise one could never extend critical support to a mass reformist party, because on winning an election inevitably they will seek to form the government, i.e., administer capitalism. The point in such instances is to demonstrate that

despite the claims of such parties to represent the interests of workers, in practice they betray these interests.

The discussion at the Fifth ICL Conference is extremely important. In adopting the position against running for executive office, we are recognizing and codifying what should be seen as a corollary to Lenin's *The State and Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, which are really the founding documents of the Third International. This understanding was attenuated by the time of the Second Congress of the CI, which failed to draw a distinction between parliamentary and executive office in pursuing electoral activity. Thus we are continuing to complete the theoretical and programmatic work of the first four Congresses of the CI. It is easy enough to pledge that you won't take executive office when the chance of winning is remote. But the question is: what happens when you win? Cannon's SWP never really addressed this issue. The stakes are high. If we cannot arrive at a correct answer of how to deal with executive offices we will inevitably bend in the direction of reformism when the issue is posed.

Our earlier practice conformed to that of the Comintern and Fourth International. This does not mean that we acted in an unprincipled way in the past: the principle had never been recognized as such either by our forebears or by ourselves. Programs do evolve, as new issues arise and we critically scrutinize the work of our revolutionary predecessors. In particular, our study of the German events of 1923, as well as of the defects of the Proletarian Military Policy, has prepared the position we are taking here, which represents a deepening understanding of the relationship of communists to the bourgeois state. To continue the past practice of running for executive office, now that this has been revealed as defective, would be opportunism. ■

China and the Russian Question

The unconditional military defense of China against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution is central to a Marxist perspective in this period. China is the most populous and the most economically and militarily powerful of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states. Moreover, it is today a major commodity producer on the world market, with a growing and vibrant industrial proletariat. The following edited excerpts from the ICL's Fifth Conference document, "Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period," outline recent discussions in the ICL aimed at deepening our understanding of the contradictory developments in China in the years since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92.

* * *

The fact that it took repeated party fights in the late 1990s and early 2000s against agnosticism on the question of defending the Chinese workers state and/or third-campist formulations in our propaganda on China ("moribund workers state," "attenuated gains of the 1949 Revolution," "the Stalinist bureaucracy is leading the counterrevolution in China") reveals that the critical importance of this question was not assimilated by the previous party leadership. A contributing factor to this disorientation was that every aspect of the market reforms was seen as negative; this only began to

be corrected in late 2003 in an article in *WV* that represented a major step forward in analyzing the impact of the market reforms on the Chinese economy and society as a whole ("China—Defeat Imperialist Drive for Counterrevolution!" *WV* Nos. 814 and 815, 21 November and 5 December 2003).

The market reforms and growing inequality in China have led to a vast escalation of struggle by workers and peasants. According to Chinese government statistics there were 87,000 "mass incidents" of unrest in 2005—an average of some 240 per day—against corruption, social inequality, loss of benefits, seizure of peasants' land by officials without equitable compensation. Alarmed by these struggles, the regime of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao has declared a project of building a "harmonious socialist society." The regime has sought, in a modest way, to ameliorate social conditions by substantially cutting taxes on farmers and reducing tuition fees, while giving more priority to building up the poorer inland provinces. It has also increased the organizing rights and authority of the state-controlled union federation, including in the private sector. Should the workers seek to test this seriously in practice, it would pose more sharply our call for trade unions independent of bureaucratic control that defend the collectivized property relations. Social unrest in China has spurred renewed debate, including inside the CCP, among elements who want the economic "opening up" to

continue unabated, Maoist “conservatives” who want a return to a bureaucratically planned economy, and neo-Maoists and “New Leftists” who accept the framework of the market reforms but favor increased government intervention to protect the interests of workers and peasants.

Since the Fourth Conference our propaganda has done a better job in intersecting social reality in China and addressing problems in our earlier approach. In response to the bureaucracy’s call for more privatizations, our “sterile orthodox” knee-jerk response had been to simply demand the abolition of the market. The draft of the article “Resurgent Japanese Imperialism Sparks Protests in China” (WV No. 847, 29 April 2005) contained an argument for expropriating “without compensation the factories and other enterprises owned by Japanese and Western imperialists.” This formulation, which had appeared in earlier articles, is a call for Stalinist autarky and does not take into account the relative economic backwardness of that society. Our thinking was counterposed to the way in which Lenin’s Bolshevik government dealt with foreign concessions. An I.S. motion of 5 May 2005 asserted: “Workers soviets in China would deal with the presence of foreign capital in a way that is appropriate to the interests of the workers. A promise to expropriate foreign capital without compensation is a promise to withdraw from the world market, a promise to lose a political revolution.” A motion at the 2006 IEC meeting criticized a formulation in our press asserting “It is the ‘socialist’ (i.e., collectivist) aspects that are responsible for the positive economic developments in China in recent years. And it is the market aspects of China’s economy that are responsible for the negative developments.” The IEC motion pointed out that this formulation

“tends to obliterate the qualitative difference between our program for a centralized planned economy with workers democracy and the Chinese bureaucracy’s command-centralized planned economy (which included the autarkic policy of ‘self-reliance’) under Mao. While the significant industrialization under Mao’s command-planned economy laid the basis for continued industrial growth under the ‘socialist market economy,’ it was the ineffectiveness and contradictions of the command-planned economy in the first place that drove the bureaucracy to employ the whip of market reforms to increase productivity....

“What fundamentally distinguishes the Trotskyist program from that of the Stalinist bureaucrats whether of the Mao or Deng/Hu variety is our struggle for international proletarian revolution as counterposed to ‘socialism in one country’.”

Internal discussion and debate helped give us a more precise and dialectical understanding of the contradictions of “market reforms” in China. The two-part article cited above as well as the article “China’s ‘Market Reforms’—A Trotskyist Analysis” (WV Nos. 874 and 875, 4 August and 1 September 2006) note that the core elements of the Chinese economy, established following the overthrow of the capitalist system in the 1949 Revolution, remain collectivized. State-owned enterprises are dominant in the strategic industrial sectors, while the nationalization of land has prevented the emergence of a class of large-scale agrarian capitalists socially dominating the countryside. Effective control of the financial system has to date enabled the Beijing regime to insulate China from the volatile movements of speculative money-capital that periodically wreak havoc with neocolonial capitalist countries. Over the last quarter-century there has been significant economic growth and in particular the development of a substantial industrial proletariat, which from a Marxist standpoint is a progressive development of historic import. Moreover, this is not simply a “screwdriver economy.”

For example, China has become a major manufacturer of the giant cranes that load and unload containers. At the same time, the policies of the Beijing Stalinists have victimized and immiserated significant sections of the working class and rural toilers, widened the gulf between rural and urban China, spawned a class of capitalist entrepreneurs with familial and financial ties to CCP officialdom as well as offshore Chinese capitalists, and generated a managerial-professional-technocratic stratum enjoying Westernized lifestyles.

As revolutionary Marxists, we do not oppose, as such, China’s extensive economic relations with the capitalist world through trade and joint ventures with Western and Japanese corporations. The Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky maintained economic as well as diplomatic relations with imperialist powers and more than once, in taking into account the actual relationship of forces, were compelled to make unpleasant compromises, such as the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918 with the Germans. The New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in 1921 made significant concessions to small traders and better-off peasantry. Lenin, however, insisted on a strict application of the state monopoly of foreign trade to protect the new workers state. Moreover, for Lenin’s Bolsheviks the NEP was a temporary retreat, designed to buy them breathing space until the relationship of forces could be changed to their advantage on an international scale, through the spread of proletarian revolution. The real crime of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy—past and present—is that it has helped to perpetuate and indeed strengthen the capitalist-imperialist system on a global scale. In pursuit of “building socialism in one country,” the Chinese Stalinists have betrayed revolutionary opportunities abroad, most notably in Indonesia in 1965, where the Maoist-derived policies in support of the “progressive” national bourgeoisie led to the obliteration of the largest Communist party in the capitalist world. China under both Mao and Deng was a strategically important component in the U.S.-led alliance against the Soviet Union during the last two decades of the Cold War.

Increasing capital investment in Asia has made it an important component of the world economy, as well as a notable concentration of the industrial proletariat (particularly in Northeast Asia). The three major shipbuilding countries in the world are China, Japan and South Korea. Northeast Asia is a significant nexus in international commerce, while the expansion of the Chinese economy props up both the U.S. economy and that of Japan (where the recession decade of the 1990s has been succeeded by a “jobless recovery”). China serves as a market for industrial exports from Germany, and is important as well for raw material exporters like Australia, Latin America and Africa, as well as oil from the Near East. At the same time, foreign direct investment in China has been substantial. In 2005, 58 percent of China’s exports were made by foreign-funded companies. In effect, the Chinese bureaucracy serves as labor contractors (but not owners) for the imperialists.

The Pacific region contains three of the four deformed workers states. This fact, combined with the growing economic weight of the region, has not been lost on the U.S. imperialists. By the last years of the Clinton administration, the Pentagon had begun to shift significant resources to the Pacific region. In 2002 the U.S. government’s “Nuclear Posture Review” targeted China and North Korea, among several countries, for a potential nuclear first strike. The waters between Japan and the Asian continent have been divided

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RGASPI

James P. Cannon with Red Army soldiers at time of Sixth CI Congress, 1928.

A Biography of James P. Cannon

The publication of a major biography of James P. Cannon, a founding American Communist and the foremost leader of American Trotskyism for its first 40-plus years, is a significant event for Marxist revolutionaries. Cannon was the finest communist leader yet produced in the United States. The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)—which has its origins in the Revolutionary Tendency, a faction expelled from Cannon's Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1963-64—claims Cannon as a central revolutionary forebear. At his death in 1974, Cannon was the National Chairman emeritus of the SWP, which had de facto abandoned the Trotskyist program more than ten years earlier. But in his prime Cannon had the evident capacity to lead the proletarian revolution in America to victory.

James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928 by Bryan Palmer, a well-known social historian who is currently a professor at Canada's Trent University, is quite good—far better than one would expect from a sympathetic, but nonetheless academic, source. The Prometheus Research Library, library and archive of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League/U.S., section of the ICL, was among the many institutions and individuals that provided Palmer with assistance in preparing this volume, as he notes in the book's "Acknowledgements."

Palmer's 542-page volume, which covers Cannon's early years through his 1928 expulsion from the Communist Party, is a substantial addition to the existing published material on Cannon's political evolution and his leadership role in the first decade of American Communism, when it attracted the best American working-class fighters and before it was homogenized into a rigid, non-revolutionary

Stalinist dogmatism. The Communist Party had been formed with the intent of following the model of Russia's Bolsheviks, who led the world's first successful workers revolution, the October Revolution of 1917. Those who flocked to the Bolshevik cause in the U.S. included Cannon, a former member of the Socialist Party (SP) and the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

The study of this period of Cannon's history as a communist is critical for revolutionaries not only in the U.S. but internationally. As Cannon noted:

"Out of the Communist Party in the United States came the nucleus of the Fourth International in this country. Therefore, we should say that the early period of the Communist movement in this country belongs to us; that we are tied to it by indissoluble bonds; that there is an uninterrupted continuity from the early days of the Communist movement, its brave struggles against persecution, its sacrifices, mistakes, faction fights and degeneration to the eventual resurgence of the movement under the banner of Trotskyism."

—Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism* (1944)

And Cannon *stayed the course*, becoming a leader of the Fourth International when it was founded in 1938. For various historical reasons, the American Trotskyists became a mainstay of the Fourth International. They had the advantage of operating in conditions of relative stability, unlike a number of other Opposition groups, which were crushed by state repression before or during World War II. Moreover, Cannon, unlike other prominent figures in Trotsky's International Left Opposition (ILO), brought with him a factional following that had worked together for years in the Communist Party.

Palmer's solidly researched volume helps round out the

picture drawn in the late Theodore Draper's essential two-volume history of the early American Communist movement, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking Press, 1957) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960). One of the many ex-Communists who became anti-Communists, Draper nonetheless maintained a feel for the concerns and struggles of Communist cadre. He was aided in his research by Cannon, many of whose substantial letters to Draper were subsequently selected for publication as *The First Ten Years of American Communism* (1962). These letters fleshed out Cannon's earlier recollections of the period in the first chapters of *The History of American Trotskyism*.

Palmer reports that Draper consciously downplayed Cannon's contributions to his second volume. Nonetheless, Draper paid tribute to Cannon, writing a preface to *First Ten Years*. Explaining why Cannon's memory of events in the 1920s was significantly better than that of his contemporaries, Draper concluded, "Unlike other communist leaders of his generation, Jim Cannon *wanted* to remember. This portion of his life still lives for him because he has not killed it within himself."

Palmer's biography supplements Cannon's own published speeches and writings from the period under study, including those compiled in *Notebook of an Agitator* (1958) and the more internally oriented party material published in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism, Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928* (1992). The latter volume was published by the Prometheus Research Library, which acquired a substantial collection of Cannon material from the 1920s in preparing the book.

The PRL introduction to *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* noted that the archives of the Communist International (CI) in Moscow were likely to contain additional documents by Cannon from the 1920s. Shortly after the capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet Union in 1991-92, PRL researchers were given access to the archives and were able to make copies of previously unavailable papers by and about Cannon from the archives of the Comintern, the American party, the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU)—also known as the Profintern—and the International Red Aid. Palmer received permission from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) to use the PRL's copies of their material in researching his book. Palmer's frequent references to Communist Party Political Committee minutes contrast favorably to the biographies of William Z. Foster by Edward P. Johanningsmeier (*Forging American Communism, the Life of William Z. Foster* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994]) and James R. Barrett (*William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* [Chicago: University

of Illinois Press, 1999]). Johanningsmeier and Barrett write as if the factional battles of the period were incidental to the party's trade-union work, with which they are overwhelmingly concerned.

Palmer was also able to use the James P. Cannon Papers, which were deposited by the SWP at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, as well as substantial documentary material on early American Communism from other libraries. Palmer collected an impressive amount of material documenting Cannon's little-known early years and his activities in the IWW. His portrayal of Cannon's leadership of the International Labor Defense, including the years-long campaign in defense of anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti until their execution in 1927, is second to none. Palmer paints a picture of James P. Cannon that is not fundamentally new, but it is significantly *enhanced*.

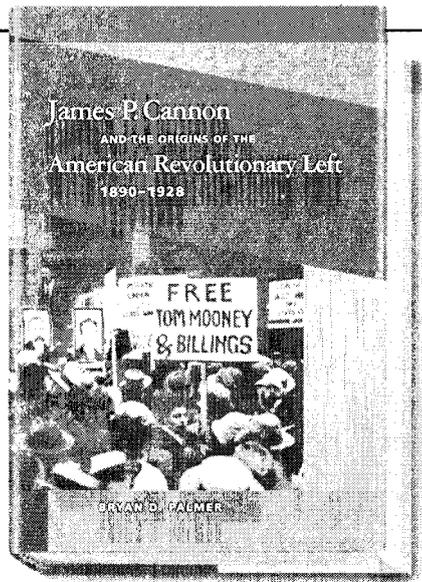
An "Age of Innocence"?

We take exception, however, to Palmer's conclusion that Cannon represented the "revolutionary Left in its age of innocence up to 1928," free of the "worldly-wise knowledges that have calloused the politics of our time, undermining belief in the possibility of thoroughgoing transformation, dismissing the broad capacity of working-class people to effect material change, containing the expansiveness of radicalism in various liberal accommodations to 'the art of the possible'." Palmer attributes this supposed loss of innocence to the corrupting and corrosive effects of Stalinism.

Corruption and rejection of revolutionary purpose in the American workers movement *preceded* the Russian Revolution and its Stalinist degeneration; the Communist movement

was founded in rebellion against the reformist Socialists and trade-union bureaucrats who insisted on the politics of the "possible." The rise of American imperialism and its huge superprofits had led to the development of a labor aristocracy that gave rise to a particularly venal trade-union bureaucracy at the head of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). American Marxist Daniel De Leon popularized the description of the AFL tops as "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class," a term later picked up by Lenin. Revolution at the open racism and reformist municipal "sewer socialism" of Victor Berger and his ilk in the heterogeneous Socialist Party propelled Cannon out of its ranks and into the IWW in 1911, on the road that would eventually lead him to communism.

The idea of Cannon as an innocent stands in contrast to the description written by West Indian poet Claude McKay of Cannon's demeanor in fighting for the liquidation of the underground Communist Party in favor of the legal Workers Party at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922. McKay wrote that Cannon "had all the magnetism, the shrewdness, the punch, the bag of tricks of the typical



A Review

James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928

By Bryan Palmer

University of Illinois Press

542 pp., \$50



Beinecke Library, Yale University

German Communist Clara Zetkin with Jamaican-born poet Claude McKay at Fourth CI Congress, 1922.

American politician, but here he used them in a radical way" (*A Long Way From Home* [New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969]).

Cannon was an authentic American communist leader. As noted in the PRL introduction to *Early Years of American Communism*, "If Cannon, feeling at a dead end in the internal factional wars, was able to make the leap in 1928 to Trotsky's programmatic and international understanding of Stalinism, it was in large part because he had *tried*, in the preceding period, to chart a path for the party based on revolutionary communism." Only with the help of Trotsky's seminal 1928 Critique of the draft program of the Comintern (subsequently published in *The Third International After Lenin*) did Cannon extricate himself from the Stalinizing party to continue the struggle that he had taken up early in his youth—the fight to lead the American working people to socialist revolution. *The Third International After Lenin* was the de facto founding document of the International Left Opposition. Cannon's recruitment to the ILO—along with a good part of the faction he had led—was a tremendous validation of Trotsky's struggle against the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

Draper vs. New Left Historians

Palmer astutely realized that a biography of Cannon, who had largely been ignored by historians since Draper wrote his two volumes, would be a way to cut through the schism that has dominated the academic study of American Communism. This debate pits anti-Communist historians like Draper and, more actively, Draper's epigones such as John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, against New Left-derived historians like Maurice Isserman. (Klehr is the author of a major study of the CP in the 1930s, *The Heyday of American Communism* [New York: Basic Books, 1984], while Isserman's major work in the New Left mode is *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* [Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1982].) Klehr, Haynes and their ilk, in whose hands Draper's thorough research has degenerated into shallow

anti-Communist muckraking, paint a picture of American Communism as little more than a Soviet espionage network that slavishly followed the foreign policy dictates of the Kremlin from its inception. In contrast, the New Left historians, many of whom were influenced by parents or other mentors who were activists in the Stalinized CP after 1928, argue that the political line coming from Moscow played at most a secondary role in what was mainly an indigenous movement of the American left.

Palmer's Introduction, based on an earlier article by him ("Rethinking the Historiography of United States Communism," *American Communist History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 2003), motivates his biography of Cannon as a way to transcend the sterility of that academic debate by injecting the question of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, i.e., of Stalinism. The breadth and depth with which Palmer surveys the existing works on American Communist history—both secondary histories and firsthand memoirs—is very impressive, as is the sheer weight of documentary material he marshals. More casual readers will find the 155 pages of footnotes more than they can handle, but Palmer's detailed list of sources and comments on them will be an important resource for historians of American Communism for some time to come.

Palmer writes from the point of view of one who is sympathetic not to some kind of ersatz academic "Marxism," but to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution itself. Such sympathy has been nonexistent among academic historians of American Communism, as Palmer himself noted in an earlier reply to his critics:

"Almost nobody in academic circles in the year 2003 is willing to stand the ground of the original Bolshevik tradition. The study of US Communism is no exception to this. Recognition of the colossal and overwhelmingly positive accomplishments of the Russian Revolution of 1917 is side-stepped.... The immense resources and programmatic guidance of this Bolshevism, willingly given to the cause of the only force which could sustain the gains of October, the world revolution and its armies of proletarian internationalism, are quibbled about, as if the early Communist International's motivation was nothing more than 'domination' and 'foreign control'."

—Palmer, "Communist History: Seeing It Whole.

A Reply to Critics," *American Communist History*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 2003

It is unfortunate, then, that Palmer situates Cannon as a leader of something called the "revolutionary Left," presenting communism as part of a continuum of "Left" organizations. Even prefaced by the word "revolutionary," "Left" has only an amorphous, relative political meaning (Left vs. Right), with no class content. In current as well as historical usage, "Left" includes not only working-class political formations, but bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties as well. It is thus a notion that encompasses reformist *class collaboration*—the working class is seen simply as a constituent part of all "progressive" forces.

The formation of the Socialist Party in 1901 represented a more widespread recognition that the working class needed its own political party as distinct from the bourgeois parties; it was formed through a merger of the Social Democratic Party—which included a split led by Eugene Debs from the bourgeois Populists—with Morris Hillquit's split from Daniel De Leon's Socialist Labor Party. The formation of the American Communist movement represented a giant step forward from the SP because it recognized the need for a clear political break not just with the bourgeois parties but

also with reformist currents within the working class. Cannon wrote:

"The launching of the Communist Party in 1919 represented, not simply a break with the old Socialist Party, but even more important a break with the whole conception of a common party of revolutionists and opportunists. That signified a new beginning for American socialism, far more important historically than everything that had happened before, including the organization of the Socialist Party in 1901. There can be no return to the outdated and discredited experiment of the past."

—Cannon, "Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Movement of His Time," reprinted in *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

Palmer's use of "revolutionary Left" reflects a failure to make a qualitative distinction between communism and the radical-populist, social-democratic, anarchist and syndicalist movements that were often intertwined in the left internationally before the Bolshevik Revolution. Palmer's dissolution of communism—the program of the revolutionary international working class for the overthrow of capitalism—into the amorphous "Left" is a bow in the direction of the pervasive retrogression of political consciousness that followed the destruction of the world's first workers state in 1991-92. This retrogression is evident not only in academic circles but, especially, in the ostensibly Marxist movement itself. A prime example is Alan Wald's review of Palmer's book ("The Story of James P. Cannon, A Revolutionary Life," *Against the Current*, July/August 2007), which questions the applicability in the 21st century of the program stemming from the Russian Revolution.

The Significance of the Russian Revolution

The Bolshevik Revolution, in the words of a 1939 "Speech on the Russian Question" by Cannon, "took the question of the workers' revolution out of the realm of abstraction and gave it flesh and blood reality" (Cannon, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* [1943]). It vindicated the Marxist understanding, reasserted in Lenin's *The State and Revolution* (1917), that the bourgeois state could not be reformed to serve the interests of the workers but had to be smashed and replaced by a workers state, the dictatorship of

the proletariat. It demonstrated, as Cannon makes clear above, that the proletariat needed a disciplined vanguard party based on a clear revolutionary program if it was to conquer state power. Cannon and the other co-founders of the American Communist movement, many of whom had long histories in the American Socialist and syndicalist movements, made a political *leap*—at least in intent—when they decided that the experience of the October Revolution was decisive. This involved not simply recognizing that the revolution in Russia had won, but grasping that working-class revolutionaries had to apply the lessons of that victory to the American terrain.

This was easier said than done, and the misunderstandings that ran through the early American Communist movement—the insistence on an "underground" party, the advocacy of "revolutionary" unions counterposed to the reformist-led trade unions, the refusal to run candidates for bourgeois parliamentary office—were enormous. These misconceptions were not limited to the American party. In his seminal work written for the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, addressing ultraleft tendencies in Holland, Britain, Germany and elsewhere, Lenin stressed the singular experience that led to the crystallization of a Bolshevik vanguard party in tsarist Russia:

"Would it not be better if the salutations addressed to the Soviets and the Bolsheviks were *more frequently* accompanied by a *profound analysis* of the reasons *why* the Bolsheviks have been able to build up the discipline needed by the revolutionary proletariat?..."

"For about half a century—approximately from the forties to the nineties of the last century—progressive thought in Russia, oppressed by a most brutal and reactionary tsarism, sought eagerly for a correct revolutionary theory, and followed with the utmost diligence and thoroughness each and every 'last word' in this sphere in Europe and America. Russia achieved Marxism—the only correct revolutionary theory—through the *agony* she experienced in the course of half a century of unparalleled torment and sacrifice, of unparalleled revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, practical trial, disappointment, verification, and comparison with European experience. Thanks to the political emigration caused by tsarism, revolutionary Russia, in the



Lusk Commission

Founding convention of Communist Party of America, one of two Communist parties formed in U.S. in 1919.



Y. Shteinberg

Group of delegates at March 1919 founding Congress of Communist International. Trotsky is standing behind Lenin at center.

second half of the nineteenth century, acquired a wealth of international links and excellent information on the forms and theories of the world revolutionary movement, such as no other country possessed.

"On the other hand, Bolshevism, which had arisen on this granite foundation of theory, went through fifteen years of practical history (1903-17) unequalled anywhere in the world in its wealth of experience. During those fifteen years, no other country knew anything even approximating to that revolutionary experience, that rapid and varied succession of different forms of the movement—legal and illegal, peaceful and stormy, underground and open, local circles and mass movements, and parliamentary and terrorist forms. In no other country has there been concentrated, in so brief a period, such a wealth of forms, shades, and methods of struggle of *all* classes of modern society, a struggle which, owing to the backwardness of the country and the severity of the tsarist yoke, matured with exceptional rapidity, and assimilated most eagerly and successfully the appropriate 'last word' of American and European political experience."

—V.I. Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder (1920)

During the latter half of the 19th century, two generations of Russian intellectuals underwent intense political ferment in search of means to throw off the stultifying tsarist yoke. Out of this ferment the most able gravitated to revolutionary Marxism. These intellectuals, in turn, led the nascent proletariat of the tsarist empire in the same direction. The 1903 split in the Russian Social Democracy between Lenin's "hard" Bolsheviks and the "soft" Mensheviks, originally over the narrow question of how to define party membership, anticipated the subsequent definitive split carried through by Lenin between Bolshevism and Menshevik labor reformism in 1912. The key importance of a political and organizational break from reformism was only generalized by Lenin in 1914, when—after the ignominious collapse of the Second International into social chauvinism in the face of World War I—he called for a Third International. The new International was founded in

early 1919, 18 months after the Bolshevik victory in Russia.

The necessity of a break with reformism was not the only lesson the Bolsheviks had to impart. The revolutionary Russian Social Democrats (the Bolsheviks adopted the title "Communist" only in 1918) had had to find a way to mobilize the peasantry—the vast majority of the tsarist empire—behind the proletariat. This was key to the Russian victory. They also had to come up with a revolutionary proletarian approach to the national question—only some 50 percent of the population of the tsarist empire was ethnic Russian. If the Bolsheviks had not successfully grappled with these issues, it would have shipwrecked the Russian Revolution. The Polish Communist Party, for example, was sterilized in the postwar period by its failure to develop a revolutionary approach to the peasantry, and paid a price for its earlier inability to deal with the Polish national question.

Lenin speaks of the quick succession of political conditions in Russia that compelled the Bolsheviks to develop a variety of tactics. There were other places in East Europe where conditions of material backwardness and severe repression meant that Marxist-inclined workers were not offered the luxury of parliamentary reformism. Many of the Social Democratic parties of the Balkans also had merit (e.g., Dimitar Blagoev's Bulgarian Narrow Socialist Party and the Serbian Social Democrats, which were the only other parties in belligerent countries besides the Bolsheviks to vote against war credits from the beginning of World War I). In contrast, the relative bourgeois-democratic stability that had prevailed before the war in the English-speaking world worked against the possibility of revolutionaries transcending the divisions among radical populism, anarcho-syndicalism and parliamentary socialism as the Bolsheviks did.

Palmer understands that the overwhelming authority the Bolsheviks enjoyed in the early Communist International stemmed from the fact that they had much to teach, but he gives short shrift to the *substance* of those lessons. He does not, for example, include any discussion of the collapse of the Second International into social chauvinism as the war began. This is where Palmer's use of "revolutionary Left" does more to obscure than to illuminate the political evolution of those who came to found American Communism, feeding into his insistence that the 1920s was an "age of innocence."

The Corruption Didn't All Come from Moscow

Palmer sympathizes not simply with the October Revolution, but with Trotsky's fight against the Stalinist degeneration of that revolution. This degeneration grew out of the utter devastation to which an already economically backward Russia had been subjected as a result of World War I and the bloody Civil War that erupted a few months after the Bolsheviks took power. The proletariat that had made the revolution was decimated, with the better elements being drawn into the Red Army and party and state administration. Conditions of great material scarcity produced strong objective pressures toward bureaucratism, which had an impact on both the party and state. These were compounded by the isolation of the young workers state, felt especially after the defeat of a revolutionary opportunity in Germany in 1923. Amid the profound demoralization that swept through the Soviet proletariat, a growing bureaucratic caste seized political power from the working class, ostentatiously rigging the delegate elections to the January 1924 Thirteenth Con-

ference of the Soviet party and thus stifling the voice of the Bolshevik Opposition led by Trotsky. While an account of this process is outside the scope of his book, Palmer correctly points to the adoption of the dogma of “socialism in one country,” first promulgated by Stalin in late 1924, as key to the CI’s abandonment of its revolutionary purpose.

The degeneration of the Russian Revolution was a process that began in 1924 but did not end there. Palmer correctly distinguishes the revolutionary program and principles that characterized the decisions of the Communist International in 1919-22 from the zigzags of the degenerating CI in 1924-28, first under Zinoviev and then Bukharin. As Palmer wrote in his earlier essay in *American Communist History*, “The Comintern was invested with a powerful and justified authority, but it was not, before 1923, regarded as some ‘sacrosanct deity’” (“Communist History: Seeing It Whole. A Reply to Critics”).

Palmer understands that the ouster of Bukharin in 1929 and Stalin’s domestic turn to forced collectivization of the peasantry—in the face of an imminent counterrevolutionary threat by the kulaks (the wealthier peasants), who had grown emboldened by Stalin/Bukharin’s conciliationist policies—dictated the sterile, sectarian adventurism of the Comintern’s 1928-34 “Third Period.” During the Third Period, all parties (not just the American) abandoned reformist-led trade unions in favor of building “revolutionary” ones. A useful documentary record of the CI’s degeneration can be found in the two volumes by Helmut Gruber, a history professor (now emeritus) at the Polytechnic University in Brooklyn, New York: *International Communism in the Era of Lenin* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) and *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1974).

The adoption of the popular-front policy at the CI’s Seventh World Congress in 1935, which mandated that the Communist parties seek out class-collaborationist alliances with putatively “democratic” and “anti-fascist” wings of the bourgeoisie, signaled the final descent of the Communist International into reformism, though there was a brief period of left rhetoric during the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939-41. In 1943, Stalin ignominiously and formally interred the CI as a hindrance to continuing his World War II alliance with the “democratic” imperialists. Most Communist parties retained their allegiance to Moscow into the 1970s, making them not very desirable governmental partners as far as the imperialist bourgeoisies were concerned. But the participation of the Communist parties in France and Italy in popular-front governments in the immediate postwar period played a critical role in staving off proletarian revolutions in those countries.

An understanding of this process of programmatic degeneration and its link to the fights going on in the Russian party is the beginning of wisdom for any serious study of Communist history. If Palmer’s account of this process in the 1920s has a flaw, it is in its overemphasis on the process of Bolshevization and what he calls “Zinoviev’s appetite for bureaucratic centralism” rather than on the political drift away from a revolutionary program.

Palmer insists that it was the “bureaucratization and triumphant Stalinization of the Comintern” which “lowered a final curtain on the innocence of the revolutionary Left in 1928.” He ignores the very real objective pressures in the United States that were also pushing the party away from a

revolutionary purpose. In fact, no party of the Comintern degenerated simply under the influence of Moscow. There was a *co*-degeneration as the 1920s went on. Though the particulars were very different in the Soviet Union, the same underlying objective pressure affected the cadre of the Western Communist parties—the recession of the post-WWI revolutionary wave and the stabilization of the capitalist world after the defeat of the German Revolution in 1923. It was the relative lack of revolutionary opportunities that underlay both the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the corruption of the Comintern’s national parties, as Cannon recognized:

“The party was influenced from two sides—nationally and internationally—and this time adversely in each case. Its decline and degeneration in this period, no less than its earlier rise, must be accounted for primarily, not by national or international factors alone, but by the two together. These combined influences, at this time working for conservatism, bore down with crushing weight on the still infant Communist Party of the United States.

“It was difficult to be a working revolutionist in America in those days, to sustain the agitation that brought no response, to repeat the slogans which found no echo. The party leaders were not crudely corrupted by personal benefits of the general prosperity; but they were affected indirectly by the sea of indifference around them....

“The party became receptive to the ideas of Stalinism, which were saturated with conservatism, because the party cadres themselves were unconsciously yielding to their own conservative environment.”

—Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

Cannon’s Formative Years

Cannon wrote little about his youth and upbringing in Rosedale, Kansas (now a part of Kansas City), but Palmer uncovered what he could about Cannon’s working-class Irish immigrant parents and family. His mother, Ann, who died when Cannon was 14, was his father’s second wife. Palmer has managed to unravel Jim Cannon’s relations to his five siblings and half-siblings, formerly quite murky. Cannon’s father, John, was only intermittently employed, but the young Jim sometimes went with him to work in the building trades. Cannon’s right thumb was smashed in an accident at his father’s work site, resulting in the amputation of the top of the digit. This minor disfigurement was seldom mentioned by Cannon.

Cannon’s father later left the working class to open an insurance office and real estate business. Palmer insists that in later life Cannon embellished his father’s proletarian credentials. Regardless, Cannon was won to socialist politics by his father, and his upbringing was typical of the Irish immigrant proletariat—Jim left school at 13 to work first at a packing house, then on the railroads and subsequently in the printing trades. He hung out in pool halls and bars with other young Irish workmen. Palmer uses Cannon’s unpublished semi-autobiographical fiction—written in the 1950s—to throw light on his early youth and social attitudes. Given the paucity of other sources, this is probably merited. But one can imagine the very private Cannon squirming at some of Palmer’s suppositions.

What was unusual in Cannon’s youth was the fact that at age 17, when he was already supporting himself and living on his own, he decided to go back to high school. Cannon had been sympathetic to socialism since participating in the 1906-07 defense campaign for Western Federation of Miners

leaders William "Big Bill" Haywood and Charles Moyer, falsely accused of murder. But Cannon joined the Socialist Party only in 1908, shortly after enrolling in high school. Cannon found it difficult to support himself and attend school; he attended for only three years and did not graduate. Palmer acquired the yearbooks of Rosedale High for the relevant years, gleaned details about Cannon's high school career and obtaining a picture of the young man as part of the Rosedale Society of Debate in 1910.

Cannon made a serious study of oratory in high school, developing himself as a powerful public speaker. Leaving high school, Cannon joined the Industrial Workers of the World in 1911, cultivating his speaking ability as a soapbox agitator on the streets of Kansas City, and subsequently as an itinerant Wobbly (as IWW members were known). Later, in the Communist Party, Cannon was much in demand as a speaker. Cannon could explain complicated political concepts in easily understandable language, as the material in *Notebook of an Agitator* amply demonstrates. He excelled as a communist propagandist.

A young teacher, Lista Makimson, was the mentor of the debate society. She and Cannon developed a romantic relationship while he was still in school; they married in 1913. Palmer debunks the myth that Lista was greatly Cannon's senior—they were separated by only seven years. Cannon's relationship with an older woman, as well as his membership in the IWW, where agitation for non-conformist ideas overlapped with labor radicalism, contradicts Palmer's assertion that Cannon "seemed to embody an odd fusion of traditionalist, Victorian notions of gender relations and sexuality and a bohemian, avant-garde disdain for material acquisitions and the trappings of money."

Cannon certainly had a disdain for material acquisitions. He was also a private man, especially about sexual matters, as were many of his day and age. But he traveled in bohemian circles, and Palmer himself recounts Cannon's enthusiastic remembrances of a speech on "free love" by anarchist Emma Goldman. Jim and Lista married only because it looked as though he was going to spend six months in jail for his labor activities; they subsequently had two children. Cannon left Lista in 1923 for fellow Communist Rose Karsner, who became his lifelong companion. He and Rose only married at the end of their lives, when they thought it necessary in order to get full Social Security benefits. This is hardly evidence of "Victorian notions of gender relations."

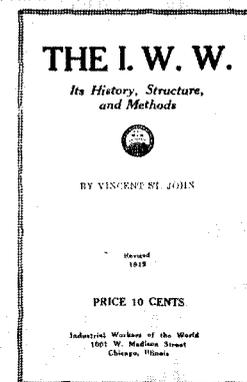


Walter Ross

**Rose Karsner,
1925, founding
American
Communist and
Cannon's
companion from
1923.**



Wayne State University



**IWW leader Vincent
St. John and 1919
anthology of his
articles.**

Palmer's complaint that Cannon practiced a "conventional monogamy" and "never really engaged with the potentially transformative *gender* politics of a militantly feminist approach to the personal realm" says more about the post-modern conceits of academic milieus than it does about Cannon. Ted Morgan's *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone, Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999) is more of an extended gossip column than a serious attempt to examine the life of this unprincipled adventurer who latched on to the Communist movement in his youth only to become a CIA operative later in life. But Lovestone's private affairs, unearthed by Morgan, show that eschewal of "conventional monogamy" is hardly a ticket to "transformative gender politics," whatever they may be.

Cannon was elected Kansas City delegate to the Seventh National Convention of the IWW in 1912. Here he caught the eye of legendary Wobbly leader Vincent St. John, who subsequently sent him on the road as an itinerant organizer. Palmer writes, "More than any other single individual, St. John put Cannon on the track of being a professional revolutionary." Palmer has discovered much that is new here, and his book excels in the account of Cannon's life as a Wobbly. Cannon went to Newcastle, Pennsylvania, where he helped produce the IWW paper *Solidarity*. From there, in early 1913, St. John sent Cannon to Akron, where a strike for union organization had erupted among the rubber workers, both native-born and immigrant. According to Palmer, "Cannon became one of the central IWW figures writing for the rebel press, appealing for funds, and taking the struggle of Akron's workers beyond the boundaries of Ohio." With the defeat of the Akron strike, Cannon was active in a manufacturing strike in Peoria (where he and Lista married). Palmer reports that by the end of the summer of 1913 "Cannon was one of only sixteen Wobbly agitators who were recognized by the General Executive Board of the IWW as having 'voluntary credentials' as itinerant organizers." From Peoria, Cannon moved on to organizing a strike by immigrant iron-ore dock workers in Duluth. Here Cannon was pretty much in charge of the IWW's efforts, working with the famous Frank Little.

Palmer writes that Lista's marriage to Cannon precluded her working any longer at Rosedale High. Cannon was thus

forced to return to Kansas City in the fall of 1913. He worked on a local syndicalist paper, *The Toiler*, and helped to lead a major free speech fight, though because of his domestic responsibilities he kept himself off the front lines in order to avoid arrest. He became, as Palmer puts it, "a member of what some Wobblies rather condescendingly referred to as 'the homeguard.'" Palmer says that Cannon grew increasingly disillusioned as the Wobblies concentrated more on organizing rural workers than the industrial proletariat; he was even more disillusioned at the lack of a coordinated defense campaign to counter the state raids and arrests that broke upon the Wobblies after the U.S. entered World War I in 1917. Palmer concludes that Cannon's "homeguard years as a disillusioned Wobbly, then, were among the worst of Cannon's life, whereas his year as a hobo rebel, immersed in the rough-and-tumble class struggles of his time, was a period of his fondest memories and most proudest accomplishments."

The Founding of American Communism

It was the October Revolution that propelled Cannon back on the road to being a professional revolutionary. Seeing the "anti-political" IWW crushed by the action of the bourgeois state while a disciplined Marxist party committed to political activity led a successful proletarian revolution in Russia, Cannon rejoined the Socialist Party in order to hook up with its developing pro-Bolshevik left wing. Palmer adds only a few new details to the account of Cannon's role in the founding of the American Communist movement, divided at first into two parties—the Communist Party of America and the Communist Labor Party—both dominated by ultraleftism.

One of the few native-born American radicals who joined the largely immigrant Communist movement, and one of the very few with real experience in workers struggles, Cannon was among the first to assimilate the lessons of Lenin's "Left-Wing" *Communism*. From the outset, Cannon opposed the American Communists' "dual unionist" insistence on the

formation of revolutionary unions, and he quickly rose to prominence in the fight against those who believed the party should be underground in principle. He was appointed editor of the Cleveland-based *Toiler*, which subsequently became the *Daily Worker*. Cannon was the chairman of the above-ground Workers Party when it was founded in December 1921. (The party changed its name to Workers [Communist] Party in 1925 and to Communist Party in 1929.)

Ironically, the Comintern's campaign against the ultraleftism that infected the young Communist parties led to the reversal of a *correct* position that had been adopted by sections of the American Communist movement: opposition to running candidates for executive office. The program adopted by the United Communist Party (UCP) at its founding in May 1920, reasserting a position in the September 1919 manifesto of the Communist Party of America, declared:

"The United Communist Party participates in election campaigns and parliamentary action only for the purpose of revolutionary propaganda. Nominations for public office and participation in elections are limited to legislative bodies, such as the national congress, state legislatures and city councils."

—UCP Program, reprinted in *Revolutionary*

Radicalism, Lusk Commission Report to

New York State Senate, submitted 24 April 1920

This position indicated a healthy, and correct, revulsion with the arch-reformist practice of the Socialist Party, whose ranks included 56 mayors and 22 police officials in 1912. The UCP program, however, wrongly declared that Communist representatives elected to legislative bodies "will not introduce nor support reform measures."

As we point out elsewhere in this issue (see "Down With Executive Offices!," page 20), in combatting the ultraleftists at the Second Congress, the distinction between executive and legislative positions was lost. In the wake of the contradictory Second Congress theses on parliamentarism, the plank against running for executive office—evidently a position pushed in particular by C. E. Ruthenberg—became a subject of debate in the American party. The following year, in the lead-up to the December 1921 founding of the Workers Party, the

IWW agitator Elizabeth Gurley Flynn addresses striking silk workers, Paterson, New Jersey, 1913. Right: Akron, Ohio rubber workers strike that same year, where Cannon played big role for IWW.

Brown Brothers



IWW



Communists in New York City ran Ben Gitlow for mayor. Cannon had a big hand in advocating and orchestrating this campaign. A Comintern document written for the August 1922 underground party convention declared, "The communists must participate as revolutionists in all general election campaigns, municipal, state and congressional, as well as presidential" ("Next Tasks of the Communist Party in America," printed in *Reds in America* [New York City: Beckwith Press, 1924]).

Five months after the Workers Party was founded, Cannon left for Moscow to serve as American representative to the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI). Cannon's seven-month stay in Soviet Russia was a critical experience in deepening his understanding of Bolshevism and the importance of the Communist International. It also provided him with a yardstick by which to later measure the degeneration of the Comintern. In a 1955 letter to Draper quoted by Palmer, Cannon recalled:

"I never was worth a damn on a mission to Moscow after my first trip in 1922. Then everything was open and aboveboard. A clear-cut political issue was presented by both sides in an open debate and it was settled straightforwardly, on a political basis, without discrimination or favoritism to the factions involved, and without undisclosed reasons, arising from internal Russian questions, motivating the decision and determining the attitude toward the leaders of the contending factions. That was the Lenin-Trotsky Comintern, and I did all right there. But after 1924 everything was different."

—Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

Palmer adds new and sometimes fascinating detail in his account of Cannon's Moscow activities. Cannon's November 1922 speech to the American Commission (see "We Want the Comintern to Give Us Assistance," page 44) was but the culmination of a long and trying battle against those who insisted on maintaining an illegal Communist Party parallel to the legal Workers Party. The victory by the so-called "Liquidators" in Moscow laid the basis for the American Communists to finally really engage in the American class struggle.

The Comintern and the Black Question

The American Communist movement—like that in most other industrial countries—had been formed on the crest of

the wave of labor radicalism that swept much of the globe at the end of World War I. Trade-union membership doubled in the U.S. between 1916 and 1920, and the end of the war saw a massive strike wave involving large numbers of unskilled immigrant workers for the first time. The war years had seen an 80 percent fall in immigration and a mass influx of blacks from the American South to the North, beginning the transformation of the black population from rural sharecroppers into an integral part of the industrial working class. The mass migration of black people had interacted with the pre-existing division between the largely Protestant, native-born white workers and the overwhelmingly Catholic workers from Ireland and Southern and Eastern Europe, leading over the next two decades to the displacement of religious and ethnic hostilities by anti-black racism as the central divide in the proletariat.

The significance of the black question was little understood by revolutionaries in the U.S. It was the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky that brought to the American workers movement the crucial understanding that the struggle for black emancipation is a central, strategic question for the American workers revolution. In his essay "The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement," Cannon writes:

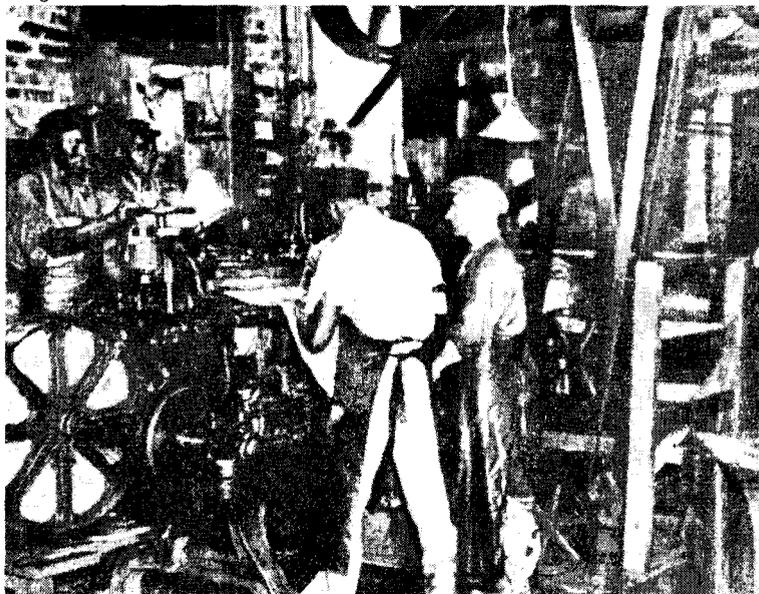
"The earlier socialist movement, out of which the Communist Party was formed, never recognized any need for a special program on the Negro question. It was considered purely and simply as an economic problem, part of the struggle between the workers and the capitalists; nothing could be done about the special problems of discrimination and inequality this side of socialism...."

"The American communists in the early days, under the influence and pressure of the Russians in the Comintern, were slowly and painfully learning to change their *attitude*; to assimilate the new theory of the Negro question as a *special* question of doubly-exploited second-class citizens, requiring a program of special demands as part of the over-all program—and to start doing something about it...."

"Everything new and progressive on the Negro question came from Moscow, after the revolution of 1917, and as a result of the revolution—not only for the American communists who responded directly, but for all others concerned with the question."

—Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

Vanguard Press



Chicago Historical Society



Black factory workers in Chicago in 1920s. Above: Attack on blacks during 1919 Chicago race riot, which destroyed interracial organizing effort among stockyard workers.

By 1917, almost one-quarter of the 45,000 workers who labored in the Chicago stockyards were black. Black workers were a significant section of the workforce in steel as well, making up some 12-14 percent of the workers at the key Homestead mill. Yet most AFL unions refused to admit black workers or else organized them in separate Jim Crow locals. The first major efforts to bring unskilled laborers into the AFL—in the Chicago stockyards and in the steel industry nationally—were led at the end of the war years by William Z. Foster, a longtime syndicalist activist. Foster had broken with the IWW in 1911, opposing its strategy of building revolutionary unions in favor of “boring from within” (i.e., working to undermine the AFL bureaucracy from within the craft unions). But Foster also bowed to the reactionary Gompers bureaucracy on the question of support to the imperialist world war, going so far as to sell war bonds.

The stockyard organizing drive, concentrated at first among the Slavic immigrant workers, made some initial headway in organizing black workers—some 4,000-5,000 were union members by 1919. An integrated union march through Chicago’s South Side in July 1919 gave promise of success; but the brutal race riots that swept the city three weeks later destroyed the interracial organizing efforts. A disastrous strike against a wage cut in 1921, in which black workers largely scabbed, wiped out the gains that had been won in the earlier struggles. The organizing drive among steel workers led to 250,000 workers, almost half the total workforce in steel, walking off the job in September 1919. Within ten days, 14 workers had been killed. Troops were brought in to occupy Gary, Indiana. While the strike was initially solid among the unskilled immigrant workers, few black workers joined and many native-born skilled workers scabbed. The strike had collapsed in the Midwest by November and was broken nationally by the middle of December, though it was not officially called off until the following month.

The 1919 defeats, the result of state repression and racist reaction, occurred as the American Communists were first breaking from the Socialist Party. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. government began a wave of repression aimed at the Communists. Beginning in November 1919 and lasting over four months, the “Palmer Raids” (named for then Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer) involved raids of Communist offices, closing of newspapers and mass arrests of Communists, anarchists and other leftist workers (over 6,000 in the first week of January 1920 alone). Foreign-born Communists and other radicals were deported en masse. Many leading Communists were jailed on “criminal syndicalism” charges. The repression quickly abated, though many leading Communists remained under indictment well into the decade. But the Palmer Raids gave credence to the ultraleftists’ undergroundism, leading to the prolonged debate on whether or not the fledgling Communist movement could function openly.

The Early TUEL

By the time the Workers Party was founded in December 1921, it was clear that American Communists could publicly propagate their views. The American bourgeoisie was largely satisfied that the smashing of the organizing drives and the repression in 1919-20 had had the desired effect. Republican Warren G. Harding was elected president in November 1920 on a program of returning the country to



Chicago Federation of Labor head John Fitzpatrick (left) with strike leader William Z. Foster during 1919 steel strike.

“normalcy.” A national strike by railway shop workers in 1922 was the last gasp of postwar labor militancy. The strike centrally involved 256,000 machinists (members of the International Association of Machinists [IAM] and maintenance workers); Workers Party supporters played a role in helping to lead it. The strike was defeated by the scabbing by some of the AFL craft brotherhoods, and by a sweeping government injunction, issued at the request of U.S. Attorney General Harry Daugherty, that basically forbade the striking unions to take any action to further the strike (known as the Daugherty injunction). This set the tone for repeated use of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act against the unions in the '20s. The union-busting offensive combined with a resurgence of racist terror (the Ku Klux Klan had several million members in the 1920s) and anti-immigrant legislation to make the 1920s a decade of racist, juridical and anti-labor reaction.

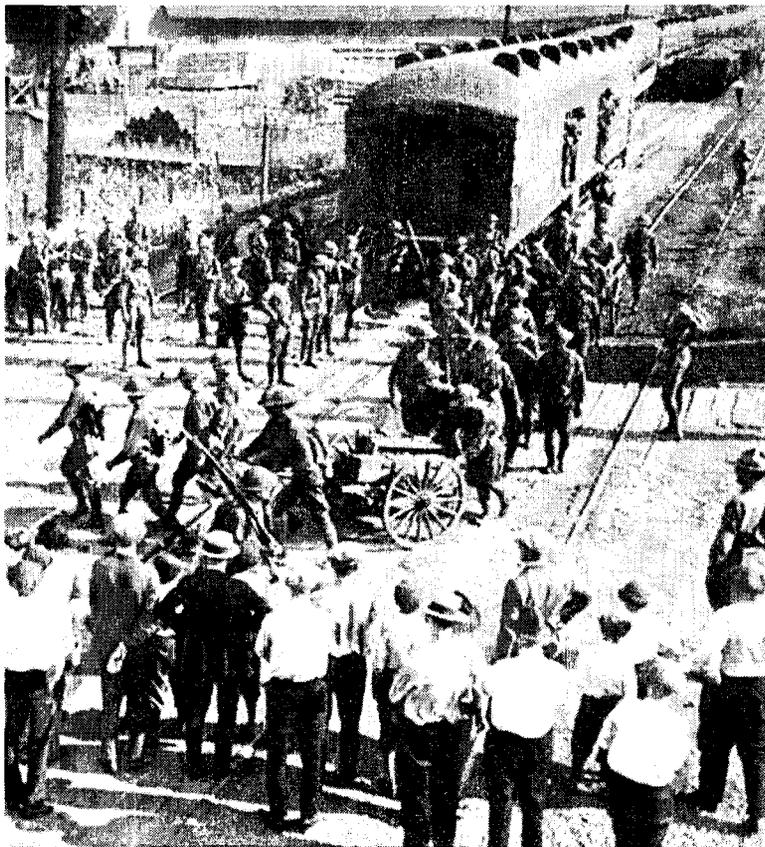
The American Communists paid a high price for this period of reaction—higher than they did for the intense repression of 1919-20—which led to great pressures toward abandoning the revolutionary purpose on which the Communist movement had been founded. Objective conditions in the 1920s dictated that the Communist Party would encompass only a small minority of the working class. The American Communists, including Cannon, were themselves slow to recognize this, and the twists and turns dictated by the Stalinizing Comintern in the latter half of the '20s didn't help.

It looked at first as if the Workers Party was destined for great success in the labor movement. Having been recruited by former fellow syndicalist Earl Browder to be part of a labor delegation to the Soviet Union in 1921, William Z. Foster was won to Bolshevism by all he saw and experienced in his three-and-a-half months there. After attending the founding conference of the Profintern in Moscow, Foster returned to Chicago in the late summer and joined the Communist Party, at the time still an underground organization.

Under the influence of Lenin’s “Left-Wing” *Communism*, the American Communists had abandoned their dual-unionist perspective; their policy now dovetailed with Foster’s long-held strategy, though not without some differences over

his rigid opposition to any trade-union organizing outside the AFL framework. The Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), which Foster had founded in late 1920, was placed at the service of the Workers Party and functioned as its trade-union arm from early 1922. Foster's own party membership was to remain a secret until 1923, and the TUEL was headquartered in Chicago, separate from the party headquarters in New York. Foster retained the close ties he had cultivated with John Fitzpatrick's Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), under whose aegis he had begun his organizing campaigns. An ardent Irish nationalist and trade-union "progressive," Fitzpatrick had for a while been advocating the formation of a labor party. He was a thorn in the side of the AFL bureaucracy under Samuel Gompers. The TUEL received substantial protection from Gompers' virulent anti-Communism because of Foster's work for the CFL.

Organized around the journal *Labor Herald*, the TUEL had no dues or membership structure so as to avoid any charge of dual unionism (its public income came from literature sales and donations, and it also received Comintern subsidies). It fought "to develop trade unions from their present antiquated and stagnant condition into modern, powerful labor organizations capable of waging successful warfare against Capital" (William Z. Foster, "The Principles and Program of the Trade Union Educational League," *Labor Herald*, March 1922). Advocating the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a workers republic, the TUEL sought the affiliation of American trade unions to the Red International of Labor Unions. The TUEL program did not mention the



Bettmann

Illinois state troopers used as strikebreakers against railway shop workers, August 1922. Sweeping government injunction helped defeat strike, setting union-busting tone for rest of decade.

Jim Crow restrictions that kept blacks out of the AFL craft unions; nor did it oppose the draconian restrictions the government had just imposed on immigration. This failure to confront the anti-black and anti-immigrant prejudices common in the working class was a real weakness. The fight against anti-black racism was a question that the American Communists, under prodding from the Comintern, were only beginning to address.

The TUEL saw as its immediate task an aggressive campaign for the amalgamation of AFL craft unions into unions organized on an industry-wide basis, raising the slogan, "amalgamation or annihilation." Beginning with a motion for amalgamation in the CFL in March 1922, the TUEL managed in the succeeding 18 months to get amalgamation motions passed in 16 international unions, 17 state federations, many city labor councils and thousands of union locals.

Grappling with the Labor Party Question

As they came up from the underground, the American Communists began to grapple with the issue of whether or not to call for a labor party. In a chapter appropriately titled "Pepper Spray," Palmer details the ways in which the Workers Party under the tutelage of a Hungarian-born Communist named József Pogány (known in the U.S. as John Pepper) made a mess of it.

In "*Left-Wing Communism*" Lenin advocated that the British Communists affiliate to the British Labour Party (BLP) and give it critical support in the coming elections. Though its program and leadership were reformist, the BLP was based on affiliated trade unions; it had been formed as an expressly working-class party. Lenin termed it a "bourgeois workers party." In order to maintain their hold on the working class in the face of the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution and post-war radicalization, the BLP tops were talking left and had in 1918 adopted a provision in the party constitution (Clause Four) calling for wholesale nationalization of industry. Lenin advocated that the Communists vote for the BLP—while retaining their complete freedom of agitation, propaganda and political activity—to help prove to the masses that once elected to government the BLP tops would in fact betray the interests of the working class. This exposure would facilitate the Communists winning the working-class base of the Labour Party.

Lenin had brought up in his discussions with American delegates at both the Second and Third CI Congresses the question of whether or not an equivalent party to the BLP could be formed in the United States. The Workers Party finally adopted the call for a labor party in May 1922. In his November 1922 speech Cannon endorses the idea of a labor party "something after the nature of the English Labour Party."

The formation of a labor party can be a big step forward on the road to a mass communist party, but it can also easily become a giant obstacle. The problem with the slogan is objective; as Trotsky later explained, everything depends on the context in which it is raised:

"One can say that under the American conditions a labor party in the British sense would be a 'progressive step,' and by recognizing this and stating

so, we ourselves, even though indirectly, help to establish such a party. But that is precisely the reason I will never assume the responsibility to affirm abstractly and dogmatically that the creation of a labor party would be a 'progressive step' even in the United States, because I do not know under what circumstances, under what guidance, and for what purpose that party would be created. It seems to me more probable that especially in America, which does not possess any important traditions of independent political action by the working class (like Chartism in England, for example) and where the trade-union bureaucracy is more reactionary and corrupted than it was at the height of the British empire, the creation of a labor party could be provoked only by mighty revolutionary pressure from the working masses and by the growing threat of communism. It is absolutely clear that under these conditions the labor party would signify not a progressive step but a hindrance to the progressive evolution of the working class."

—Trotsky, "The Labor Party Question in the United States," 19 May 1932

Elements in the trade-union bureaucracy in the United States had begun to raise the idea of a labor party during the post-WWI strike wave. John Fitzpatrick had run for mayor of Chicago in 1919 on a Labor Party ticket, garnering 56,000 votes. Fitzpatrick sought to unite into a national party the local labor parties that had sprung up in several cities, including Seattle and Minneapolis. But by the time the American Communists, having emerged from the underground, began to pay attention to these efforts, Fitzpatrick's party was no longer an unambiguous attempt to create a working-class party organizationally independent of the bourgeoisie. At a convention in 1920, the Labor Party had merged forces with the bourgeois Committee of 48, the remnants of the "Progressive" movement that had dominated both bourgeois parties earlier in the century but was distinctly on the outs in President Harding's America.

The Progressives wanted to run the old Republican warhorse Robert La Follette for president. Fitzpatrick would not go along with support to such an openly bourgeois candidate. But his divergence from a proletarian orientation was indicated by his party's change of name to Farmer-Labor Party (FLP). The FLP ran its own candidate for president, Parley Parker Christensen, who received a quarter of a million votes. His vote was not centered in urban working-class centers: it was overwhelmingly in the Western agrarian states where American family farmers were facing ruin and where the bourgeois populist tradition remained strong.

The American Communists could not at first agree on what attitude to take toward Fitzpatrick's FLP. This was a source of dispute right up to the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. The ECCI advised the American Communists to enter the labor party movement:

"The idea now prevailing of the establishment of a labor party in America has enormous political importance. *The basis of our activity must be the Left Wing of the Trade Union Movement.* All attention and energy must be devoted to our activity among the masses of the Left Wing in the Trade Union movement. If we succeed in building a large Labor Party—at first



Bettmann

TUEL's Labor Herald (July 1923). American Communists called for "labor party," but joined in founding two-class Federated Farmer-Labor Party. They were pulled back by CI from support to bourgeois Progressive Robert La Follette (right) in 1924 presidential elections.

only with a moderate political program—it will be an event of historical importance, not only for the American Labor movement, but for the Labor movement of the whole world."

—"To the Communist Party of America from the Executive Committee of the Communist International," undated but written shortly after the Fourth CI Congress, reprinted in *Spartacist* No. 40, Summer 1987

This CI decision was based on reports at the Fourth Congress that there was a growing movement for an "independent labor party" in the left wing of the trade-union movement in the United States (see "We Want the Comintern to Give Us Assistance," page 44). The FLP per se was not mentioned in the CI decision.

The American Communists began to campaign for a labor party even before the ink was dry on the ECCI letter. They did so while in an implicit bloc with Fitzpatrick's CFL and *without* explicitly criticizing Fitzpatrick's Farmer-Labor orientation. The *Labor Herald* declared:

"The pioneer work in this movement, as in many other things, came from the Chicago Federation of Labor. This organization was the initiator of the Farmer-Labor Party, the first attempt to give expression to the trade unions on the political field."

—National Committee of the Trade Union Educational League, "A Political Party for Labor," *Labor Herald*, December 1922

The article did not mention Fitzpatrick's merger with the bourgeois Committee of 48, nor the fact that the FLP's support was overwhelmingly from small capitalist farmers. It insisted, "In order to mobilize all the potential strength of the Labor Party, it is necessary that it make provision for including the exploited small-farming class along with the industrial workers. But the actual workers, being the only class whose interests give them a clear-cut line of action at all times, must dominate the party.... It must be a Labor Party in fact as well as name." In the absence of any concrete criticism of Fitzpatrick's FLP, this insistence on a "labor" party was meaningless.

The only principled basis for participation in a labor party movement at this time would have been an attempt to polarize and split the FLP by insisting on a break with the bourgeois Progressives and an unambiguously working-class orientation. The Workers Party had embarked on an opportunist and class-collaborationist course.

The party agreed to participate in a national conference called by Fitzpatrick's FLP for July 3 to found a party of *workers and farmers*. In this case, the Workers Party's own opportunist impulse to cash in on Fitzpatrick's popularity dovetailed with the emphasis on a "workers and peasants" united front, then coming from Zinoviev's Comintern. A Peasant International was formed in the autumn of 1923; the CI would soon begin pushing for the establishment of two-class worker and peasant parties. John Pepper had arrived in the U.S. with an ECCI delegation in 1922 and appointed himself permanent CI representative. Pepper made it his business to keep up on the shifts in policy as the CI degenerated and he soon made himself indispensable to the New York WP leadership around C.E. Ruthenberg. Pepper, whom Palmer aptly terms "a living articulation of the nascent degeneration of the Russian Revolution," was in the forefront of the U.S. party's wholesale adoption of farmer-laborism.

In joining in with Fitzpatrick's call for a farmer-labor party, the American Communists were submerging the crucial call for political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie into the "progressive" petty-bourgeois radical morass they had set out to combat. Two-class parties, supposedly uniting the working class with the peasantry or small farmers, are inevitably and invariably *bourgeois* parties, as Trotsky exhaustively demonstrates in *The Third International After Lenin*. Trotsky derisively wrote of the American variant:

"According to Pepper's conception, a party of a few thousand members, consisting chiefly of immigrants, had to fuse with the farmers through the medium of a bourgeois party and by thus founding a 'two-class' party, insure the socialist revolution in the face of the passivity or neutrality of the proletariat corrupted by super-profits."

—Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*

Pepper, a consummate opportunist maneuverer, indicated no knowledge of the history of bourgeois agrarian Populism in the United States. He had grandiose illusions and thought that if the Workers Party could capture the farmer-labor movement, the party would catapult itself into national influence. Under his direction, the Communists rode roughshod over the concerns of Fitzpatrick, packing the July 3 Farmer-Labor convention with Communist delegates and provoking a walkout by the vengeful CFL leader. The Federated Farmer-Labor Party (FFLP) that was created on July 3 consisted largely of the Communists and no one else.

The effect of the split with Fitzpatrick was exactly the opposite of what Pepper intended. The Workers Party lost the protection of its bloc partners in the AFL. Gompers, with the full backing of Fitzpatrick, launched a witchhunt that drove TUEL supporters out of labor councils and unions around the country. By 1925, the TUEL had been driven virtually underground in the shrinking AFL craft unions. Though forced by Pepper's idiocies, the break with Fitzpatrick was very likely, given the string of labor defeats and the political climate in the U.S. at the time. Gompers had cut the subsidy to the Chicago Federation of Labor to force it to sever ties with the Workers Party. But a sliding apart based on clear political differences would have been far less damaging than an acrimonious split over organizational grievances.

The debacle of the July 3 convention led Foster and Cannon to make a pact to fight for leadership of the party against Pepper and his American supporters. Foster and Cannon were horrified at the growing isolation of the TUEL in the AFL. But they fully imbibed the opportunist adaptation to farmer-

laborism and the unprincipled call for a "two-class party" that had led to the July 3 debacle. Thus they helped lead the Workers Party into deepening its unprincipled course, taking the FFLP far down the road to support for Republican Senator La Follette in the 1924 presidential elections.

Palmer's account downplays the political problems with the Workers Party's uncritical adoption of farmer-laborism. He blames the problem on Pepper and Moscow, not the opportunist impulse in the American party itself. Far from being the sole source of opportunism, it was the Comintern—where Trotsky had vehemently opposed the support to La Follette—that pulled the American party back from supporting La Follette. Trotsky wrote:

"For a young and weak Communist Party, lacking in revolutionary temper, to play the role of solicitor and gatherer of 'progressive voters' for the Republican Senator La Follette is to head toward the political dissolution of the party in the petty bourgeoisie."

—Trotsky, Introduction (1924), *The First Five Years of the Communist International*

Palmer wrongly writes that the sudden pullback from support to La Follette was like the Fitzpatrick split "all over again." He insists that "the mechanical reversal of communist policy spoke to the ways in which the WP was now subject to a Communist International bureaucratism that had no sensitivity to international realities and little flexibility in its local renegotiation of programmatic error." There is no room for "flexibility" on the elemental question of drawing the class line in electoral activity. *If the Workers Party had persisted in support to a bourgeois candidate, its cadre would have been finished as a revolutionary force.*

The conflation of bourgeois third parties with genuine labor parties has been a source of opportunism before and since. Cannon earnestly sought to assimilate the lessons and turn the party around, as Palmer lays out. But the Comintern under Zinoviev only confused the party more by insisting that it maintain the fictitious Federated Farmer-Labor Party front group. Cannon and the American Trotskyists originally drew the wrong lessons from the American Communist experience in the 1920s, dropping the labor party slogan from their arsenal entirely until Trotsky insisted that they adopt it again in the midst of the labor upsurge that built the mass industrial unions in 1938. This will hopefully be a topic in Palmer's second volume.

Issues in the Factional Wars

Cannon and Foster's successful fight to win a majority of delegates to the Workers Party's Third Convention in December 1923, and hence a majority on the incoming Central Executive Committee (CEC, the leading body between party conferences), is well laid out by Palmer. They drew into their faction Ludwig Lore's supporters in the German federation and the needle trades, and most importantly, the Finnish-language federation, the largest single voting bloc. Cannon was key to establishing and cementing this alliance.

The factional struggle took on the ferocity it did in part because of the role played by Jay Lovestone, an indefatigable Ruthenberg factional operative who learned quickly in the Pepper school. The split between Foster-Cannon and Ruthenberg-Lovestone reflected in part a national bifurcation between the TUEL, based in industrial Chicago, and the central party leadership based in New York. In his *It Had to Be Revolution: Memoirs of an American Radical* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), Charles Shipman gives a



Getty



RGASPI

John Pepper (József Pogány) in Hungary, 1919 (left); Jay Lovestone at Sixth CI Congress, 1928.

sense of the social and political tensions in the party at the time. Shipman (known at that time as Manuel Gomez) was a member of the Workers Party in Chicago in 1923-24, later joining the Cannon faction and becoming head of the party's All-American Anti-Imperialist League.

Ruthenberg viewed the Foster-Cannon bloc as a collection of trade-union opportunists. There was an element of truth in this view. As Cannon himself later wrote, he was "not very sensitive" to the risk of opportunist errors at the time. Though there were certainly differences of approach and nuance between the groups, there were no fundamental programmatic disagreements. After their December 1923 victory, Cannon and Foster managed to get the party headquarters moved to Chicago. But they insisted that Ruthenberg remain party secretary. Cannon was assistant secretary and Foster party chairman. They succeeded in having Pepper recalled to Moscow. However, lines hardened, leading to the factional wars that dominated the party until Lovestone's expulsion in 1929.

Pepper continued to play a role as a Ruthenberg operative in Moscow. The Cannon-Foster faction's majority in the party leadership was overturned by Comintern fiat at the party's Fourth Convention in 1925. Cannon and Foster parted ways in reaction to the Comintern edict, with Cannon leading those faction members who refused to organize a revolt against the Comintern decision. After 1925, Cannon maintained his own separate faction. Palmer writes particularly well about the Foster-Cannon split and its aftermath.

Palmer uses material from the Comintern archives to shed new light on issues under dispute in the Workers Party. For example, he reports that the formation of the United Council of Working Class Women/Wives and similar local women's organizations led by party activists was a source of controversy in 1924. Palmer asserts that the Ruthenberg-Lovestone faction tended to support these auxiliary party women's organizations while Cannon did not. Cannon expressed concern that "the theory of operating under another name is somewhat a survival of the days when our Party was obliged to work illegally" (Cannon Letter to Jeanette Pearl, 22 September 1924). Cannon wrote that "political work among the women must be conducted directly by the Party, in the name of the Party... and not under some other organization—real or camouflage." However, he also wrote that he had

"hesitated a long while over the question," adding, "Women's work is very complicated, and I am far from being able to qualify as an 'expert' on the question. However, its importance is self-evident."

Palmer incorrectly takes Cannon to task for insisting that work among women be directly under the political control of the party leadership, seeing this as evidence of a "blind spot" on the need for special work among women. The Workers Party had created an internal Women's Commission/Bureau in 1922, as mandated by the Third CI Congress resolution on methods and forms of work among women. The task was to make this a real body overseeing real party work. But, as Palmer notes, this body "was largely a figurehead organization." In fact, the Workers Party appears to have produced very little propaganda about women's oppression, and to have carried out very little

work on the woman question per se, reflecting a tendency to bend to the backward attitudes in the working class. This was true no matter which faction was in power. Neither side pushed women to take leadership roles. Only a few women—largely intellectuals like Juliet Stuart Poyntz and Rose Pastor Stokes—served on the Central Executive Committee. Women were, however, a large part of the party's base in the heavily Jewish needle trades, where Rose Wortis helped lead the work. The garment workers' leaders were originally part of the Foster-Cannon group, though they switched to Ruthenberg-Lovestone after 1925.

The trade-union work, and in particular the TUEL, was always a source of controversy in the party's factional wars. The only AFL unions in which the party retained a base after the early 1920s were in the needle trades and in coal mining. Both of these industries were in decline and their workers suffered job and wage cuts throughout the decade, making them particularly volatile. As Ian Angus details in his excellent history of the early Canadian Communist Party, *Canadian Bolsheviks* (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981), the Canadian Communists won leadership of the Cape Breton miners, solidly organized in District 26 of the United Mine Workers (UMW). The party led an August 1922 strike against wage cuts to partial victory and subsequently did an exemplary job in maintaining the district union intact against the bosses' attacks and UMW chief John L. Lewis's attempts to wrest back control. The UMW collapsed in most of the rest of Canada. The American party did not lead even a substantial region of an AFL union until it won control of some New York needle trades locals in 1925. The party led a successful furriers strike in 1926, but a long and militant needle trades strike the same year failed to win its main demand. In the aftermath, the reformist needle trades tops went after the TUEL supporters and succeeded in purging many from leadership positions. The Communists' heroic efforts in the 1926-28 "Save the Union" movement in opposition to the Lewis bureaucracy in the UMW, which won significant support from black miners, were also defeated.

The party's work, both in the trade unions and in particular as regards the black population, was hampered by Foster's insistence that the only course was to "bore from within" the AFL (though he was forced to abandon this long-held belief to remain a party leader during the Third Period).

AFL unions mostly retained their racist color bars throughout the 1920s. Cannon rightly opposed a sole emphasis on the AFL, although his factional co-leader, William F. Dunne, leaned more toward Foster's position.

With Foster and Cannon both in the USSR attending the Sixth Plenum of the ECCI in 1926, Albert Weisbord and other party supporters propelled themselves into the leadership of an organizing strike among the textile workers of Passaic, New Jersey, outside of the AFL framework. Palmer gives the Passaic strike the attention it deserves. As the strike dragged on, the party moved to hand control over to the AFL, agreeing to the Gompers bureaucracy's demand to dump Weisbord from the strike leadership. Cannon wrote in later years that this had been a mistake (see *The First Ten Years of American Communism*). Far better that the party gain the reputation of following through on its commitments to working-class leadership. Defeated strikes, too, if well fought, can pave the way for a party to attain mass influence in subsequent class struggles.

In this period of reaction, the TUEL could and should have played a role as a largely educational vehicle for Communist propaganda in the AFL, and for the episodic organizing of solidarity actions in support of strikes and other labor actions. Simply maintaining the TUEL as a fighting force for militant class struggle would have put party trade unionists in a good position for the future. However, the TUEL became a factional football in late 1925-26, and Palmer's detailing of the dispute, based on documents from the Moscow archives, is quite useful. Cannon and Ruthenberg wanted to liquidate the TUEL in favor of "broader" trade-union oppositions. Foster vehemently opposed this move. When the Comintern insisted that the TUEL be maintained, Cannon still insisted that it seek to organize on a broader basis than hitherto. But the support the TUEL had won in its 1922-23 campaigns for amalgamation and a labor party was based on the bloc with the Fitzpatrick forces in the CFL. For Communists to insist on organizing "broad" trade-union oppositions without a clear and principled programmatic basis is an opening for opportunist adaptation.

The ILD...and Lovestone

U.S. president Harding's "normalcy" notwithstanding, state repression against radical and labor activists was a fact of life. Defense of those threatened by the state had a real

urgency; defense work was the one arena where the party's work could garner something approaching mass support. Cannon was always proud of the role he played in helping to found and lead the International Labor Defense (ILD), whose work has served as a model for the Partisan Defense Committee in the U.S. and the other fraternal non-sectarian defense organizations set up by ICL sections around the world. Building in large part on the ties Cannon maintained from his days as an IWW agitator and his reputation in the broader labor and Socialist movement, the ILD was a real, ongoing united-front organization (impossible in the current period for the tiny and exemplary defense organizations associated with national sections of the ICL).

The ILD's founding convention in 1925 was attended by over 100 delegates. By the end of 1926 it had 20,000 individual members (dues were ten cents a month, raised to 15 cents in 1927) and 156 branches. The trade-union and other labor organizations that affiliated to the ILD as bodies claimed some 75,000 members. Palmer's section on the ILD excels in the detail and care with which he recounts the organization's activities and its scrupulous methods of financial accountability. He is careful to credit Rose Karsner's significant role in the organization, which was linked to the CI's International Red Aid. Palmer reports that Cannon faction lieutenant Martin Abern eventually took over some of Karsner's duties, exercising his abilities as an excellent administrator; the young Max Shachtman gained further experience as a communist journalist editing the ILD's *Labor Defender*.

The most famous campaign of the ILD in that period was the defense of Italian immigrant anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Arrested in the aftermath of the Palmer Raids in 1920 and falsely accused of robbing a shoe factory in Braintree, Massachusetts, and killing the paymaster, Sacco and Vanzetti were convicted in a 1921 trial saturated with anti-Italian chauvinism and anti-anarchist hysteria. The death sentence was pronounced in April 1927. Cannon's writings on Sacco and Vanzetti, available in *Notebook of an Agitator*, are exceptional examples of communist agitation, combining pedagogy with polemics. Cannon combatted illusions in the capitalist courts, insisting that the case was "an issue of the class struggle and not merely one of an exceptional miscarriage of so-called justice."

Cannon addresses ILD's Second Convention, September 1926. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn seated to Cannon's right. Inset: May 1928 issue of ILD's *Labor Defender*.

Labor Defender





Boston Public Library
Framed-up anarchists Bartolomeo Vanzetti (left) and Nicola Sacco. 1927 ILD rally in New York City in their defense.



Labor Defender

Reading *James P. Cannon and the Revolutionary Left*, it is impossible not to see the parallels between the American capitalist state's vendetta against the two immigrant anarchists and its current determination to execute MOVE supporter and former Black Panther Party member Mumia Abu-Jamal. Sacco and Vanzetti were seen by the state as symbols of all those who challenge capitalist rule. Mumia, a Philadelphia journalist known as the "voice of the voiceless," was falsely accused of killing a police officer and sentenced to death in a 1982 trial that was saturated with racism and hatred for his past as an activist in the Black Panther Party. He is seen as a symbol of all those who would challenge the capitalist system of exploitation and racial oppression.

And just as the ILD had to combat the attempts by various bourgeois liberals and trade-union reformists to sabotage a *class-struggle* policy to defend Sacco and Vanzetti, the PDC has had to expose those who seek to derail the fight for Mumia's freedom into dead-end reliance on the capitalist courts and politicians. Unfortunately, Palmer spends little time examining the ways and means by which Cannon exposed the treachery of sundry socialists, anarchists and liberals in the case of Sacco and Vanzetti. But he does amply illustrate that the ILD built the broadest possible united-front actions against the threatened execution.

As Palmer writes, the case of Sacco and Vanzetti "stirred the soul of America in the 1920s." Not just America, but the world. Tens of thousands participated in protests in U.S. cities in the spring and summer of 1927; millions hit the streets from Moscow to Paris. As the date of the execution approached, there were a few sporadic strikes and other labor actions. The bourgeois state was determined to execute Sacco and Vanzetti for their political views. Cannon knew from his experience in the campaign to free Big Bill Haywood and Charles Moyer, who were acquitted in 1907, that mass protest could at times compel the forces of bourgeois reaction to back down. But despite a massive protest movement,

the state executed Sacco and Vanzetti in August 1927. Their funeral march in Boston drew 100,000 participants.

Palmer correctly sees Cannon at his "organizational and journalistic best" in the ILD work, but he also sees Cannon's participation in this mass agitation as something separate and apart from his role as a Workers Party leader. He writes, "The ILD had been something of an interlude of peaceful coexistence in the factional gang warfare of Workers (Communist) Party internal struggle in the mid- to late 1920s." Palmer's assertion is belied by the many instances, which he himself recounts, in which the Ruthenberg-Lovestone forces tried to undercut the ILD's work. The ILD was conceived and founded in the midst of one of the most intense periods of factional struggle, which lasted from the Fifth ECCI Plenum in the spring of 1925 through the party's Fourth Convention that August. As noted in the PRL Introduction to *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*, Ruthenberg tried to scuttle the ILD even before it was founded.

The Sacco-Vanzetti campaign was at its height in the spring and summer of 1927, when the faction fight again exploded in the aftermath of Ruthenberg's sudden death in March. Lovestone pulled out all the stops to have himself anointed Ruthenberg's successor as party secretary, rushing off to Moscow in May to attend the CI's Eighth Plenum. With Cannon, Foster and other party leaders forced to follow Lovestone to Moscow, the ILD's work in the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign had to continue without Cannon for a period. Throughout that summer, a revived Cannon-Foster bloc devoted its efforts, ultimately unsuccessful, to preventing Lovestone from winning a majority at the party's Fifth Convention in August. Despite Cannon's attempt to postpone it, the convention took place in the *midst* of the ILD's final burst of agitation against the execution.

The ILD's accomplishments are the more impressive in light of Cannon's simultaneous concentration on the internal factional struggle. But the ILD was founded and did its work only *because* Cannon was a major leader of the

Workers Party with a factional base of his own that was able to safeguard the defense work from factional intrigues.

Collective Leadership Is No Panacea

Though occasional faction fights are crucial to maintaining the programmatic integrity of a Leninist party in the face of the relentless pressures of bourgeois society, the permanent factional warfare in the American party indicated that something was deeply wrong. The different approaches that distinguished Foster's largely trade-union base from the more immigrant, ex-ultraleftists of the Ruthenberg-Lovestone forces would have provided for healthy political debate in a real Leninist party. It was not principally differences over the real work of the party that fueled the factional lineups, nor was it Lovestone's overweening personal ambition, though this was certainly a factor. The fight in the American party was fueled in part by the fight in the Russian party and the Comintern, which pitted Trotsky's Left Opposition (blocking in 1926-27 with Kamenev and Zinoviev to form the Joint Opposition) against the rising bureaucracy led by Stalin, for whom the cause of world proletarian revolution was rapidly receding.

Palmer astutely characterizes the situation as the "balkanization of the American leadership," writing:

"A weakened Central Executive Committee majority, in which Ruthenberg's political authority was counterposed to the hegemony of Foster in trade union work, with Cannon's role shunted off as something of an appendage to each (by which his labor defense field was necessarily related to these bifurcated wings, but somewhat subordinate to both), undoubtedly satisfied competing sectors of the Comintern and suited Stalin's agenda adroitly."

Stalin's struggle against Trotsky greatly affected the American party situation: one of the principal reasons for the Comintern's deposing of the Foster-Cannon majority in 1925 was certainly its alignment with Ludwig Lore, who had publicly defended Trotsky. More of a left social democrat than a Bolshevik, Lore was duly drummed out of the party. The generally rightist political thrust of this putative Trotskyist may well have confused the Workers Party cadre about the true nature of Trotsky's fight in the Russian party. After 1925, ritual denunciations of Trotsky were *de rigueur* for Comintern party leaders. As Palmer notes, "Cannon distinguished himself in the general Central Executive Com-

mittee factional rush to condemn Trotsky by refusing to jump on the bandwagon of political invective, but he did go along for the ride."

There are certainly indications that Cannon harbored some doubts about the struggle in the Russian party. But as he later stated:

"My state of mind then was that of doubt and dissatisfaction. Of course, if one had no responsibility to the party, if he were a mere commentator or observer, he could merely speak his doubts and have it over with. You can't do that in a serious political party. If you don't know what to say, you don't have to say anything. The best thing is to remain silent."

—Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*

Cannon was deeply unhappy with the state of permanent factional war in the Workers Party. Palmer points to the fact that Cannon, after his 1925 break with Foster, argued for the primacy of program over faction and insisted that votes should be taken on the "main political line, regardless of who is for or against." In late 1926, Cannon managed to win over two key Ruthenberg-Lovestone supporters in New York—Jack Stachel and William Weinstone—on a program of fighting to end party factionalism. This was a promising development. Palmer does not, unfortunately, discuss the indications that Cannon's campaign was making headway with Ruthenberg before the latter's untimely death in 1927.

Since the party factional pot was kept boiling by the heat supplied by the Comintern, Cannon's "faction to end factions" was doomed to failure. Palmer describes how the CI leadership simply brushed the Cannon group aside as inconvenient. After Ruthenberg died, Foster joined Cannon and Weinstone in campaigning for Weinstone to be general secretary of the party. But it was Lovestone who won the Comintern's approval, and Weinstone subsequently slipped back into the Lovestone fold.

Cannon's energetic efforts to end the factionalism were unique among the party leadership. But collective leadership is, in itself, no panacea. The experience of the Canadian Communist Party demonstrates that neither collective leadership nor refusal to join in the Comintern's anti-Trotsky chorus were guarantees of resistance to Stalinist degeneration. Ian Angus in *Canadian Bolsheviks* details the admirable lack of permanent factions—or indeed of any factional struggle at all—at the top of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) through 1928. From the party's founding in 1921, the Canadian leadership worked collectively in an axis around Maurice Spector, editor of the *Worker* and national chairman from 1923-28, and Jack MacDonald, who was first national chairman, then party secretary.

Spector went to Germany to cover the unfolding revolution in 1923, in which the Communist Party faltered in the face of the left Social Democrats' opposition and refused to try to lead an insurrection in a situation where it had the mass of the working class behind it. Spector subsequently attended the 13th Party Conference in Moscow in January 1924, where the Stalinist bureaucracy won its decisive victory. These experiences led him to harbor real doubts about the campaign against Trotsky and to agree with Trotsky's analysis of the German defeat when he later read *The Lessons of October*. Under Spector's editorship, the *Worker* maintained a conspicuous



Vanguard Publications

Early Canadian Communist leaders. From left: William Moriarty, Tim Buck, Jack MacDonald and Maurice Spector.

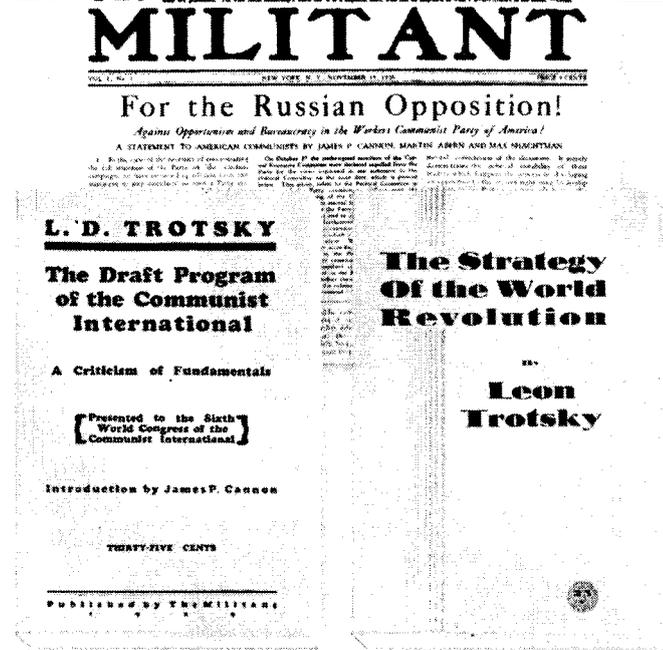
silence on the anti-Trotsky campaign as it developed through-out 1924. The rest of the Canadian leadership acquiesced to Spector's policy. The party maintained a studied neutrality on Trotskyism until early 1927, with the sole exception of one November 1926 *Worker* article written by the one nascent Stalinist in the Canadian leadership, Tim Buck.

No one in the Canadian leadership had a factional ax to grind against Spector; the party was small and in other matters reliably toed the line of the degenerating Comintern. The Canadian leadership was at first able to deflect demands for a statement against the Russian Opposition. Things changed after Tim Buck went to Moscow as delegate to the ECCI's Seventh Plenum in the fall of 1926. He not only voted for the resolutions against the Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev Joint Opposition but went back determined to force the issue in Canada. At an April 1927 CEC meeting, Buck put forward a motion condemning the Russian Opposition and endorsing the program of socialism in one country. The Canadian leadership knew by this time that to refuse to endorse Buck's motion would provoke a major confrontation with the Comintern. All voted with Buck except Spector. Yet the CEC refused Spector's offer to resign his posts and insisted on covering for him (so long as he agreed to be quiet) by presenting their anti-Trotsky resolution as unanimous. This charade was maintained for over a year.

By that time, Spector had a far better idea of what the Left Opposition stood for than did Cannon, but he was by no means a Trotskyist. Under Spector, the Canadian paper fully supported the disastrous liquidation of the Chinese Communist Party into the Guomindang, which led to the defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27. Spector sought out Cannon to discuss their doubts and dissatisfaction at a February 1928 plenum of the American CEC. They subsequently both attended the Comintern's Sixth Congress. Both were on the Program Commission and received copies of two of the three sections of Trotsky's scathing Critique of the draft Comintern program. Translations of this seminal Trotsky document were, for some reason, distributed to Commission members, though in numbered copies that had to be returned. Spector and Cannon read and studied the document and were thoroughly won over, particularly by Trotsky's penetrating analysis of the defeat in China. They made a pact in Moscow to smuggle out Trotsky's Critique and to go back to their respective parties to fight for the Left Opposition's program. Both succeeded in smuggling out the document. Cannon emerged with some 100 supporters, Spector with only a handful.

Spector had understood enough of the Left Opposition's fight against the degeneration of the Russian Revolution to vote against "socialism in one country" in the Canadian CEC in April 1927. It was well known in the Canadian party that he had doubts about the anti-Trotsky campaign. His hesitations in fighting for his views earlier within the CPC likely damaged the prospects of winning a broader layer of cadre to Trotskyism. Many of his prospective cothinkers had been operating on the premise that Spector's Trotskyist sympathies had very little to do with the real work of the Canadian party. On the other hand, the shock of Cannon's sudden conversion to Trotsky's views disposed his co-factionalists to seriously consider them.

More importantly, if paradoxically, the hard factional lines in the American party worked to Cannon's *advantage*, collective leadership to Spector's *disadvantage*. Factional



Founders of Communist League of America: Martin Abern (left), James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman. First issue of the *Militant*, 11 November 1928, declared for Trotskyist Opposition. 1929 CLA pamphlet (above left) published first and third sections of Trotsky's Critique of CI draft program, smuggled out of Moscow by Cannon; second section was published in 1930 pamphlet.

loyalties allowed Cannon to quickly win over Karsner, Shachtman and Abern and meant that Cannon had time to talk to others who might be sympathetic before he was expelled. Even those who were not able to read the smuggled copy of the Critique were disposed to question Cannon, Shachtman and Abern's expulsions. Spector had little room to maneuver in the Canadian party, and the small group of youth cadre whom he had drawn around him (according to Angus, largely through personal complaints against MacDonald), far from showing any interest in the Left Opposition, became Buck's acolytes. Relations with MacDonald, who had been Spector's central collaborator for seven years, were evidently quite strained by this point. MacDonald did not join the Trotskyists until 1932; before MacDonald decided he had had enough, he went through more than two years of hell in the CPC as it gyrated into the Third Period and as Buck consolidated his control.

The Toronto Trotskyists initially formed a local of the organization Cannon and his supporters founded, the Communist League of America (CLA). The Canadians formed their own national organization only in 1934. Spector's role



Jean Weinberg

Leon Trotsky in exile in Prinkipo, Turkey, 1931. Formation of CLA was important boost for Left Opposition internationally.

in the CLA, where he was a member of the anti-Cannon Abern clique, is detailed in the PRL's *Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 2002), as well as in an article by Palmer, "Maurice Spector, James P. Cannon, and the Origins of Canadian Trotskyism" (*Labour/Le Travail* No. 56, Fall 2005). These works provide clues as to the probable weaknesses of Spector's efforts on behalf of the Left Opposition in 1928. Cannon's development into a Leninist party leader speaks to his strengths:

"The genesis of the CLA from an established grouping within the Communist Party, with years of political collaboration and agreement behind it, gave it an organizational stability and political cohesion lacking in other International Left Opposition sections outside of the Soviet Union itself. Most other leaders who came over to the Left Opposition from parties of the Communist International did so only after they had been discredited and stripped of all supporters. Cannon stands out as the only one expelled while he was still a credible party leader, able to win others to his political course."

—PRL Introduction, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*

The PRL Introduction also addressed the question of *why* Cannon, uniquely among the top leaders of the American party, was won to Trotskyism. There were factors in the political profile of Cannon's faction that militated against his leap to the Left Opposition: a parochial concern for American questions, insistence on the strategy of a bloc with the "progressives" in the trade unions, lack of emphasis on the fight against special oppression of blacks and women. At the same time, the PRL Introduction observed:

"The fight of the Cannon-Foster faction against an orientation to La Follette's bourgeois third party movement after the 1924 elections; Cannon's insistence on the leading role of the working class in any farmer-labor party; the strong, if skewed, internationalism that made Cannon break with Foster and refuse to lead a rightist revolt against the Communist International in 1925; Cannon's attempt to reverse the dead-end factional wars which crippled and deformed the party after 1925; his willingness to break with the party's adaptation to the AFL unions in 1928: all this predisposed Cannon to make the leap to the Left Opposition when that option presented itself. Can-

non, unlike the other Workers Party leaders, had not been made cynical by the corrupt maneuvering inside the degenerating Comintern."

The Revolutionary Comintern: The High Point

The upsurge in revolutionary working-class struggle that threatened to overwhelm much of the capitalist world toward the end of World War I, culminating in the great Russian Revolution and the establishment of the Communist International, represents the high-water mark of revolutionary proletarian struggle. Study of this *unique* period, and of the program and principles established by the first four Congresses of the Communist International, is essential for Marxist revolutionaries—all the more so today, amid the pervasive, incessant propaganda barrage that "communism is dead." Also important is the study of the processes by which the sections of the Comintern were destroyed as revolutionary organizations, though this experience is not unique. (Under different circumstances, the First and Second Internationals also underwent a process of degeneration.) Palmer's biography of the man who pioneered the fight to build a Bolshevik "party of the Russian Revolution" on American soil deserves the attention of every youth seeking a coherent program, theory and organization to change the world.

There are some parallels to be drawn between the 1920s and the current period of reaction, but one overwhelming difference stands out: in the 1920s the Soviet Union existed as an example to the world proletariat. In that period, the European working class was overwhelmingly socialist and communist in its sympathies. The American working class was by far the most politically backward of any in the industrial world, with its social weight and power far outstripping its political consciousness. Still lacking a mass political party independent of the bourgeois parties, this huge proletariat was, however, the key to humanity's future. American imperialism was on the rise and was to dominate the world. The American Communist Party had an importance in the Comintern far outweighing its numbers.

The disproportion between the social power and the political consciousness of the American working class still bedevils American revolutionaries. The proletariat in the United States remains in thrall to the capitalist Democrats and Republicans. But American imperialism is in decline. The counterrevolution in the Soviet Union has left the United States as the world's only superpower in the current conjuncture; its military strength is far out of proportion to its current economic weight. This is a situation that cannot last even in the historical middle term, but the transfer of so much productive capacity to China, a very unstable deformed workers state, makes future prognosis difficult. The diminished economic weight of the U.S. proletariat in the global arena does not in itself determine the role it will play in the world socialist revolution, which depends on historic developments. The nuclear-armed American bourgeoisie remains the most dangerous and powerful gendarme of the world imperialist system.

In any case, the legacy of James P. Cannon remains no less important today for revolutionaries in the U.S. and around the world. *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* is a substantial contribution to communist historical study. It stands as refutation of those who bought the self-serving anti-Cannon line propagated by Max Shachtman as he descended from revisionism to renegacy after breaking with Trotsky's Fourth

International in 1940. Shachtman insisted that Cannon was never more than an unreconstructed Zinovievist, shaped irreversibly into a bureaucrat by his experiences in the degenerating Communist International. This view of Cannon has been perpetuated with particular vehemence by ostensible Trotskyists in Britain, especially the late Al Richardson and his cothinkers at the journal *Revolutionary History (RH)*.

The *RH* crowd cannot appreciate one of the main strengths of the Cannon faction: its antipathy to Lovestone's opportunism, which flowered when he took over leadership of the Workers Party in 1925. After his expulsion, Lovestone

became the leader of the Bukharinite Right Opposition in the U.S. The CLA was thus well inoculated against any attempt to make a "left-right bloc," an unprincipled maneuver that has been extolled in the pages of *RH*. Elsewhere, the "left-right bloc" shipwrecked the Spanish section of the Left Opposition under Andrés Nin (paving the way for the defeat of the 1936-38 Spanish Revolution), and also, for example, led to the foundering of Polish Trotskyism and ruined the building of a Danish Trotskyist organization.

We hope that Palmer's promised second volume, covering Cannon's years as a Trotskyist, when he developed into a first-class Leninist party leader, also finds a publisher. ■

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“We Want the Comintern to Give Us Assistance”

We publish below a speech given by James P. Cannon (using the pseudonym Cook) to a 27 November 1922 meeting of the American Commission convened in conjunction with the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (CI). To our knowledge the speech has

never been published before. This publication is by permission of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), which holds the original transcript. Cannon's speech supplements the material on the American Question at the Fourth Congress that we published previously (“The American Question at the Fourth Congress of the Communist International,” *Spartacist* No. 40, Summer 1987).

The Workers Party (WP) had been founded in December 1921 with the approval of the Comintern to test the waters as to whether or not it was possible for the American Communists to function openly. Participating in the party's formation were both the underground Communists and the Workers Council group, a pro-Bolshevik split from the Socialist Party that included the important Jewish and Finnish federations. The former Workers Council members who joined the Workers Party did not become members of the underground Communist Party of America (CPA) and were referred to as “centrists” by all the speakers at the American Commission.

The formation of the Workers Party had led to a split by about half of the underground CPA membership, concentrated among the party's foreign-language federations, who formed their own legal party, the United Toilers of America. By the time of the Fourth Congress, the majority of the splitters had rejoined the underground CPA, largely through the efforts of a representative of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), Henryk Walecki (Valetski), a founding member of the Polish Communist Party. At the American Commission, Sullivan, a Latvian from Boston, spoke for the minority of the United Toilers who refused to reunite with the CPA.

Walecki had been delegated by the ECCI to attend the CPA's famous August 1922 Bridgman convention, which was raided by the FBI. He sought to adjudicate a raging debate over the Workers Party that had broken out in the CPA, pitting the “Liquidators,” who wanted to abolish the underground party because the Workers Party could function openly and legally as a Communist Party, against the so-called “Goose Caucus,” whose position was codified in a thesis written by Israel Amter (J. Ford) and Abraham Jakira (A. Dubner). The Ford-Dubner thesis conceded that the Workers Party might become, under certain conditions, an open Communist Party, but insisted that the clandestine CPA would still be necessary as a “directing and controlling” body.

In a motion prepared for the Bridgman convention, Walecki arrived at a compromise formula evidently agreed to by both factions. The compromise mandated that the majority of

1922 Speech by James P. Cannon

Communist work be carried out in the name of the Workers Party, but insisted on maintaining the underground party. The Goose Caucus won the upper hand at Bridgman, winning a majority on the incoming Central Executive Committee. But their victory proved short-lived. The

Walecki-sponsored compromise was overthrown at the Fourth CI Congress in favor of the position of the Liquidators.

Cannon was a delegate to the Fourth Congress and one of the principal spokesmen for the Liquidators. Ludwig E. Katterfeld (who used the pseudonym Carr) spoke for the Goose Caucus. Cannon's speech indicates impatience with the Walecki-engineered compromise.

As an illustration of the backwardness of the American working class, Cannon cites the fact that the American Federation of Labor unions refused even to join “Amsterdam,” referring to the Social Democratic-led International Federation of Trade Unions formed in 1919 at a conference in Amsterdam. The “Spetztes” referred to by Cannon were bourgeois military/technical advisers who worked under the direction of the Soviet state.

The victory of Cannon and his cothinkers at the Fourth Congress was greatly facilitated by a one-hour meeting with Leon Trotsky that party sympathizer Max Eastman set up for Cannon and another Liquidators leader, Max Bedacht. Trotsky agreed to support the Liquidators' position and to get the support of other Russian party leaders, requesting that Cannon and his cothinkers write down their views “on one sheet of paper—no more.” This document, read by Cannon at the end of his speech, is not reprinted here. It appears in *Spartacist* No. 40 and in the Prometheus Research Library's *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*.

The discussion on the reports occurred at subsequent American Commission meetings on November 30 and December 1. Cannon later described the discussion:

“Then the big guns began to boom. First Zinoviev, then Radek and then Bukharin. The noncommittal attitude they had previously shown in our personal conversations with them, which had caused us such apprehension, was cast aside. They showed a familiarity with the question which indicated that they had discussed it thoroughly among themselves. They all spoke emphatically and unconditionally in support of the position of the liquidators.”

—Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

The final ECCI decision declared, “The Fourth Congress and the new Executive of the Communist International are of the opinion that the American communists must commence a new chapter in their work. Illegality for the sake of illegality must cease. The main efforts must be devoted to work on the legal field.” In April 1923, the underground CPA formally dissolved itself.

The other issue in dispute was the question of the labor

party. At issue was not the party's attitude to the slogan *per se*, but its orientation to the existing currents in the American labor movement that were then flirting with the idea of a labor party, including John Fitzpatrick, the leader of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) and of the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP). In February 1922, delegates from the FLP and CFL had joined the effort sponsored by some railway union tops to found the Conference of Progressive Political Action (CPPA) as a vehicle to support "progressive" candidates of any party in state and local elections.

In his report, Walecki wrongly portrayed the FLP and the CPPA as part of a growing movement in the left wing of the American trade unions to found "an independent labor party." He wanted the Communists to participate in this movement and noted that the Goose Caucus had opposed this at Bridgman. Walecki insisted, "This labor party is not a theoretical idea, but the founding of the party is imminent. It will immediately be a party of millions" (our translation from the original German transcript). Cannon in his speech agreed with Walecki and mentioned a March meeting of trade unionists in support of a labor party—probably referring to the founding of the CPPA in February. The labor party dispute is discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this issue (see "A Biography of James P. Cannon," page 24). The original transcript has been lightly edited, correcting obvious typographical errors and grammatical inconsistencies. Words that have been added or changed because the uncorrected transcript was garbled appear in brackets.

* * *

Comrades, I am sorry that I cannot join in the general love feast of comrades Walecki and Carr. I am here to tell you, comrades, that there is a serious and fundamental struggle in the party and there has been for three years, and what we want the Communist International to do is to give us decisive directions. I speak here in the name of the minority delegation, in the name of the entire delegation of the Trade Union Educational League, in the name of the Young Communist League [delegation] to the Young Communist International.

It is not necessary to go into an analysis of conditions in America. I am sure they are known to you comrades sufficiently to make it clear that we are not confronted with a revolutionary situation. The American workers are not class conscious. They think and act as citizens in society. The majority of them vote for the capitalist parties. The unions reflect this condition; they are reactionary and numerically weak. They never had the experience of a Second International. They rejected Amsterdam because of the socialist phrases it employed. Their only indications of revolt are the armed rebellions they resort to now and then.

You read about Herrin, Illinois, where a band of union miners slaughtered 18 or 20 scabs, and you think that perhaps there is a revolutionary situation. But this is a mistake. He is fighting in defense of what he believes to be his rights, and when he marches across the country to Mingo, when he slaughters scabs, he is doing it in protection of his rights, which he thinks belong to him as an American citizen, and not because he is engaged in a struggle against the government. There is no doubt there is an awakening, and one of its manifestations is this desire for a labor party.

Comrade Carr is mistaken if he thinks it only began with the Daugherty injunction. Are you going to ignore the fact that in Chicago last March was held a convention to discuss political action? It was not very clear in its ideas, but it was not a small group. There were the miners union, the American railroad brotherhoods, the printers, garment workers, and central labor unions. This was unmistakable evidence of a first attempt for political action on the part of the workers. I endorse the idea of a labor party, something after the nature of the English Labour Party. What we want the International to answer is: What shall we do in this matter? What shall our tactics be? We have a clear position which we will submit to you for your approval. Because our conception has not agreed with the conception of comrade Carr and his faction of the party is one reason we are here in Moscow, determined to fight for our position.

What we say is this: If we remain passive or inactive on

Tim Davenport Collection



Some American delegates to CI Fourth Congress, 1922. Standing (from left): Cannon, unidentified delegate, Ludwig Katterfeld. Seated (from left): Alexander Trachtenberg, Arne Swabeck, unidentified (possibly Rose Wortis), Max Bedacht.

the question of the labor party, we will find that it will gradually develop and that the other elements in the left wing will push it along. The result will be the crystallization of the labor party. That will be a process. In the city of Chicago, the Federation of Labor will put up an independent stand. Detroit, Seattle and Denver have supported this maneuver. This will be extended, and out of this process the labor party will develop. It is one of the most important tasks of our party to get immediately into this movement, to be one of the sponsors of this movement, to have nuclei in it, and always to work for the labor party.

We cannot possibly steal the offices before we capture the trade unions. A child can see that we cannot capture the unions. There is a danger in America that we will lose this opportunity as we lost others, because we have to fight too long on this simple, obvious, fundamental question. There is a danger that while we sit at ease, the Socialist Party and the various radical fringes in the labor movement will take advantage of this situation and will succeed if we do not get busy. We do not want to find ourselves in that position, or worse. Say that the labor party is finally launched and becomes a main factor in the political life of the workers—the political birthday of the workers of America, as comrade Walecki has said—and that our party is outside of that movement, like the Communist Party in England, and that we are trying to get inside to say our say.

If we do not act now, that will happen to us. That is one of the things that comrade Walecki had to put to these people. Since the [Bridgman] convention in the latter part of August, what tremendous things have happened to change comrade Carr's mind and those of his group unless it has become obvious to them that there is nobody in sympathy with their position? The Daugherty injunction and big strikes were not new. They were on before. This is what we are afraid of. We are afraid of this idea of slipping over things that tear our party to pieces, without in any way changing the attitude of our opponents. We have voted on all kinds of questions. We find this—they always change their position, but never change their minds. We fully agree with comrade Walecki on the question of the development of the labor party.

Now we get down to the point that is tearing our party to pieces, the thing that has been an issue for nearly three years, the question of legality and illegality. The illegality of our party is a tremendous handicap. We have the disadvantage of being a new party. We have not tested our leaders in the open struggle. Our party was underground the first year of its existence, and it has very little confidence of the working masses. The working class in America has democratic illusions. They do not understand why we are underground as a party, and they do not have the sympathy for us that it is necessary for them to have for our party to be a factor in the life of the workers. I say it with great regret: Our underground party, instead of having the sympathy and attraction of the workers, is regarded by the masses as a good deal of a joke. They think it is illegal because we want to be illegal, and I must say that is true of a large majority of the illegal party.

Our party never made a fight for legality. We have been driven underground the first year of our existence as a party, and it is because of this illegality that we have the results that we have outlined before. There has been persecution in America not only against our party but against the trade unions, also against the IWW. There is not a strike in America where men are not shot down and beaten and

jailed, yet the trade unions have not been driven underground. The IWW has not been driven underground. The IWW, in contradistinction to our party, never was willing to accept illegality. They went back time and time again to the halls from which they had been expelled and made a fight for the right to keep them open, with the result that they now keep them open in many parts of the country.

The white terror in America that is so much talked of is certainly not in the same degree of intensity as it is in those countries in Europe where there are underground parties. The white terror that you hear so much about in Moscow is a white terror that has been manufactured in the minds of those comrades to justify their romantic conceptions of the movement. Nevertheless, these persecutions take place. The party is illegal, it is underground. We do not consider it a solution to adopt a resolution that for the time being the party must remain illegal, because nobody will dispute it in our faction at least. I want an illegal party if a legal party cannot exist. But that is negative. What about the future? There must be a determined fight for an open Communist Party, a purposeful fight to bring the party into the open.

Further, the working class of America will support this fight, but it will not support an illegal organization that makes no fight. The very fact that the democracy believes that free speech belongs by right to everybody in America will make them support that. The IWW never at any time in its career had such decisive influence upon the general labor movement as it had when it was a small organization and was conducting its free speech fights openly and publicly against all forms of suppression. Many of us who are here participated in that movement. We know that this will get a response from the laboring masses. In every labor union you will get a hearing. I do not know whether those comrades want to accuse us of being liquidators and legalists in America, but there is not in our faction one man of any influence in the organization who has any legalism or respect for the country's laws in him or who has any illusions about the possibilities of the legal movement. They are men working in the open class struggle, in the open, who want to utilize every possibility that can be got or fought for to carry on our work. We do not say we can have a legal Communist Party. We do not guarantee it, but we are going to fight for a legal party. I want the Communist International to say what is wrong with this program. We do not say that we can or that we will be successful.

There are three possible results. It is by no means impossible that we will, after a hard fight to rally to our support wide masses of the workers, if we have the guts, if we have the courage to fight ourselves, that we will gain for a time a legal existence. Can anybody measure what this would mean for us, if only for a time? There is nothing the party could do that would be better for it, or gain more friends for it among the working class. We may lose this fight, there is that possibility, and I think that the most probable outcome of this struggle will be that we will gain a semi-legal position. We will be a tolerated organization. In many places we will be able to operate under our own name. That in itself is a tremendous advantage in all respects. It frees us from the necessity of camouflage with the workers, and it admits us as a fighting party which does not accept the decrees of the capitalists that the party has to go underground. That we have to go underground as a party is not certain, but if, after a hard and determined struggle, we have our party finally driven underground and the workers know the men, then they will begin



Bettmann

Foreign-born radicals herded to New York's Ellis Island for deportation in Palmer Raids, January 1920.

to have some faith in the Communist Party. It will cease to be a joke and laughingstock to the workers of America, who cannot say that it is our own fault that we are underground.

Anyway, no matter what the result of this legality is, everything is in favor of a hard and determined struggle, and comrade Carr has not said one word on the other side that has any weight. Now these comrades who a few months ago were against the legal party in principle, these comrades who would not listen to the very idea of a legal party because, they claimed, revolution being illegal, the party has to be illegal, have changed their positions but not their minds. They are still illegal in principle. They admit that it would be a good thing to have a legal party in America, and they say, "How are you going to fight for a legal party in America?"

We say clearly that we propose to do it through the legal party that we have already organized. We said this [to the Workers Council group] in answer to those comrades who wanted an open Communist Party then. We want to build it up as a process. We want to regard this as a step in the process of forming an open Communist Party. We say, first, to transfer to this party all the functions that can be carried on in the open. Next, increase the duties and the responsibilities of the members of this legal party in every way possible. Strengthen it and give it a Communist character in all its makeup. Make it appear more and more before the workers as an exponent and defender of the Communist International, by this process at the same time drawing into it wider masses of the workers, making out of it a Communist Party which will become the section of the Communist International. Comrade Carr did not have one word to say about the pressing question in the movement, the question of fighting for a legal party in America. In their conversations in the party they did say this: They would fight for a legal party by building up the underground party, and have it come out as a legal party.

The International has to decide this question because it brings us to a fight on every other question. We can remember well how the fight developed on the question of going out to the workers organizations and of going into the trade unions. We said, yes, we propose this, because we want to

mobilize every possible member to strengthen our influence in the trade unions. In accord with our theory, we want to develop our ideas of disciplined action in the trade-union movement. We want to teach them how to be Communists in action, to get them to read our program. Disciplined action in the trade unions is one of the methods. These comrades come back with the argument that that will be taking away its functions from the illegal party.

[When] we were proposing to issue a manifesto on the Mingo insurrection, when we wanted to issue this manifesto in the name of the legal party, they put up the argument (comrade Carr was not present on this occasion) that if you do not give the illegal party something to do, the illegal party will die out; therefore you have to issue this manifesto illegally to give this party something to do. This may seem ridiculous here in Moscow, but it is not ridiculous in America.

The situation in the party is intolerable. We have No. 1, which is the illegal party; the legal party is called No. 2; and these comrades say they have taken No. 1 away from us, but we, the underground party, are the real Communist Party, the others are not Communists at all, and are not to be treated as Communists. They want to set one authority against the other. Carr betrays this in his remarks. They betray it by saying that the party is not a part of the Communist movement in America. They deprecate it in every way because of their conception that you cannot have a legal party in America. The hostility to the membership of the Workers Party is to be seen in the proposition, the jackass proposition, to exclude from this debate the members of the Workers Party of America because they are not members of No. 1. Take this psychology and see it permeating through the whole American party, and you will see that this assumption that things are settled in America, that the question is settled by the decision of the convention, is not true.

I said a while ago that many of the workers think that our party is illegal because it wants to be. Our convention a little over a year ago insisted upon putting into the constitution of the party a clause as follows: "The name of this organization is the Communist Party of America. The Communist Party of America is an illegal, underground organization." And they said that anybody that does not subscribe to this is a Menshevik, because they think, naturally, that if the Communist Party says it is illegal, then it is illegal. They regard the members of the Workers Party who want to work in the trade unions in the same light as the trade-union leaders. They regard them as something else than real Communists, they look upon them as "Spetztes."

I will cite the Chicago elections. That is where we have some real leaders of the labor movement in our organization—of the whole left-wing movement. We have a number of other comrades engaged in the industrial work of the party, all capable and having the confidence of wide masses of workers. But they are not 100 percent Communists because they are not 100 percent illegal, and they need to be controlled by a higher grade of Communists, who do what they call "party work." These "party workers" are all within a small circle, controlling what they call the real Communist Party. They have never been heard of in the labor movement in America.

I do not need to mention the Ford-Dubner thesis. This Ford-Dubner thesis [advances] this proposition that the most important task of the Communist Party in America is the carrying out of propaganda for armed insurrection, and have come to this conclusion that in America, even if we finally

have a legal Communist Party, we will still have inside it an illegal party to control it. These comrades have changed their position, but not their minds. You will have the same difficulty with them again. You will find that they will change their position, but not their minds. The crisis in our party has been brought about by two opposing conceptions: the conception of a mass labor movement and the conception of work separate from the class struggle.

Let us take the case of the contest for a delegate from Minneapolis. There were two delegates contesting the seat—one from our faction and one from the other faction. The man whom we were supporting happened to be the chairman of the strike committee of the railroad strike in Minneapolis, a man standing at the head of the labor movement in Minneapolis. The other man was a shopkeeper, a party worker who spends all his time in the underground party. The other man only was active in the class struggle; the shopkeeper is a party man, a No. 1 Communist. Multiply this man from Minneapolis by a majority in the party, and you will have the organization in America.

Yes, there are some things I might say about it that are almost too bitter to be said, even among ourselves. After three years of fighting to get a chance to do our work, we have still to come to Moscow to fight it out. Not one split, comrade Walecki, but four splits have been forced upon us, and they will force yet another one upon us. I might go on *ad infinitum* to contradict those rosy predictions that all is well in the party. There is a conflict there that you cannot settle till you go to the root of it.

I have my proposition, which I will put before you. We do not want this situation of two hostile parties. We want a legal party with an illegal center in it, consciously and deliberately fighting for the right of open party existence. We want no hostility between the legal and illegal organizations, nor between the members. We don't want in the districts, as at present, two parties, one legal and one illegal and one controlling the other. In our district work, in the very nature of things, the man in control has got to be a man able to do something in the class struggle. He must be a speaker, a fighter, an agitator. You cannot put a nonentity in such a position. But according to the other theory, we are to put also in the illegal organization a man who does not need to be an agitator or who is not known by anybody, but still this man is controlling the man working in the class struggle. The Comintern must help us to rectify this. We want a party that is as much of a Communist Party as possible and which will become ever more Communist. Not something that might be non-Communist, but something to be made deliberately into a Communist Party. We want not merely legal work as the convention resolution said, but a legal organization, the development of a legal party in all its activities and functions.

Some of them say that we are in the legal organization because it is safe. That is unfair and untrue, because in America if you want something easy, you keep out of the class struggle. It is dangerous. There is nothing safe about it. It is a perversion of the facts to say that these men want something safe and easy. You will find that we are fighting for this point of view, that we have fought for it in the past and will continue to fight for it in the future. We are opposed to the present policy of the fight against the centrists. We say the centrists should be admitted into the legal and illegal party if they want to come in on the same basis with us, and we will not fight them.

CARR [Katterfeld]: That is the position of the Executive of the Party.

COOK [Cannon]: I am gratified to learn about this. They have kept it secret from me.

Comrades, what is the basic reason for this position? After three years it is time for us to be honest and frank. Why have we had four splits in the party? Why have we a section in the party propagating a split, as comrade Sullivan does? Why have we this inability to do the simple things? The large majority of our membership is a foreign-born membership, mainly Russian, Ukrainian, Lettish, etc., that has not assimilated itself. They live for the most part in separate colonies and their life is entirely a Russian life. And the peculiarity of the situation is that our party is not troubled with an American nationalism, but with an anti-American nationalism. It is troubled with prejudice on the part of these comrades against the American workers. There is a decided anti-American sentiment. I might cite the example of comrade Sullivan in Boston. I told them in the Congress, in these discussions with the Executive Committee, that they should become qualified American citizens. They said they are citizens of Russia and do not want to be citizens of America, and of course they said that my proposal was inspired by a patriotic motive. This has caused all the splits in the party, the irreconcilable attitude of those comrades, the fact that they refuse to act in terms of American life and American conditions.

Every issue in the party is at bottom a fight for control between these two irreconcilable elements. We spent three years in this futile fight. We are sick and tired of these fights. We are of the opinion that unity does not help us to solve our difficulties. We have been able to do more when these elements were outside the party than we had ever done before. We were able to organize the party and the Trade Union Educational League. We at least made an effort. Comrade Sullivan comes here to Moscow and he proves conclusively the weakness of comrade Walecki's policy. I do not take issue with anything comrade Walecki has proposed here, except that it is not conclusive enough. I am sorry that I have had to take exception to his policy of unity. Comrade Sullivan proved from the rostrum of the Communist International that unity is impossible. Comrade Sullivan I am more inclined to speak of as representing a faction than anybody else here. I know that the comrades of his faction have sent him to state their case for them here in Moscow.

Comrades, I am here to tell you seriously there is a growing revolt against this situation in our party. A growing determination on the part of its members to work for Communism in the class struggle, those who want to build a Communist Party in America for that struggle. We want the Comintern to give us assistance, to give us guidance on the point at issue. On our side there is no danger of a split. We are not the split makers. But there is a danger on the part of some of our following to do this. We have repulsed tens of thousands of men in the labor movement. They are now coming back and they come up against this, and so there is a big danger of a movement out of the party. We want from the Comintern not diplomacy, but real political leadership, a clear statement on this question. We will be satisfied. What the Comintern says is the light we go by. I have a declaration here on the part of our group.

(For the text of the declaration, see "The American Question," James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism.) ■

China...

(continued from page 23)

between the U.S. and Japanese navies, with the U.S. Navy patrolling the Sea of Japan and the Japanese carrying out provocations against Chinese shipping to the south in the East China Sea. In February 2005 Japan and the U.S. issued a joint policy statement avowing that Taiwan is a "mutual security concern." As we noted in the course of revisiting a discussion on the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, Taiwan is the key political and military question of significance for the defense of China in the East China Sea. A joint statement of the American and Japanese sections of the ICL declared that "Taiwan has been since ancient times a part of China, and we Trotskyists will stand with China in the event of any military conflict with imperialism over Taiwan." Our program for the revolutionary reunification of Taiwan with China is counterposed both to the CCP's "one country, two systems" unification perspective that includes accommodating the Guomindang and to the Taiwanese independence movement. Meanwhile, the U.S. war in Afghanistan and American assistance to nuclear-armed India have contributed to tightening a dangerous military vise around China. In this context, Indonesia's significance is growing. This large land barrier skirted by strategic waterways such as the deep sea water trough of the Ombei Wetar Straits, and the narrow Strait of Malacca through which much of China's energy imports flow, could be a crucial choke point in any future conflict between the U.S. and China. It is no accident then, that while the Chinese deformed workers state seeks further trade and diplomatic successes in the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. lifted its arms embargo on Indonesia in November 2005 and is planning two new bases in Australia. A neocolony of the American imperialists in the area is the Philippines, where the U.S. military has been a key factor backing up the death squad terror of the Arroyo regime which has seen hundreds of leftist and other oppositional elements killed.

While China has become more of a workshop of the world, wealth creation in the U.S. in recent years has had a largely fictitious quality. The nominal increase in household wealth represented by higher corporate stock prices is largely illusory and that represented by higher housing prices is entirely illusory. As government deficits blossom, the stagnation in real wages has led to a shrinking of household savings. Such savings had been an important component of the internal economic surplus available for corporate investment in new plant and equipment. One consequence has been a steady and massive increase in U.S. foreign indebtedness. Over the past ten years, foreign purchases of U.S. government and corporate securities have risen from less than 10 to over 30 percent of domestic investment. China has displaced Japan as the holder of the world's largest foreign-exchange reserves, about 70 percent of which consist of dollar-denominated debt instruments, much of it in U.S. Treasury bonds. The financial stability of the U.S. economy has become critically dependent on the willingness of China and Japan to accumulate more U.S. debt. In effect the Chinese are lending the U.S. money to buy goods produced in China.

The Chinese bureaucracy's accommodation to imperialism has proceeded from the false postulate that if it can "neutralize" the chances of military intervention through "peaceful coexistence," then China can become a global superpower and

indeed build "socialism in one country." Despite impressive gains in industrialization, however, the capital stock per person is still **30 times greater** in the U.S. and Japan than in China. The difficulties of the Bush administration in Iraq and its fixation on "Islamic terrorism" have temporarily deflected it from its pursuit of the bourgeoisie's goal of toppling the Chinese deformed workers state. But only an impressionist would believe that the current conjuncture will continue indefinitely. Moreover, the imperialists have weapons other than military ones. Economic pressure on the deformed workers states presents equal if not greater dangers. A central objective of the imperialists is to undermine the Chinese government's control over banking and currency movements. The huge balance-of-trade surpluses run up by China have created substantial pressures within American and some European ruling circles for anti-Chinese protectionism, a policy favored by the Democrats. A major economic downturn in the U.S. and/or anti-import protectionist measures would be a severe blow to China's economy and could ignite serious social struggle there. It should be noted that in the 1990s and extending into the early 2000s we put forward a catastrophist analysis and projections regarding China. We must guard against an over-correction: that is, an implicit assumption that China will continue to experience a high rate of economic growth and industrial development under a stable CCP regime for the foreseeable future. The market reforms have sharpened the contradictions in China, on the one hand fostering the potential forces for capitalist counterrevolution, and on the other hand increasing the social weight of the working class that potentially can carry out proletarian political revolution. ■



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Women of the East...

(continued from page 56)

work flowed from the policy of forming special party bodies to carry out work among women with the aim of winning them to the socialist cause.

At the time of Trotsky's speech, a conservative bureaucratic caste led by Stalin was already beginning to consolidate control over the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International (CI). This was to take on programmatic expression in late 1924, as the Stalinist bureaucracy propounded the anti-Marxist dogma of building "socialism in one country." Through its futile pursuit of accommodation with imperialism and its opposition to international revolution, the bureaucracy undermined the gains of the revolution and ultimately opened the



Wide World

Leon Trotsky addressing Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922. Inset: His 1924 speech to the Communist University for Toilers of the East was published that same year in Moscow in a collection titled *West and East*.

door to capitalist counterrevolution. The final undoing of the October Revolution in 1991-92 has caused enormous poverty and desperation throughout the former Soviet Union, dragging the Central Asian republics back toward their degraded past and fueling a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism there and in other predominantly Muslim societies, as well as political and religious reaction in the imperialist countries.

The October Revolution verified Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution for Russia: that only the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasant masses and fighting to extend proletarian rule to the imperialist centers, could realize the historic tasks of the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries—e.g., agrarian revolution, political democracy. In 1924 Trotsky had not yet generalized this concept from tsarist Russia—an economically backward imperialist power—to even more economically backward colonial and semicolonial countries, where a proletariat had only begun to emerge during and after World War I. Thus, while warning in his speech against the danger of the nascent Communist par-

ties of the East acting as a transmission belt to bourgeois nationalism, he also spoke of a progressive role for some bourgeois-nationalist parties, like the Chinese Guomintang (Kuomintang).

However, Trotsky opposed the entry of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) into the Guomintang, which meant subordinating the revolutionary proletariat to a bourgeois formation, when the question came before the Russian Communist Party Political Bureau in 1923. When the CI subsequently, under the leadership of Stalin and Zinoviev, ordered the CCP to liquidate wholesale into the Guomintang, Trotsky also fought against this. The liquidation of the CCP paved the way for the disastrous defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese Revolution (see "The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism," *Spartacist* No. 53, Summer 1997). Trotsky drew the lessons of that defeat and generalized to other backward countries his theory of permanent revolution in counterposition to the Menshevik/Stalinist schema of "two-stage revolution," which subordinated the proletariat to the bourgeoisie in the "democratic stage." And he categorically declared that Communist parties must never enter into bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties. Trotsky's own re-evaluation of this question underlines the need to critically appraise the history of the Marxist movement.

The following translation was published under the title *Perspectives and Tasks in the East* by New Park Publications (London) in 1973. (A different, partial translation appears in *Leon Trotsky Speaks* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972].) Factual corrections or rewording of garbled phrases to conform to the Russian original appear in brackets; ellipses appear as in original.

* * *

I have received, comrades, from the bureau of your cell, documents outlining your university's work over three years. At my request the comrades marked out all the most essential points with a red pencil thereby considerably easing my task of becoming familiar with the documents for, and I do not know how to put it—either to my shame or to my loss—I have not had the opportunity of closely following the work of your university either day by day or even month by month: work which has an exceptional and, without at all exaggerating as is common on anniversaries, a world-historical significance.

Comrades, although it is perhaps not customary at anniversary meetings to get involved in theory, nevertheless allow me to present a few observations of a general character which will substantiate my statement that your university is no simple educational establishment, revolutionary as it may be, but forms a lever of world-historical significance....

The whole present-day political and cultural movement rests upon capitalism, out of which it is growing, has grown and which it has outgrown. But capitalism has, schematically speaking, two different facets: the capitalism of the metropolis and the capitalism of the colonies. The classic model of a metropolis is Britain. At the present time it is crowned by the so-called "Labour" government of [Ramsay] MacDonald. As for the colonies I would hesitate to say which one of them is most typical as a colony: this would either be India, a colony in the formal sense, or China which preserves the semblance of independence yet in her world position and the course of her development belongs to the colonial type. Classic capitalism is in Britain. Marx wrote his *Capital* in London by directly observing the development of the most advanced country—you will know this, though I do not remember which year you cover this in.... In the colonies

capitalism develops not out of its own fragments but as an intrusion of foreign capital. This is what creates the two different types. Why is MacDonal, to put it not very scientifically but in quite precise terms just the same, why is MacDonal so conservative, so limited and so stupid?

Because Britain is the classic land of capitalism, because capitalism there organically developed from handicrafts through manufacture into modern industry step by step, by an "evolutionary" road and so yesterday's prejudices and those of the day before and the prejudices of the past and the previous centuries, all the ideological garbage of the ages you can discover under MacDonal's skull (*applause*). At first glance there is here some historical contradiction: why did Marx appear in backward Germany, in the most backward of the great countries of Europe in the first half of the 19th century, not counting Russia of course? Why did Marx appear in Germany and why did Lenin appear in Russia on the borders of the 19th and 20th centuries? A plain contradiction! But of what nature? Of one which can be explained by the so-called dialectic of historical development. In the shape of British machinery and in the shape of British cotton cloth, history created the most revolutionary factor of development. But this machinery and this cloth were processed and created by way of a prolonged and slow historical transition, one step at a time, while human consciousness remained in general frightfully conservative.

When economic development proceeds slowly and systematically it tends to find it hard to break through human skulls. Subjectivists and idealists in general say that human consciousness, critical thought and so on and so forth draw history forward like a tug towing a barge behind it. This is untrue. You and I are Marxists and we know that the motive power of history consists of the productive forces which have up till now taken shape behind man's back and with which it tends to be very difficult to smash through man's conservative skull in order to produce the spark of a new political idea there and especially, let me repeat, if the development takes place slowly, organically and imperceptibly. But when the productive forces of a metropolis, of a classic land of capitalism, like Britain, encroach upon a more backward country, as with Germany in the first half of the 19th century, and with ourselves on the watershed of the 19th and the 20th centuries, and at the present time with Asia; when economic factors intrude in a revolutionary way cracking the old regime, when development takes place not gradually, not "organically" but by means of terrible shocks, and abrupt shifts in the old social layers, then critical thought finds its revolutionary expression incomparably more easily and rapidly, providing there is of course the necessary theoretical prerequisites for this. That is why Marx appeared in Germany in the first half of the 19th century and that is why Lenin appeared here and that is why we can observe at first sight the paradoxical fact that in the land of the highest, oldest and most revered European capitalism, Britain, we have the most conservative "Labour" party. While on the other hand in our Soviet Union, an extremely backward country economically and culturally speaking, we



Poster shows student killed in British police massacre of 30 May 1925 Shanghai demonstration. Protests sparked general strike that spread across China, signaling Second Chinese Revolution.

P & A Photo

have—and I say this unashamedly for it is a fact—the best communist party in the world (*applause*).

It must be said that as regards its economic development Russia stands mid-way between the classic metropolis like Britain and the colonial countries like India or China. And what distinguishes our Soviet Union from Britain as regards the paths and forms of development shows itself even more sharply in the development of the countries of the East. Capitalism encroaches there in the form of foreign finance capital. There it tosses in ready-made machines shaking and undermining the old economic base and erects upon its splinters the Tower of Babel of a capitalist economy. The action of capitalism in the countries of the East is neither gradual nor slow nor "evolutionary" but abrupt, catastrophic—indeed in many cases far more catastrophic than it was here in yesterday's tsarist Russia.

It is from this fundamental standpoint, comrades, that one has to examine the fate of the East in the coming years and in the coming decades. If you take such prosaic books as the accounts of British and American banks for the years 1921, 1922, 1923 then you will read tomorrow's revolutionary fate of the East in the figures of the bank balances of London and New York. Britain has once again re-established her role as world usurer. The United States have accumulated an unbelievable quantity of gold: in the vaults of the Central Bank there is kept gold to the value of 3,000m dollars, that is 6,000m gold roubles. This inundates the economy of the United States. If you ask: to whom do Britain and the United States give loans?—for as you have probably heard they are still not giving loans to us, the Soviet Union, nor do they give them to Germany, they gave France some miserable crumbs to save the franc—so who do they give them to? For the most part they give them to the colonial countries; they go to finance the industrial development of Asia, South America and South Africa. I shall not give you figures: I do have some but this would drag out my report too much, but it is sufficient to say that up to the last imperialist war the colonial and semi-colonial countries received from the United States and Britain probably about half as much in credits as did the developed capitalist countries, yet now financial investments

in the colonial countries exceed, and exceed very considerably, investments in the old capitalist countries. Why is this? The causes are many but the chief ones are two: a lack of confidence in old Europe, ruined and bled white, with this furious French militarism at its heart—a militarism which threatens ever fresh upheavals; and on the other hand the need for the colonial countries as furnishers of raw materials and as customers for the machines and manufactured goods of Britain and the United States. During the war we observed and we observe now the headlong industrialization of the colonial, semi-colonial and of the backward countries in general: Japan, India, South America, South Africa and so on. There is no doubt that if the Chinese Kuomintang party manages to unify China under a national-democratic regime then the capitalist development of China will go ahead with seven-mile strides. And yet all this will prepare the mobilization of the countless proletarian masses who will at once burst out of a prehistoric, semi-barbaric state and cast themselves into industry's melting-pot, the factory. Consequently there will not be the time to conserve and accumulate the rubbish of past ages in the consciousness of the toilers; a guillotine will slice through their consciousness as it were, cutting off the past from the future and forcing them to seek new ideas, new forms and new paths of life and struggle. And so here there must appear on the scene in some countries and broadly and boldly develop in others, the Marxist-Leninist parties of the East: Japanese communists, Chinese communists, Turkish, Indian and so on.

Comrade toilers of the lands of the East! In 1883 there was formed in Switzerland the Russian "Emancipation of Labour" group. Is that such a long time ago? From 1883 to 1900 it is 17 years and from 1900 to 1917 again 17 years, that is in all 34 years—one third of a century, one generation: from the organization of the first theoretical-propagandist circle of the ideas of Marxism during the reign of Alexander III until the conquest of tsarist Russia by the proletariat there elapsed all in all one third of a century!

For whoever has lived through this it will seem a long and painful period. But from the point of view of the scales of history this represented an unprecedentedly furious and wild tempo. Yet in the countries of the East the tempo of development will by all indications be even more rapid. So what then is your Communist University for Toilers of the East in the light of the perspectives we have traced—what is it? It is the garden nursery for "Emancipation of Labour" groups for the countries of the East (*tumultuous applause*).

It is true, and one must not close one's eyes to this, that the dangers facing young Marxists of the East are great. We know, and you will know, that it was in a grave external and also internal struggle that the Bolshevik Party was shaped. You know that Marxism, emasculated and falsified, was for us in the 1890s a school for an all-round political study of the bourgeois intelligentsia, of the Struvians who afterwards became the political henchmen of the bourgeoisie, the Cadets, while many then went over to the Octobrists and even further to the right. Economically backward, Russia was in the political sense neither a differentiated nor a fully-formed country: Marxism spoke of the inevitability of capitalism and those bourgeois-progressive elements who wanted capitalism not for socialism but for itself accepted "Marxism" having removed its revolutionary sting. The same thing happened in Rumania. The majority of today's ruling scoundrels of Rumania have passed in their time through the margarine school of Marxism; some of them in France adhered to Gues-



Humbert-Droz Archives

Turkish delegate Najiya Hanum addressing First Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in September 1920 in Baku, capital of Soviet Azerbaijan.

dism. In Serbia a whole number of today's conservative and reactionary politicians in their youth passed through the school of Marxism or Bakuninism.

This is less observable in Bulgaria. But in general this temporary exploitation of Marxism for the aims of a bourgeois-progressive policy characterizes the countries of the Balkan south-east, as it did our own country. Does such a danger threaten Marxism in the East? In part. Why? Because the national movement in the East is a progressive factor in history. The struggle for the independence of India is a profoundly progressive movement; but you and I know that at the same time this struggle is confined to national-bourgeois tasks. The struggle for the liberation of China, the ideology of Sun Yat-sen, is a democratic struggle and a progressive ideology, but bourgeois. We stand for the communists supporting the Kuomintang in China by driving it forward. This is essential but here there is also a danger of a national-democratic degeneration. And likewise in all the countries of the East which form the arena for the national struggle for liberation from colonial slavery. Upon this progressive movement the young proletariat of the East must rest; but it is absolutely clear that in the coming period there is for the young Marxists of the East, a danger of being torn out of the "Emancipation of Labour" groups and dissolving themselves in nationalist ideology.

Wherein, however, lies your advantage? Your advantage over the older generations of Russian, Rumanian and other Marxists is that you are living and will live and work not only in the epoch after Marx but in the epoch after Lenin too. In your newspaper which the bureau of your cell so kindly sent me, with annotations, I read a heated polemic about Marx and Lenin. You polemicize with each other very severely; I say this to you, however, not in reproach. The question was presented there as if, in the opinion of some, Marx was only a theoretician—so the opposing side had depicted this position and it objected: "No, Marx was a revolutionary politi-

cian as was Lenin and with both Marx and Lenin theory and practice went hand in hand." In such an abstract formulation of the question this is undoubtedly true and beyond question; but there is still a difference between these two historical figures; a profound difference which grew not only from a divergence in personality but from a divergence of epochs too. Marxism of course is not an academic doctrine but a lever of revolutionary action; not for nothing Marx said: "Philosophers have sufficiently explained the world but now we must change it." But in the lifetime of Marx, in the era of the First International and then during the time of the Second International was there the opportunity of the movement of the working class utilizing Marxism totally and to the end? Did Marxism find then a genuine embodiment in action? No it didn't. Did Marx have the opportunity and fortune to guide the application of his revolutionary theory to the decisive historical action: the conquest of power by the proletariat? No, he didn't. Marx created his teaching not of course as an academic; he did, as you know, grow wholly out of the revolution, out of his estimation and criticism of the downfall of bourgeois democracy, wrote his [*Manifesto*] in 1847 and was active on the left flank of bourgeois democracy in the revolution of 1848 evaluating in a Marxist way, or in rather Marx's way, all of its events; in London he wrote *Capital*; he was at the same time the creator of the First International, the inspirer of the policy of the most advanced groups in the working class of all countries; but he did not stand at the head of a party which decided the fate of the world nor even of one country. When we wish to answer briefly the question: who was Marx? we say: "**Marx was the author of Capital.**" And when we ask ourselves who Lenin was we will say: "**Lenin was the author of the October revolution**" (*applause*). Lenin emphasized more than anyone else that he was not out to revise, remake or review Marx's teaching; Lenin came, to speak in the old words of the gospels, not to alter Marx's law but in order to implement it. He himself more than anyone else emphasized this; but he at that time needed to release Marx from underneath the sediments of those generations which separated Lenin from Marx; from underneath the sediments of Kautskyism, MacDonaldism, the conservatism of the labour bosses, and the reformist and nationalist bureaucracy and to apply the tool of genuine Marxism once cleansed of sediments, additives and falsifications totally and wholly to the great historical action. And so your greatest advantage as the younger generation is that you have directly or indirectly participated in this work, that you have observed it, that you are living in the political and ideological environment of Leninism and that you are imbibing this theory which corresponds to practice in the University for Toilers of the East. This makes up your enormous and inestimable advantage and you must understand it. Although Marx himself could in his theory embrace the course of development of decades and centuries his teaching was then in the everyday struggle whittled down to its separate elements and in parts absorbed moreover in a distorted form. Lenin came along, gathered Marxism together once again and in the new conditions showed this teaching in the action of the greatest historical scale. You have seen this action and you have attached yourselves to it: this places you under an obligation and upon this obligation the Communist University for Toilers of the East has been built.

That is why, comrades, I think that the danger of a national-democratic degeneration which of course exists and which will seize and carry off some people for it cannot be

otherwise, that this danger is greatly reduced by the very fact of the existence of the Soviet Union and of the Third International. There is every ground for hoping that the basic nucleus which will emerge from the Communist University for Toilers of the East will occupy its due place as a class leaven, a Marxist leaven and a Leninist leaven to the proletarian movement in the lands of the East. The demand for you, comrades, appears gigantic and it manifests itself, as I have already said, not gradually but all at once, also in its own way "catastrophically." Read over one of Lenin's last articles "Better less but better": seemingly it is devoted to a specific organizational question but it at the same time embraces the perspectives for the development of the countries of the East in connection with the development of Europe. What is the main idea behind the article? The fundamental idea is that the development of the revolution in the West may be held up. How can it be held up? By MacDonaldism, for the most conservative force in Europe is in fact MacDonaldism. We can see how Turkey abolished the Caliphate and MacDonald resurrects it. Is this not a striking example which sharply contrasts in deed the counterrevolutionary Menshevism of the West to the progressive national-bourgeois democracy of the East?

Taking place at present in Afghanistan are truly dramatic events: MacDonald's Britain is toppling the left national-bourgeois wing which is striving to Europeanize independent Afghanistan and is attempting there to restore to power the darkest and most reactionary elements imbued with the worst prejudices of pan-Islamism, the Caliphate and so forth. If you weigh up these two forces in their living conflict, it will at once become clear why the East will more and more gravitate towards us, the Soviet Union and the Third International.

We can see how Europe, which through its past development preserved the monstrous conservatism of the bosses of the working class, is more and more undergoing economic disintegration. There is no way out for her. And this finds an expression in particular in the fact that America does not give her loans, rightly not trusting her economic viability. On the other hand we can see too that the same America and the same Britain are compelled to finance the economic development of the colonial countries thereby driving them along the path of revolution at a frantic rate. And if Europe is to be kept back amid the present state of putrefaction of the numskulled, parochial, aristocratic, privileged MacDonaldism of the labour bosses then the centre of gravity of the revolutionary movement is being transferred wholly and entirely to the East. And then it will emerge that although a number of decades of Britain's capitalist development was necessary to act as a revolutionizing factor to raise up our old Russia and our old East on to their feet then it will now be necessary for the revolution in the East to come back to Britain to smash through or, if necessary, smash up some thick skulls and give an impulse to the revolution of the European proletariat (*applause*). This is *one* of the historical possibilities. It must be kept in one's mind's eye.

I read in the documents you delivered to me about the gigantic impression a student from your university, a Turkish girl, created in Kazan where the women, some old and illiterate, gathered around her. A small episode it is but it does as an indicator have a profound historical meaning. The sense, the strength and the essence of Bolshevism lies in that it addresses itself not to the labour bosses but to the mob, the underdogs, the millions and to the most oppressed of the oppressed.

That is why it is not through its theoretical content, which is still far from assimilated, or fully thought out, but through its liberating breath of life that it has become the favourite teaching for the countries of the East. It is in your paper that we read ever fresh confirmations of the fact that Lenin is well known not only in the saklias of the Caucasus but in the depths of India too. We know that in China, toiling people, who have probably never in their life read a single one of Lenin's articles, ardently gravitate towards Bolshevism for such is the might of history's breath! They have sensed that here is a teaching which is addressed to the pariahs, the oppressed, the downtrodden, the millions and to the tens and hundreds of millions for whom there lies otherwise no historical solution for whom there is otherwise no salvation. And there is the reason why Leninism encounters such a fervent response in the hearts of toiling women—because there is no more oppressed layer on earth than the toiling woman! When I read how the student from your university spoke in Kazan and how the illiterate Tartar women gathered around her, I recalled my recent brief stay in Baku where for the first time I saw and heard a Turkic girl communist and where I could observe in the hall several tens and possibly hundreds of Turkic girl communists and saw and heard their enthusiasm, this passion of yesterday's slave of slaves who has heard the new words of liberation and has awoken to a new life, and where for the first time I came to a quite clear conclusion and told myself that in the movement of the peoples of the East woman will play a greater rôle than in Europe and here (*applause*). Why? Just precisely because Eastern woman is incomparably more fettered, crushed and befuddled by prejudices than is the Eastern man and because new economic relations and new historical currents will tear her out of the old motionless relations with even greater force and abruptness than they will man. Even today we can still observe in the East the rule of Islam, of the old prejudices, beliefs and customs but these will more and more turn to dust and ashes. Just as a rotting piece of cloth, when you look at it from a distance, it seems to be all of a piece, all the pattern is there and all the folds remain but a movement of the hand or a puff of wind is enough for the whole cloth to turn to dust. And so in the East the old beliefs which appear to be so deep are actually but a shadow of the past: in Turkey they abolished the Caliphate and not a single hair fell out of the heads of those who violated the Caliphate; this means that the old beliefs have rotted and that with the coming historical movement of the toiling masses the old beliefs will not present a serious obstacle. And this, moreover, means that the Eastern woman who is the most paralysed in life, in her habits and in creativity, the slave of slaves, that she, having at the demand of the new economic relations taken off her cloak will at once feel herself lacking any sort of religious buttress; she will have a passionate thirst to gain new ideas, a new consciousness which will permit her to appreciate her new position in society. And there will be no better communist in the East, no better fighter for the ideas of the revolution and for the ideas of communism than the awakened woman worker (*applause*).

Comrades, this is why your University has a universally historic importance. By making use of the ideological and political experience of the West it is preparing a great revolutionary leaven for the East. Your hour will soon strike. Finance capital of Britain and America is smashing the economic foundations of the East, throwing one layer of society against another, cracking the old and giving birth to a demand for the new. You will appear as sowers of the seeds of the ideas of

communism and the revolutionary productivity of your work will be immeasurably higher than the productivity of the work of the old Marxist generations of Europe.

But, comrades, I would not like you to draw conclusions in the vein of some sort of Eastern arrogance from what I have said (*laughter*). I can see that none of you here has taken me in this way.... For if anyone of you were to be steeped in such a Messianistic arrogance and disdain for the West then from there it would be the shortest and quickest move to dissolving yourself in nationalist democratic ideology. No, the revolutionary communists of the East at their University must learn to study the world movement [as a whole,] juxtaposing and connecting the forces of [East and West] from the standpoint of one single great [aim]. You must know how to couple together the uprising of the Indus peasants, the strike of coolies in the port of China, the political propaganda of Kuomintang bourgeois democracy, the struggle of the Koreans for independence, the bourgeois-democratic rebirth of Turkey and the economic and cultural and educational work in the Soviet republic of Transcaucasia; you must know how, both ideologically and practically, to link all this with the work and struggle of the Communist International in Europe and in particular in Britain where the mole of British communism is slowly—more slowly than many of us would like—burrowing under MacDonald's conservative bastion (*applause*). Your third anniversary is of course in itself a very modest anniversary. Many of you are merely on the threshold of Marxism. But your advantage over the older generation lies, I repeat, in the fact that you are studying the ABC of Marxism not inside émigré circles divorced from life in countries ruled by capitalism as was the case with us but upon soil conquered by Leninism, upon soil nurtured with Leninism and upon soil enveloped in the ideological atmosphere of Leninism. You are not only studying Marxism from pamphlets but you have the opportunity to inhale it in the political atmosphere of this country. This applies not only to those who have arrived here from the Eastern republics which constitute part of the Soviet Union but applies too to those—whose importance is of course in no way less!—who have made their appearance here from the oppressed colonial countries. Whether the final year of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism will unfold in one, two, three or five years' time we do not know; but we do know that each year will produce a new crop from the Communist University of the East. Each year will provide a new nucleus of communists who know the ABC of Leninism and who have seen how this ABC is applied in practice. If one year passes by before the decisive events then we will have one crop; if two years pass by then we will have two; if three years pass we will have three crops. And at the moment of these decisive events the students of the Communist University for Toilers of the East will say: "We are here. We have learnt one thing. We know not only how to translate the ideas of Marxism and Leninism into the language of China, India, Turkey and Korea; but we have also learnt how to translate the sufferings, passions, demands and the hopes of the toiling masses of the East into the language of Marxism."

"Who has taught you that?" they will be asked.

"The Communist University for Toilers of the East taught us that." And then they will say what I shall say to you now on the day of your third anniversary:

"Glory, glory and glory to the Communist University of the East" (*noisy ovation and the Internationale*). ■

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Women and Revolution



Communism and Women of the East

We reprint below an April 1924 speech by Leon Trotsky, co-leader with V.I. Lenin of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, celebrating the third anniversary of the founding of the Communist University for Toilers of the East in Moscow. The masses of Asia saw in the world's first proletarian revolution a beacon for their own struggles against imperialist subjugation and all-sided oppression. The extension of Bolshevik power to Central Asia—formerly under the rule of the tsarist empire and local Islamic despots—brought to this benighted region the promise of a massive social transformation, not least the liberation of women from a life of extreme degradation, shrouded in the veil and bought and sold like chattel in marriage.

Even in the advanced capitalist countries, where women have achieved a measure of formal equality, the oppression of women cannot be legislated out of existence. Women's oppression originates in class society itself and can only be rooted out through the destruction of private property in the means of production. The family, the main source of women's oppression in class society, cannot be abolished; it must be *replaced* with socialized childcare and housework. The material abundance necessary to uproot class society and to free women and youth from the stultifying confines of the institution of the family can only come from the highest level of technology and sci-



Novosti

Literacy class for women in the Soviet Caucasus in the 1920s. Bolsheviks waged fierce struggle to emancipate women in backward regions of former tsarist empire.

ence, based on an internationally planned socialist society. To unleash the revolutionary potential of the struggle for women's emancipation requires the leadership of a proletarian vanguard party armed with a broad new vision of a social order of equality and freedom.

In countries of belated capitalist development, this struggle is a particularly powerful motor force of social revolution. In such societies, the acute oppression of women is deeply rooted in pre-capitalist "tradition" and religious obscurantism, conditions that are reinforced by imperialist subjugation. In areas like Central Asia, where there was no proletariat to speak of, the Bolsheviks believed that women could play an auxiliary role as a "surrogate proletariat" in the workers state's struggle to break the feudal chains and begin to transform the primitive social order, which was possible only with large-scale industrialization. The Bolsheviks fought to extend the proletarian revolution internationally, especially to the advanced capitalist economies of Europe.

While the Bolsheviks could not with one blow abolish oppressive Muslim institutions, they undertook systematic work among Muslim women. Dedicated and heroic members of the Zhenotdel (Bolshevik commission for work among women) donned veils in order to meet Muslim women and explain the laws and goals of the new Soviet republic. This

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FROM THE ARCHIVES OF MARXISM