



## ICL Holds Sixth International Conference

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# ICL Holds Sixth International Conference

## Fighting for Programmatic Integrity in a Reactionary Period

The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) held its Sixth International Conference in North America in late 2010. The conference, the highest body of our revolutionary Marxist organization, was preceded by an intense three-month discussion period following a conference call issued by our International Executive Committee (IEC). Conference delegates with speaking rights and decisive votes were elected by each ICL section based on political positions expressed in written documents. The delegates discussed, amended and adopted a document, "Fighting for Programmatic Integrity in a Reactionary Period," drafted by comrades in the International Secretariat (I.S.), the resident subcommittee of the IEC in our international center.

Much of the pre-conference discussion and debate took as a starting point our repudiation of the ICL's betrayal of Marxist principle over U.S. and United Nations troops in Haiti. As we wrote in a statement issued by the IEC on 27 April 2010:

"In its articles on the Haitian earthquake, *Workers Vanguard*, the newspaper of the Spartacist League/U.S., committed a betrayal of the fundamental principle of opposition to one's 'own' imperialist rulers. In addition to justifying the U.S. imperialist troops as essential to the aid effort, these articles polemicized against the principled and correct position of demanding the immediate withdrawal of the troops."

—"A Capitulation to U.S. Imperialism,"

*Workers Vanguard* No. 958, 7 May 2010

The statement noted that our ability to correct our line was hardly a cause for celebration, but merely laid the basis for political rectification. A central purpose of the international

conference was to rearm the party by examining the roots of our disorientation over the Haiti earthquake.

Discussions before and at the conference pointed to the ongoing pressures toward programmatic revisionism bearing down on revolutionary Marxists, particularly since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the East European deformed workers states in the early 1990s. There is today a huge gap between our communist program and existing levels of political consciousness. Even the most politically conscious workers and radical youth generally accept that the struggle for socialism, as embodied in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, was at best a failed experiment. The reformist left has increasingly abandoned any pretensions of fighting for the liberating ideals of communism, openly embracing the politics of social democracy and/or bourgeois-nationalist populism.

As comrade James Robertson remarked at a Spartacist League/Britain day school several years ago:

"Now we're in an unusually deep trough, and the experiences that are immediately available to us are not very good. So we had better make very heavy reference back to the experiences of the workers movement when it could see much further: 1918 through 1921. And furthermore, there's a quote by Lenin in January 1917. He gave a talk in Switzerland and said: 'We of the older generation may not live to see the decisive battles of this coming revolution.' Now, I run into various panacea-mongers who say, what is your immediate perspective? Don't

## Corrections

The article "Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics" in *Spartacist* (English edition) No. 61 (Spring 2009) implies on page 20 that Trotsky is referring to municipal elections in his May 1924 introduction to *The First Five Years of the Communist International* when he hails the French Communist Party (PCF) getting about 900,000 votes as "a serious success, especially if we take into account the swift growth of our influence in the suburbs of Paris." In fact, as stated in the French (No. 39, Summer 2009) and Spanish (No. 36, November 2009) editions of *Spartacist*, "Trotsky was likely referring to a parliamentary election that had been held that month." However, as we also noted, "the PCF's 'influence' in the suburbs also included its administration of several municipalities." Just after the above quote, Trotsky's "Nationalized Industry and Workers' Management" is correctly dated as 12 May 1939, though the subsequent paragraph incorrectly refers to 1938. On page 18, the caption implies that the drawing of Nikolai Shablin is to the left and that of Amadeo Bordiga to the right; it is rather the converse.

In "Trotskyism vs. Popular Frontism in the Spanish Civil War" in the same issue (page 42), we wrote: "When an I.S.

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**Line in front of government job center in Madrid, January 2010. Global economic crisis has resulted in massive rise in unemployment.**

pay so much attention to the immediate perspective, because you don't know what's going to happen in February! What is your *programme*? That is the decisive question."

—*Workers Hammer* No. 195, Summer 2006

In line with this understanding, the conference document noted that there is no easy solution to the problems we face and laid out as our central tasks: persistent study of the history and principles of the Marxist movement, critical examination of new developments and critical reappraisal of earlier projections and positions, and a patient and pedagogical effort to cultivate a new generation of party cadre and leadership—combined with active propagandistic intervention in class and other social struggles.

Such an approach was evident at the conference itself. An entire session was devoted to the state of the international labor movement, which included a critical assessment of some earlier discussions in our sections. A commission on South Asia discussed proposals for informed propaganda aimed at extending the reach of the ICL into the Indian subcontinent, with its huge proletariat and substantial left milieu. A meeting organized by the ICL's Women's Commission focused on our extensive research into the early Communist International's work among women (see article, page 64). Another commission discussed proposals for propaganda on Cuba, drawing both on a study of current developments and on our unique programmatic heritage. Smaller working groups met to discuss other areas of work, including propaganda on China and broader perspectives in Latin America, and the *Spartacist* Editorial Board held a working meeting. Numerous comrades remarked that such discussions, which aimed at cultivating our capacity to understand and analyze current developments in a dialectical-materialist manner, stood in stark contrast to a tendency in recent years toward abstract schemas and creating our own "reality" as a form of solace for the difficult period we confront in the post-Soviet world.

### Against Subjective Idealism

Discussion on the main conference document, which covered two full sessions of the conference, was introduced by comrades J. Bride and L. Markow of the outgoing IEC. The document framed the conference deliberations by laying out the main contours of the world today. Two years into the worst worldwide economic crisis since the Great Depression, the capitalist rulers seek to make the working masses shoulder the burden through layoffs and savage cuts in social spending. Karl Marx's theory of increasing misery has been made palpable in the massive increase in unemployment, housing foreclosures and deportations of immigrants in the advanced capitalist countries and in the spread of famine and disease in the neocolonial world. Meanwhile, the bloody

delegation led by Jean Rous arrived in Spain in August 1936 and distributed the issue of the French Trotskyists' *La Lutte Ouvrière* containing 'The Treachery of the POUM,' Fosco was no less incensed than the POUM leaders." In fact, as we determined upon further investigation, Trotsky's "The Treachery of the POUM" was not among the anti-POUM polemics then published by the French *La Lutte Ouvrière*, notwithstanding the reference to this article in a footnote to the account by Fosco (Nicola di Bartolomeo), "The Activity of the Bolshevik-Leninists in Spain and its Lessons," as published in the Labourite journal *Revolutionary History* (Vol. 4, No. 1-2, Winter 1991-92). It would have been better to simply quote Fosco's venomous attack on the Fourth Internationalists, as we did in the French and Spanish editions: "Writing several years later, Fosco complained bitterly that when an I.S. delegation led by Jean Rous arrived in Spain in August 1936, the delegation brought with it a statement by Trotsky 'on the POUM and against "the traitors Nin and Andrade," to distribute it to the Bolshevik-Leninists and amongst the POUM. That alone was enough to condemn the entire policy of the International Secretariat."

The article on the Spanish Civil War contained a few other inaccuracies. Trotsky's "Is a Rapprochement with Nin

Possible?" (page 30) should have been dated 3 June 1936, not 3 June 1935. On page 31, the article wrongly states that the International Left Opposition "reconstituted itself as the International Communist League" in 1934; this actually happened in 1933. The photo credits on pages 35 and 36 should read Agustí (not Augustí) Centelles, as is correctly given for the photos on pages 44 and 45. The author of an article "in the POUM's *La Batalla* (7 October 1936)" cited on page 36 is Indigeta (not Indegeta) and the correct date is 8 October 1936. Also, the quote on page 45 from the 4 May 1937 leaflet by the Spanish Trotskyists as published in the International Bureau for the Fourth International *Information Bulletin* (July 1937) had a translation error, which we carried over when we wrote: "the Trotskyists urged the workers to seize the 'revolutionary offensive' and to form 'committees of revolutionary defense in the shops, factories, districts.'" In the original leaflet, the last phrase reads: "in the shops, factories, barricades, etc."

Finally, it should be noted that the figure for the number of people killed in the 1965 anti-Communist bloodbath in Indonesia is over one million, not "over half a million" as stated in the article "Women Workers and the Contradictions of China Today" (page 51). ■

U.S. imperialist rulers, now under Obama's Democratic Party administration, have maintained the occupation of Iraq, escalated the war in Afghanistan, stepped up sanctions and military threats against Iran and continued their drive to reverse the anti-capitalist gains of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states (China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam and Laos).

The document addressed how the capitalists seek to deflect the anger of working people by deliberately fostering retrograde social and political attitudes, pitting different sections of the working class against each other along racial, religious, ethnic and sexual lines, as well as native-born against immigrant and younger versus higher-seniority workers. In this context, the "war on terror" has become more virulent, serving both to regiment the domestic population and to justify yet more imperialist military incursions, including into Pakistan. More recently, NATO has waged war on Libya. Economic nationalism in the imperialist West and Japan has been directed particularly against China, the most powerful of the existing deformed workers states, whose relatively strong economic performance testifies to the fact that it is not capitalist—as is argued by most bourgeois ideologues and the bulk of the reformist left. Despite its relative success, however, China remains extremely backward economically with respect to the imperialist powers, which will not rest content until they reclaim the world's most populous country for untrammled exploitation through capitalist counterrevolution.

The Sixth ICL Conference affirmed the understanding, laid out at the 2009 SL/U.S. National Conference, that the objective difficulties we face in this "death of communism" period cannot be overcome through opportunist shortcuts and get-rich-quick schemes, to which prior party regimes have too often resorted (see "Dog Days of the Post-Soviet Period," *Workers Vanguard* No. 948, 4 December 2009). The SL/U.S. and ICL conferences rejected the subjective idealist approach behind these schemes and its invention of opportunities for major organizational breakthroughs where none existed.

Such an approach was exemplified in the attempt, following the 2004 SL/U.S. National Conference, to be the best builders of a campaign to "revitalize" a nonexistent mass movement to fight for the freedom of black death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. The international conference rejected the false assertion that we had withdrawn "from political and polemical combat with our reformist opponents around Mumia's case," which appeared in our report of the 2007 ICL Conference ("Maintaining a Revolutionary Program in the Post-Soviet Period," *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 60, Autumn 2007), and reaffirmed that "we must continue to pursue our efforts to fight for Mumia's freedom...in line with our actual resources and the ups and downs of the case." The recent conference sharply criticized the political conciliation under the previous party regime of forces hostile to our proletarian and revolutionary purpose, including black nationalists and elements of the capitalist Democratic Party in the U.S. By 2008, such efforts had brought us to the brink of organizational and political liquidation. Our opponents' embrace of Obama found an echo in the alarming response



Getty

**Workers protest against government austerity measures near Greek Parliament in Athens, May 2010.**

among the central party leadership in New York to Obama's "More Perfect Union" speech, given as he campaigned to be U.S. imperialist Commander-in-Chief, which some comrades characterized as "powerful" and a "turning point" for supposedly "acknowledging race and racial oppression in the U.S." Had we gone to press with this line, it would have been a betrayal of our principle of proletarian class independence.

A tiny clique led by Rachel Wolkenstein, which resisted the efforts to correct our opportunist trajectory, proclaimed itself a "Minority Faction" before the international conference. This was exactly the same group—composed of Wolkenstein, her brother, his spouse and their best male friend—that came together around the 2009 SL/U.S. conference, where their views were decisively rejected. Their lengthy counterposed document for the international conference, circulated in one of our internal bulletins, received no support from any other comrade in the ICL before or at the conference, and the four quit days after the conference ended.

The idealist view that we could overcome difficult objective conditions simply through our own efforts was accompanied by a frenzy of activism and disdain for Marxist theory and history. The Sixth ICL Conference document noted that this "made us more stupid and undercut our capacity to examine developments around the world as Marxists, thus making us more permeable to alien class pressures." Delegates observed that this was not a small factor in the sequence of events that led to the betrayal over Haiti.

The conference reaffirmed the importance for the ICL of *Spartacist*, our quadrilingual theoretical journal, and noted that its production is a central responsibility of the incoming IEC and especially of those comrades assigned to the I.S. Closely related is the work of the Prometheus Research Library, the Marxist repository and archive of the SL/U.S. Central Committee. As was laid out in a report to the conference by the comrade centrally responsible for this work, the holdings and research of the PRL are indispensable for our propaganda, not least *Spartacist*, and are critical to assimilating and transmitting the history of the Marxist

movement, including that of our own party. The conference document reiterated a point that had been strongly asserted at our Fourth International Conference in 2003, only to be effectively jettisoned afterward: "If we are to be an effective fighting propaganda group, we must above all be a *thinking* propaganda group."

**Roots of the Haiti Betrayal**

By the time the conference convened, there was a wide consensus in the ICL on the factors that led to our betrayal over Haiti. The conference rejected the notion that there was a single pat explanation and instead pointed to a range of pre-existing weaknesses. Pre-conference documents noted that at least since the December 2004 Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, the SL/U.S. press had developed a tacit policy of not calling for the withdrawal of troops in the early days of a catastrophe, a line never formally discussed or codified in any party body.

While denouncing U.S. imperialism, the article "Tsunami Catastrophe in South Asia" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 839, 7 January 2005) did not take note of the insertion of a huge U.S. and Australian imperialist military presence around Indonesia in the days after the tsunami. This deployment freed up the Indonesian army to go into the mountains of the island of Aceh to defeat rebel insurgents of the Free Aceh movement. By omission, *Workers Vanguard* tacitly accepted the U.S. supply and rescue operations along the coast as "humanitarian" relief and ignored the underlying purpose of this show of U.S. military force, which extended to Sri Lanka, where there was a Tamil insurgency at the time. In contrast, as noted in our IEC repudiation statement on Haiti, the Spartacist League/Australia article, "Australian Imperialists Seize On Tsunami Catastrophe" (*Australasian Spartacist* No. 190, Autumn 2005), forthrightly demanded the immediate withdrawal of Australian and Indonesian troops from Aceh and sharply warned against illusions in imperialist foreign aid programs, which serve to reinforce neocolonial subjugation.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, *Workers Vanguard* correctly described the National Guard force that went into New Orleans as being "mobilized above all to assert con-

trol over the city, to disarm the remaining population and to enforce the government's suppression of the truth about the number of dead" ("New Orleans: Racist Atrocity," *Workers Vanguard* No. 854, 16 September 2005). However, the article failed to demand that the cops and troops get out, as we have done many times before when there have been racist police/National Guard occupations of the ghettos.

The conference document also noted a "tendency to paint U.S. imperialism's interests in Haiti as conjuncturally benign, rather than dictated by their direct interests in controlling, subjugating and profiting from the region." As the IEC repudiation statement asserted, "One doubts that we could so easily have taken such a position if the Republican Bush administration were still in the White House." Noting the strategic importance of the large numbers of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic, the U.S. and Canada, the document affirmed our internationalist perspective: for a workers and peasants government in Haiti as part of a socialist federation of the Caribbean, which is inextricably linked to the fight for the revolutionary overthrow of U.S. imperialism.

**Permanent Revolution and Proletarian Centrality**

In the course of defending the social-imperialist line over Haiti, *Workers Vanguard* No. 952 (12 February 2010) had argued emphatically that there was a "virtual absence of an industrial proletariat in Haiti." The conference document noted:

"Whether there is a working class in Haiti sufficient to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat is an empirical question that can be debated. More fundamental is the question: *what political conclusions did we draw from this assertion?* We utilized evidence relating to the economic poverty of Haiti, the lack of infrastructure and the relative weakness of the proletariat to buttress our alibis for imperialist intervention."

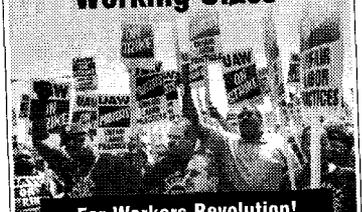
Writing when Ireland was still largely a peasant country, Lenin sharply attacked those would-be Marxists who wrote off as futile the 1916 Easter Uprising in Dublin, arguing: "The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an *independent* factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene" ("The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," 1916). Four years later, the Second Congress of the Communist International stressed that the proletariat in the advanced capitalist countries must actively support liberation struggles in the colonies and oppressed nations if it was to find a road to socialist revolution at home. In his theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky linked the fight for social and national liberation in the colonial and semicolonial countries to the struggle for proletarian state power, while emphasizing that the road to socialism can be opened only through the extension of revolution to the advanced capitalist countries.

In response to arguments raised by some comrades, the conference document upheld the understanding that permanent revolution is not directly applicable to all countries regardless of their level of development, noting: "There are also countries, such as Afghanistan or Nepal or East Timor, where there is not a proletariat with sufficient social weight to lead the oppressed masses in carrying out a socialist revolution." But to dismiss struggles in such countries would be fatal to our revolutionary purpose. The document cited

A Spartacist Pamphlet

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addresses.)

our attitude to Afghanistan under the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party (PDPA) regime in the late 1970s and '80s: "Our recognition that there were more mullahs than proletarians in Afghanistan did not lead us to devalue or dismiss the struggles and aspirations of the advanced layers of that society." After the Soviet bureaucracy's treacherous withdrawal of the Red Army in 1988-89, we sought to engage some of the PDPA cadre politically, urging that they read the works of founding Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov because he had dealt with the tsarist empire at a time when industrialization was just coming into play.

The conference document also looked back at earlier problems that had since been corrected in addressing countries where permanent revolution applies. In 2001, the I.S. and our South African section voted to retire our longstanding call for a *black-centered* workers government with the argument that there was already a black-centered government, led by the bourgeois-nationalist African National Congress (ANC). In 2007, we reinstated the slogan, which underscores that the socialist revolution in South Africa will be an act of both national and class liberation. While our propaganda had never ceased to stress that national liberation could be achieved only through proletarian revolution, a Spartacist South Africa conference last year noted that dropping the call for a black-centered workers government had been a concession to the ANC-led Tripartite Alliance, which pushes the lie that the national oppression of the black majority can be resolved under capitalism.

In 2006, the Grupo Espartaquista de México reinstated its call for a workers *and peasants* government, which had not appeared in its propaganda for some time and had been explicitly called into question in 2005 by I.S. comrades who pointed to the diminished relative weight of the Mexican peasantry in recent decades. While noting this development, the GEM affirmed at its 2010 conference that there continues to be a numerous poor peasantry that the pro-

letariat must struggle to mobilize, and that this remains a strategic question for workers revolution.

## Working-Class Struggle Against Capitalist Immiseration

The session on the state of the labor movement internationally was kicked off with presentations by three comrades: T. Themba from Spartacist South Africa, A. Hakki of the Ligue Trotskyste de France and S. Hendricks of the SL/U.S. The speakers addressed the contradictions facing us in different countries in the context of the economic crisis. On the one hand, there has been a sharp growth of economic nationalism and attendant class collaboration pushed by the labor bureaucracy, along with a major decline in union membership. On the other, there have been important defensive struggles against the capitalist onslaught, notably in Europe.

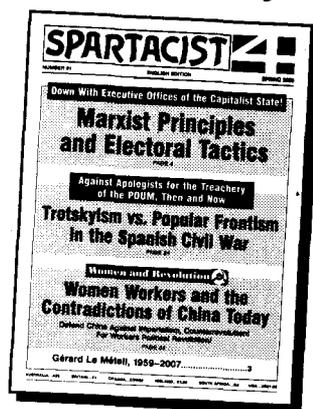
A central topic of discussion was the massive growth of temporary and contract labor, which has served to weaken the labor movement but has also provoked union struggles of varying kinds. From labor brokers in South Africa and elsewhere, to the proliferation of temporary contracts for young workers in Europe, to "outsourcing" of union jobs to non-union contractors in the U.S., there is an urgent need to organize the unorganized and combat the bosses' divide-and-rule schemes through joint class struggle. As numerous speakers emphasized, such situations must be examined concretely. Much of the discussion focused on a tendency to wrongly generalize from our correct opposition to reactionary protectionist labor actions to situations in which defense of the unions is centrally posed.

Comrade Themba vividly detailed the explosive contradictions of South Africa's neo-apartheid order. He described the desperate conditions of life for the black masses since the end of apartheid—massive unemployment with over half of black youth jobless and millions of people without enough to eat. The Tripartite Alliance government of the

# SPARTACIST

## An Organ of Revolutionary Marxism

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EPA

**South Africa: Striking construction workers fighting for wage increase march outside Soccer City stadium in Johannesburg, July 2009.**

ANC, South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) cannot deliver on the promise of “a better life for all.” Township protests over the failure to deliver basic services continue to boil over around the country.

Our comrade explained that while the working class remains subordinated to bourgeois nationalism, centrally through the agency of the ANC/SACP/COSATU popular front, it has not been defeated. Workers retain their organizations, with a militant history in the struggle against apartheid, and continue to struggle in spite of the treachery of the union tops, who help to prop up the neo-apartheid capitalist order. He also reported on struggles against the use of labor brokers to undercut union jobs, such as the 2010 strike by auto workers in the National Union of Metalworkers that won the demand that the company not make any new contracts with labor brokers. In line with comrade Themba’s report, the conference document affirmed: “Labor brokers are parasites who on behalf of big capitalists operate to obstruct union organization and ultimately to break the unions. We seek to smash the institution of labor brokering through class-struggle means.”

The LTF speaker noted that some 80 percent of newly hired workers in France are on temporary contracts, and in both France and Spain the unionization rate among workers under the age of 30 is very low. While there have been some attempts to organize temporary workers, the union bureaucracy often refrains from doing so, feeding the perception of unions as job trusts of older, more privileged workers. The European Union (EU) economic bailout plan, which is essentially a mechanism to force the workers in Greece, Ireland, Spain and other debt-ridden countries to pay off the German (and French) banks, has provoked a number of struggles. The German bourgeoisie’s relative economic strength has been achieved in large part thanks to the treacherous role of the social democrats in spearheading pay cuts and austerity measures.

Comrades noted that two countries with some of the most deepgoing labor struggles, Greece and South Africa, continue

to have mass Stalinist-derived parties that never renounced their earlier allegiance to the Soviet Union. The Greek Communist KKE has won some authority with workers as the more militant wing of opposition to the PASOK government, which is politically supported by the bureaucracy of the main union federations. However, the KKE promotes a chauvinist framework, opposing the EU and International Monetary Fund on the basis that they interfere with Greece’s national sovereignty. The conference pointed to the Trotskyist Group of Greece’s 28 April 2010 leaflet as a model for intervention into working-class struggles, particularly in its effective use of transitional demands leading to the need for a workers government (see “Greece: Down With PASOK Government’s ‘Stability Program!’” *Workers Vanguard* No. 959, 21 May 2010).

Comrade Hendricks spoke to pressures and problems we have faced in approaching labor struggles in the U.S., with its very low level of class struggle. One problem has been a tendency to presume that the union bureaucrats are incapable of leading any struggles. Another problem was evident in motions passed at the 2009 SL/U.S. National Conference, which cited the slogan “Full union pay for all work at the prevailing rate, no matter who does the job!” and stated, incorrectly, that this applies “equally to intersections between unionized and non-unionized workers domestically as well as between workers of different nations.” That slogan had been raised by the Spartacist League/Britain in regard to the reactionary 2009 strikes by construction workers at oil refineries, who demanded “British jobs for British workers.” The British strikes pitted British workers against foreign workers who had been brought in temporarily to work in Britain.

The international conference rejected the line of the 2009 SL/U.S. conference as amounting to indifference as to whether a workforce is unionized or not. As one comrade explained:

“We fight against nationalist, protectionist and job-trusting answers to ‘outsourcing,’ but that doesn’t mean we are indifferent to the loss of union jobs that outsourcing produces! We fight for *union* jobs, but with the methods of the class struggle that unite the working class across national boundaries.”

We are not left critics standing outside the present-day unions, but aspire to be the militant class-struggle pole *within* the labor movement, fighting to build the unions as inclusive organizations of class struggle—for industrial unions and a closed shop. The conference mandated further discussion in the sections on various specific issues, and affirmed the importance of maintaining and strengthening such slender links as we have to the proletariat.

### **Understanding the Retrogression of Consciousness**

An important underlying factor in our recurrent political problems in the post-Soviet period has been a failure to recognize that the rest of the left does not share our ultimate goal of a communist society. In his “Critical Notes on the

'Death of Communism' and the Ideological Conditions of the Post-Soviet World," comrade Joseph Seymour noted: "The crux of the 'death of communism' is just that: a *disbelief* in the historical possibility of a global communist civilization in the Marxist sense. This is a *basic common ground* shared by diverse political tendencies with often strongly antagonistic attitudes toward Western imperialism, parliamentary democracy, a capitalist market economy and other divisive issues" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 949, 1 January 2010).

At the same time, the retrogression of consciousness since the fall of the Soviet Union is uneven, as demonstrated by South Africa, where many advanced workers are still subjectively sympathetic to the idea of communism as they understand it. Moreover, it is false to see this retrogression as absolute and immutable, thus blinding ourselves to the eruption of contradictions, inherent in capitalist class society, which can open opportunities for programmatic intervention in a sober and measured way. The conference endorsed Seymour's conclusion:

"A very important question confronting us can be formulated in this way: is it possible that a spontaneous upheaval, involving a substantial section of the working class, against a right-wing government can lead to a prerevolutionary and even a revolutionary situation (i.e., organs of dual power) even though the mass of workers and other toilers involved do *not* aspire to socialism? I think the answer is yes. While we have not experienced such a development, we should not rule it out. For now, our primary task is to propagate a Marxist worldview with the expectation of recruiting relatively small numbers of leftist intellectuals and advanced workers. To paraphrase John Maynard Keynes: when the facts change, so will our perspectives."

At the same time, as demonstrated in the positive by the October Revolution and in the negative by countless defeats for the proletariat, the essential condition for working-class victory in a situation of dual power is the leadership of a revolutionary vanguard party.

The conference document noted, "The workings of capitalist-imperialism will necessarily continue to impel masses of workers and other sections of the exploited and oppressed into struggle against the capitalist order." To deny the possibility of revolutionary situations in this period would lead to a rejection of Trotsky's Transitional Program, the founding program of the Fourth International, which seeks to introduce elements of dual power—e.g., factory committees, workers control of production, workers defense guards—into major labor and other progressive social struggles with the aim of forging a Leninist party to lead the fight for proletarian state power.

### Other Conference Discussions

Another reporter in the main conference session, comrade M. Coates of our Canadian section, motivated a proposed new preface (see page 10) to the ICL's "Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program," which was adopted in 1998 (see *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 54, Spring 1998). In 2007, we adopted the principle of opposition to running candidates for election to executive offices of the capitalist state. The new preface addresses this important extension of Marxist principle. It also includes a few other correctives and additions, notably adding Laos to the list of present-day deformed workers states, an understanding arrived at through internal study and discussion and affirmed by the conference.

The preface also corrects an idealist formulation implying that the Stalinist political counterrevolution in the USSR could have been forestalled if the Bolsheviks had formally acknowledged that the course of the October Revolution had vindicated Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. This idealist argument also appeared in "The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism" (*Spartacist* [English edition] No. 53, Summer 1997) and "A Critical Balance Sheet: Trotsky and the Russian Left Opposition" (*Spartacist* [English edition] No. 56, Spring 2001). This correction drew on a valuable document by comrade V. Alexander of the SL/U.S., applying research into Soviet archival sources.

The conference generously voted to give a representative of the Wolkenstein faction presentation time during the main session, even though they had not even one delegate. This allowed comrades from throughout the ICL to experience firsthand the empty bombast, philistine moralism and egomania of these demoralized elements. The conference characterized their politics as neo-Bernsteinite—a reference to the revisionist German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein, who argued that "the ultimate aim of socialism is nothing, but the movement is everything." Their contributions to party discussion, which were in large part driven by personal pique, even included a vigorous defense of pseudo-medical quackery such as chiropractic and acupuncture.

Wolkenstein and her co-thinkers fully supported the social-imperialist line on Haiti. After *other* comrades had led the fight to correct the betrayal, the Wolkenstein clique began cynically posturing as holier-than-thou "anti-imperialists" in the neocolonial world, clamoring for a simple-minded "anti-imperialism" that would let the local bourgeoisie and its left tails off the hook and open the door to a class-collaborationist "anti-imperialist united front." When comrades pointed to the 1973 Chile coup, where unlike the rest of the left we did not amnesty the Chilean bourgeoisie and reformists by simply denouncing the U.S. role in the coup, Wolkenstein disparaged our opposition to the Chilean popular front in 1970-73 as basically irrelevant to today's world.

As comrade Bride noted in his presentation, the real poli-



Spartacists at February 2008 Berlin protest against Turkish army attack on Kurdish PKK in northern Iraq. Sign on left reads: "Down With Racist Fortress Europe! Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!"

tics of this clique were to “junk the old Spartacism.” This was expressed most clearly in their consistent and ongoing push to denounce the ICL Declaration of Principles as so flawed and partial as to not clearly convey who the ICL is and what we fight for. After receiving not a single vote from any comrade outside of their clique, they concluded their fight to “Return to the Road of Spartacism”... by quitting the ICL.

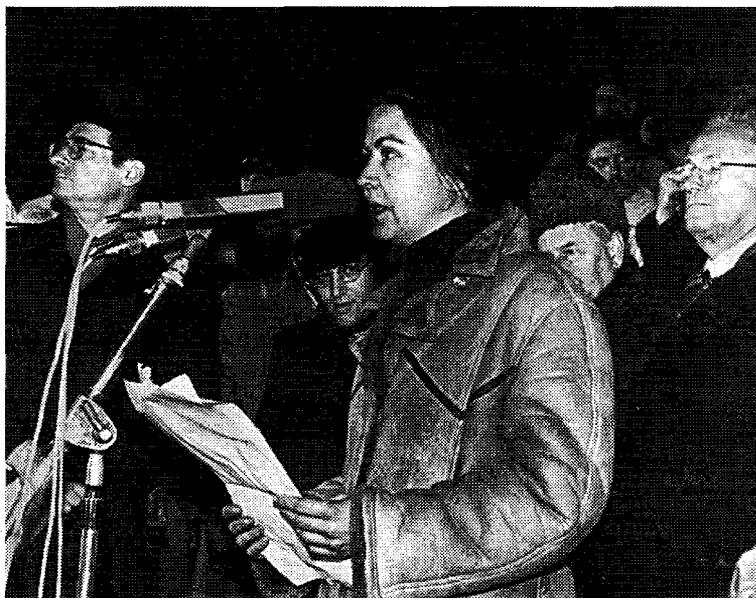
A contrast to such behavior was provided by a second, very small faction that formed in the pre-conference period, in part in opposition to the line of the 2009 SL/U.S. conference on outsourcing. When the conference voted to correct this line, the faction’s founder announced its dissolution, while retaining his views on other disputed questions.

### Upholding Our Fight in the DDR

The conference rejected the claim, pushed by Wolkenstein and wrongly accepted at the 2004 SL/U.S. National Conference and again at the 2007 ICL Conference, that a purported failure to evaluate our intervention into the incipient political revolution in the East German deformed workers state (DDR) in 1989-90 was at the root of the ICL’s problems. In fact, we had had extensive discussion and evaluation of this intervention, reflected in numerous internal bulletins and most cogently in the main document of our 1992 Second International Conference (published in *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93). The purpose of the minority’s assertion was to pursue a demagogic campaign to determine who in the ICL leadership “lost Germany.” A political kernel of this crusade to discredit longtime party leaders was the “strategic united front,” i.e., the liquidation of the party into a broad, amorphous “movement.” While this liquidationist policy was played out in full in the opportunist Mumia campaign, Wolkenstein retrospectively promoted a similar approach to the ICL’s intervention in the DDR. Thus, she argued a few years ago that we should have given up one of our two speakers at the huge 3 January 1990 Treptow united-front rally in East Berlin, where our comrades powerfully exposed the bankruptcy of the ruling Stalinists, in order to give speaking time to a politically unknown dissident East German soldier.

The conference also corrected a misleading statement in the otherwise excellent assessment of our DDR intervention in the 1992 ICL Conference document: “Leftist-inclined oppositional groups were taking shape in the summer of 1989. Given the extremely tight control exercised by the East German security police (the Stasi), an effort to begin work in the DDR may well have been totally frustrated but should have been made nonetheless.”

Going into the conference a small number of comrades argued against correcting this statement. Until the situation opened up in October 1989, when it became clear that large demonstrations weren’t being attacked by the police, the only “independent” political groups tolerated by the Stasi operated under the umbrella of the Lutheran church and in consonance with the “peaceful coexistence” politics of the bureaucracy. It would have been foolish and dangerous to think that we would be treated in the same way as those opportunist leftists who mucked about in this milieu, such



Spartakist

**ICL spokesman Renate Dahlhaus exposes bankruptcy of ruling Stalinists at 250,000-strong protest against Nazi desecration of Soviet war memorial in Berlin’s Treptow Park, 3 January 1990.**

as the Pabloite United Secretariat, whose program posed no threat to either the Stalinist bureaucracy or the West German imperialists. A leader of our German section noted that an adventurous and premature intervention inside the DDR could well have precluded our ability to intervene with appropriate cadre when the situation changed. And when we were able to intervene we did so powerfully, fighting for our program of a “red Germany of workers councils” and gaining a hearing among an advanced layer of East German workers before the situation was cut short by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and the East German Stalinists’ move for a rapid sellout to West German imperialism.

### Continuing the Fight for Revolutionary Continuity

We trace our continuity back to the revolutionary teachings and experiences of Marx and Engels and the First and Second Internationals, through Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks and the Third (Communist) International, as well as Trotsky and the Left Opposition’s fight against Stalinist betrayal culminating in the formation of the Fourth International. The political tendency embodied in the ICL today originated as the Revolutionary Tendency within the U.S. Socialist Workers Party in 1961-63. The RT sought to continue and complete the struggle against Pabloite revisionism in the Fourth International, which was taken up, albeit too little and too late, under the leadership of founding American Trotskyist James P. Cannon in 1953. Pabloism represented the liquidation of the Trotskyist vanguard party into bourgeois-nationalist, Stalinist and social-democratic formations (see “Genesis of Pabloism,” *Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972).

Many of the existing cadres of the ICL were won to Trotskyism during the period of convulsive radicalization between the Cuban Revolution of 1959-60 and the final victory of the Stalinist-led Vietnamese Revolution in 1975. Notwithstanding some exceptions, the period since has been heavily colored by stagnation and defeats for the interna-

tional proletariat. The Spartacist tendency has succeeded in maintaining a revolutionary program for close to five decades, longer than any other Marxist formation in history. A crucial task is to pass on our history to younger generations in the party. To this end, the ICL has been pursuing an extensive educational series on our early history.

A major factor affecting us has been the concentration of much of our international leadership in the U.S.—the largest imperialist power, but with the most politically backward working class among the advanced capitalist countries. Since the inception of our tendency, we have understood that a revolutionary party cannot successfully resist the deforming pressures of national isolation without disciplined international collaboration. As an organizational measure toward addressing such pressures, the new IEC elected at the conference includes a greater proportion of members from sections outside the U.S. It also reflects a certain genera-

tional shift in the party leadership. The conference further resolved to take steps toward building up a stronger IEC collective in Europe. The main conference document emphasized that “we can and must act on the understanding that the IEC is a body of peers, whose different national experiences should complement each other in honing our line and our understanding of world and national developments.”

The Sixth International Conference was an important step in the ICL’s continuing efforts to put programmatic and theoretical rearming at the center of our tasks. Our roots remain very slender and there are no easy answers to the current difficulties faced by revolutionary Marxists. Nonetheless, as our conference document concluded: “If there is to be a communist future for humanity, there is no other option than to persevere in the struggle to maintain our revolutionary continuity, which is crucial to reorganizing an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International.” ■

## Preface to ICL Declaration of Principles

The Sixth Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), held in late 2010, voted to make a number of amendments to the ICL “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program” adopted at the Third ICL Conference in 1998. In presenting these in the form of a preface rather than a revised edition of the Declaration, we follow the practice of our Marxist antecedents in addressing necessary extensions or additions to historic documents of the revolutionary workers movement.

Chief among the amendments is the position adopted at the Fifth ICL Conference in 2007 to oppose on principle running candidates for executive positions in the capitalist state. This is a logical extension of the position expressed in Point 11 of the Declaration of Principles: “Parliamentary governments formed by reformist workers parties (‘bourgeois workers parties’ as defined by Lenin) are capitalist governments administering capitalist rule.” 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. While Marxists can run for and serve, as oppositionists, in bourgeois parliamentary bodies, seeking to use their positions as tribunes for revolutionary propaganda, the problem with running for executive offices—even when, as we did prior to 2007, asserting in advance that we would not accept such positions if elected—is that it lends legitimacy to prevailing and reformist conceptions of the state. Our article “Down With Executive Offices of the Capitalist State! Marxist Principles and Electoral Tactics” (*Spartacist* [English edition] No. 61, Spring 2009) elaborated the historical development of this understanding, indicating how it differed from the practice of our Leninist and Trotskyist forebears, a practice which issued in part from a partial and confused discussion on the question of parliamentarism at the 1920 Second Congress of the Communist International (CI). As the document of the Fifth ICL Conference stated: “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.”

A second addition to the Declaration is the inclusion of Laos as one of the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states along with China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba. During the Vietnam War, as against all variants of petty-bourgeois pacifism, class collaboration and Stalinist nationalism, we raised the call: “All Indochina Must Go Communist!” The seizure of Saigon on 30 April 1975 by the forces of the Democratic Republic of (North) Vietnam and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front signified the victory of the Vietnamese Revolution against U.S. imperialism and its South Vietnamese bourgeois/landlord puppet regime. When the Stalinist-led, peasant-based Pathet Lao guerrilla insurgents gained state power in Laos several weeks later, we wrote in the youth press of the Spartacist League/U.S.: “With its predominantly feudal and even pre-feudal tribal relations of production, a Laotian state established by the Stalinists would tend to lean on and take on the social character of the neighboring and more advanced Vietnamese and Chinese deformed workers states” (*Young Spartacus* No. 33, June 1975). However, in the subsequent years, we failed to codify the understanding that Laos is, and has been since the victory of the Indochinese Revolution, a deformed workers state. The Laotian Communists had always been closely linked with those in Vietnam. Once in power, the Laotian Stalinists went on to establish a regime based on proletarian property forms, in conjunction with and under the influence of the relatively more powerful and economically advanced Vietnamese deformed workers state.

Correctly stressing the central importance of the fight against capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, the homeland of the October Revolution, Point 3 of the Declaration notes “our active intervention for the revolutionary reunification of Germany” in 1989-90. Our fight for proletarian political revolution against the ultimately ascendant forces of capitalist reunification with West Germany represented the largest and most sustained intervention in the

history of our tendency. As we noted in our assessment of the DDR [East Germany] intervention in the document of the 1992 Second Conference of the ICL (*Spartacist* [English edition] No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93): “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.”

We also take this opportunity to summarize previously codified corrections to several impressionistic statements in the Declaration of Principles. The reference to “‘market reforms’ counterrevolution in China” in Point 3 conflates the introduction of such measures with the imminence of capitalist counterrevolution. In the same vein, we argued that the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy “looks toward wholesale destruction of state industry, thereby posing the dismantling of what remains of the planned economy of the deformed workers state.” In fact, despite massive incursions of capitalist property, China remains a deformed workers state in which the industrial and financial core of the economy is based on collectivized, state-owned property. As a brittle, parasitic caste resting atop the socialized property, the Stalinist bureaucracy is incapable of implementing a cold, gradual restoration of capitalism from above. However, sooner or later the bureaucracy will fracture, posing pointblank the alternatives of capitalist restoration or proletarian political revolution.

The Declaration (in Point 7) also exaggerates the significance of centrist, anarchist and syndicalist currents in the post-Soviet period. When Trotsky wrote “Centrism and the Fourth International” in 1934, the radicalization within the workers movement resulting from the Great Depression and the bankruptcy of the Stalinized Comintern in the face of Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 generated significant left-centrist currents in the social-democratic parties. In contrast, there is little in the current political spectrum that is classically centrist, i.e., organizations in political motion, breaking to the left from reformism or to the right from revolutionism to reformism. Overwhelmingly, our opponents on the left are today confirmed reformists, opponents of the internationalist revolutionary workers movement. Likewise the political signature of today’s anarchists, who are in fact petty-bourgeois liberals, is not revulsion against the parliamentarist and class-collaborationist betrayals of Stalinism and social democracy but passionate anti-Communism. Nor is there any-

thing approximating a genuinely anti-parliamentarist, revolutionary syndicalist current, as at the time of the Russian Revolution, in the workers movement today.

Lastly, we note that it is somewhat misleading and ahistorical to say that “the failure of the Bolshevik Party to explicitly recognize the vindication of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution by the October Revolution and the failure to explicitly repudiate the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry’ then became a conduit for the forces later posturing as the Bolshevik ‘old guard’ (e.g. Stalin) to attack Trotsky” (Point 10). In the first place, it was generally acknowledged in the Bolshevik Party during the period of Lenin’s leadership that the revolution had conformed to Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution and the congruent perspective advanced by Lenin in his “April Theses” of 1917. Moreover, it is idealistic to presume that revolutionaries can, simply through codifying a correct theory, thereby close off a “conduit” for revisionism in a later reactionary period. As Trotsky subsequently explained in *The Stalin School of Falsification*, in launching an attack on “Trotskyism” (i.e., the internationalist principles of October) in 1924, the conservative, bureaucratic “Old Guard” was not restrained by anything he or Lenin had written or done in 1917. Trotsky later noted that the Thermidorean reaction won out over “the Opposition, the party and Lenin, not with ideas and arguments, but with its own social weight. The leaden rump of the bureaucracy outweighed the head of the revolution” (*The Revolution Betrayed* [1936]).

Unlike the erstwhile Stalinists and other revisionists, joined today by numerous dilettantes and political bandits ensconced in the virtual reality of cyberspace, who rotate through contradictory programmatic positions and even alleged principles in order to conform to changing opportunist appetites, authentic Marxists prize revolutionary continuity and programmatic consistency. That is why the ICL, uniquely among organizations on the left, makes available bound volumes of our earlier publications. We strive to forthrightly and explicitly indicate when we have refined or rejected, in light of subsequent experience or new research, previous positions as inadequate or wrong. This approach is central to our responsibility to act as guardians of the collective memory of the international proletariat.

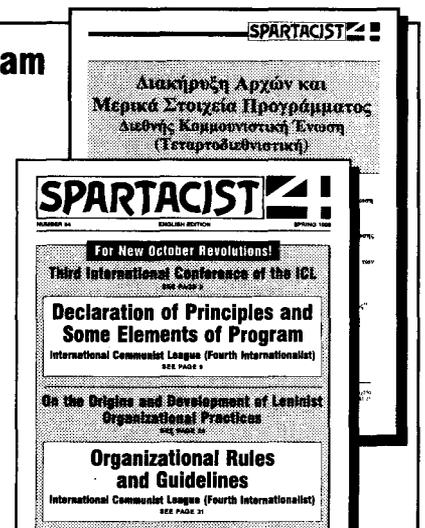
—December 2010

## ICL Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program

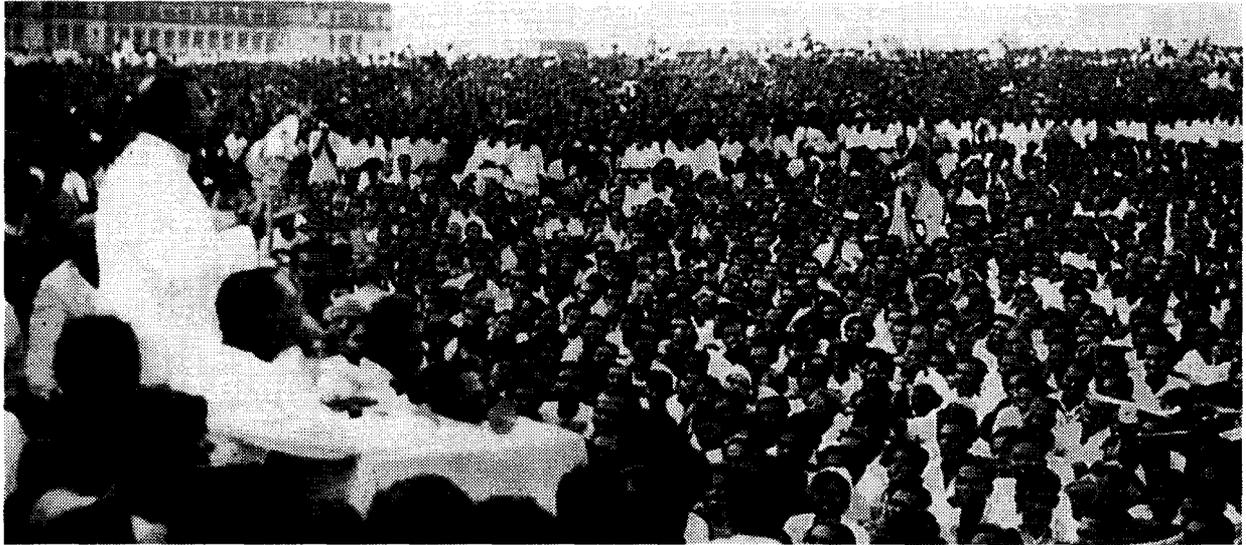
The Declaration of Principles of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is a concrete expression of our purpose: to build national sections of a democratic-centralist international which can lead the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution. This important document, which was 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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# Edmund Samarakkody and the Legacy of the Ceylonese LSSP



LSSP Collection

LSSP leader N.M. Perera announces call for 12 August 1953 hartal (general strike) at mass rally in Colombo.

## The Fight for Trotskyism in South Asia

“The struggle for the rebirth of the Fourth International promises to be difficult, long, and, above all, uneven. But it is an indispensable and central task facing those who would win proletarian power and thus open the road to the achievement of socialism for humanity.”

—“Declaration for the Organizing of an International Trotskyist Tendency,” July 1974, *Spartacist* (English edition) No. 23, Spring 1977

Our relations with the Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP) of Edmund Samarakkody in the 1970s constitute a significant chapter in that difficult, long and uneven struggle. By the time of his death in January 1992, Samarakkody’s revolutionary days were well behind him. But at one time, this founding member of the Ceylonese Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) represented a rare breed: a militant won to Trotskyism in the late 1930s who had not been utterly compromised and corrupted by homegrown popular-frontism or by the revisionist current of Michel Pablo, which had destroyed the Fourth International in 1951-53. In outlining the prospects for revolutionary regroupment, the 1974 declaration of the international Spartacist ten-

gency, now the International Communist League, took particular note of Samarakkody’s RWP as having “emerged with integrity from the welter of betrayals perpetrated by the old LSSP” and abetted by the Pabloite United Secretariat (USec) of Ernest Mandel and the craven “International Committee” (IC) of Gerry Healy (*ibid.*).

For many years, the LSSP stood at the head of a section of the labour movement and was at times the official parliamentary opposition in Ceylon. Its importance extended

beyond that small island, as Ceylon provided a staging area for socialist revolution throughout the region, crucially India. In fact, the LSSP played a decisive role in forging the first authoritative Trotskyist organisation in India in the crucible of inter-imperialist war and anti-colonial struggle. Samarakkody himself was jailed during World War II for revolutionary anti-war activities in Ceylon, and later became a Member of Parliament. But the dominating political event of his life, the apex and the limit, was the parliamentary vote cast in 1964 by him and his comrade, Meryl Fernando, that brought about the downfall



Spartacist

Edmund Samarakkody in 1979.

of the capitalist coalition government led by the bourgeois-nationalist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), a popular front that included the LSSP, which had degenerated by then into rank reformism. The SLFP was committed, above all, to furthering the domination of the island's Sinhala Buddhist majority over the besieged Tamil national minority.

We saw in Samarakkody the principled best of old Ceylonese Trotskyism, which was not very good. In the course of our discussions, it became clear that he and his group had not broken from the parliamentarist framework that defined left-wing politics in Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka, to stress the country's Sinhala "identity," in 1972). We learned, for example, that by the early '70s Samarakkody had repudiated his courageous 1964 vote against the popular front. A projected fusion with the RWP at the First International Conference of the iSt in 1979 fell apart as Samarakkody made it clear that he intended to maintain his provincial operation on the left fringe of the Lankan popular-frontist swamp and would not allow his organisation to be subjected to the scrutiny and correctives of international democratic-centralism. In drawing a balance sheet of our attempts to find sufficient programmatic agreement with the RWP to constitute a common international organisation, we observed:

"Our long fraternal experience with the Ceylonese comrades of the Samarakkody group was our most notable effort to find, in the words of James P. Cannon, 'the initiating cadres of the new organization in the old.' This grouping's last decisive revolutionary act took place in 1964, just at the time of the founding of the organizationally independent Spartacist tendency in the U.S. Had we been capable of forcefully intersecting the Ceylonese comrades at that time, it is conceivable that they might have been won to authentic Trotskyism. But the 40 or so Americans who made up our tendency at that time would have had little authority in the eyes of former leaders of a mass-based party."

—"Toward the International Trotskyist League!"

*Spartacist* (English edition) No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80

The iSt/ICL originated as the Revolutionary Tendency of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the early 1960s, formed in opposition to the SWP's abandonment of the fight for a Trotskyist party in Cuba. Having broken with Pablo in 1953 to form the anti-Pabloite International Committee—a bloc centrally with the Healy group in Britain and the French group led by Pierre Lambert—in 1960 the SWP leadership embraced the same liquidationist methodology as Pablo in response to the Cuban Revolution. As elaborated by Pablo in the years after World War II and continued by his chief lieutenant, Mandel, this tendency rejected the struggle to forge Trotskyist parties, essential to the victory of proletarian revolutions internationally, and instead acted as a pressure group on various petty-bourgeois, non-revolutionary forces (see "Genesis of Pabloism," *Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972). The RT was bureaucratically expelled from the SWP in late 1963 after the latter reunified with the Mandelites to form the USec.

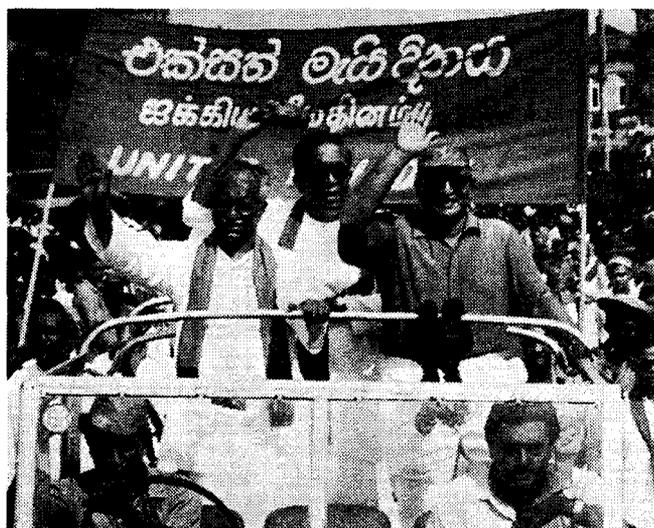
At its inception and for several years thereafter, the RT stood in political solidarity with the IC of Healy and Lambert. We split definitively from the IC in 1967 when the Healy group came out for support to a classless "Arab Revolution" and a number of other anti-Marxist positions. Our 1979 conference report noted:

"The Samarakkody group is the concretization of the observation that no national revolutionary current can pursue an authentic revolutionary course in protracted isolation from the struggle to build a world party. From the time of our

inception as a tendency, the American nucleus of the iSt struggled to break out of enforced national isolation. Through this lengthy process we came to see that the main international currents of ostensible Trotskyism were fundamentally programmatically moribund."

However, even after the split with Healy, we were aware that there existed local groupings that had not been firmly bound to the liquidationist politics of Pabloism. We looked the longest at the Lambert group, which had broken with Pablo in 1952, because it was the largest repository of cadre dating back to the Trotskyist movement of Trotsky's time, in the hope that some section of that cadre would break on essentials from that organisation's rightward course. There followed our protracted engagement with the Samarakkody group in Ceylon. But all these efforts were unsuccessful in winning over a layer of older Trotskyist cadre.

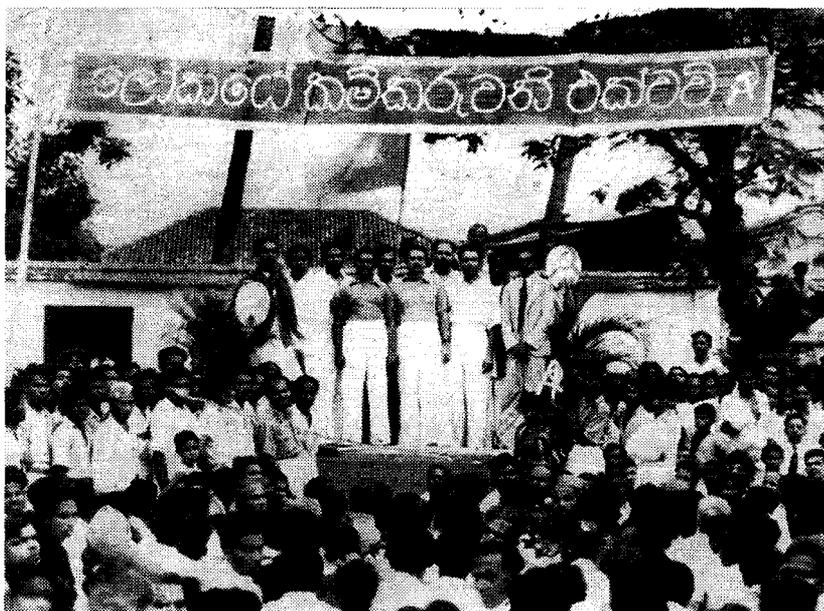
A significant part of our early history as an international tendency was written on the small island of Ceylon. From



Prologue to 1964 popular-front government: Philip Gunawardena, CP's S.A. Wickremasinghe and N.M. Perera in 1963.

1971, when Samarakkody first contacted us, through to the negative resolution of our fraternal relations with the RWP in 1979 and in the subsequent years when a left split from the RWP was established as the Spartacist League/Lanka, we had sporadic, but sometimes intense, contact with Samarakkody and his group. Samarakkody's "The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon," which we published in *Spartacist* (No. 22, Winter 1973-74), was one of the documents upheld in our 1974 declaration as part of the programmatic heritage of the iSt; and for a number of years our press carried articles by Samarakkody reporting on the situation in Sri Lanka. The inability of the RWP to find a road to fusion with our Trotskyist international constituted a crucial test of its left limits as an opposition to the LSSP's class collaboration.

To describe Samarakkody's life is to describe the rise and fall of Ceylonese Trotskyism. There are many details of the history of the LSSP which remain obscure to us. The internal life of the early LSSP is poorly documented, much of it having played out informally within a small coterie of the leadership. And much documentation, notably that in Sinhala and Tamil, is presently inaccessible to us. Nonetheless, that



LSSP Collection photos

**LSSP in its early years: Gunawardena and other party leaders share platform at rally. Above: Samarakkody addressing outdoor LSSP meeting in Colombo.**

history merits serious study if a new generation of revolutionaries is to revive Trotskyism in Lanka and India as part of the struggle to reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution.

### Origins of the LSSP

As a founding member of the LSSP, Samarakkody belonged to a layer of militants who might make better claim to be the founding fathers of their country than the venal pro-imperialist capitalists to whom the British handed power in 1948. Born into a wealthy and aristocratic low-country Sinhalese family in 1912, he was politically active in the early 1930s amid a rise in anti-colonial sentiment and joined the Colombo South Youth League. Young Ceylonese returning from study overseas brought to the Youth Leagues notions of internationalism, socialism and revolutionary change. One of these was Philip Gunawardena, who while abroad had come into contact with various leftist currents, including the Trotskyist International Left Opposition. Many of these young men and women came from a section of the newly prosperous rural bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie; Samarakkody himself qualified as a lawyer in Ceylon and continued to practise law until he died.

The Youth Leagues grew rapidly through their anti-imperialist agitation in the Suriya Mal (an indigenous flower) movement, a protest against the "Poppy Day" commemoration of British military veterans of the first imperialist world war, and also through their social relief efforts in impoverished villages during a malaria epidemic in 1934-35. In 1932-33, the young militants directly challenged the traitorous role of established labour leader A.E. Goonesinha, who had become increasingly communalist, when they gained leadership of a strike by 1,400 workers, mainly Malayalis from the Indian state of Kerala, at the Wellawatte Weaving and Spinning Mills, the largest textile plant on the island.

Samarakkody was one of 20 or so leftists who founded the LSSP under Gunawardena's leadership in December 1935. A variety of influences affected these talented and energetic young men and women: Stalinism, Trotskyism, Harold Laski's Labourite "socialist" reformism and

Mahatma Gandhi's Indian National Congress.

The LSSP was born against the backdrop of an all-sided vacuum of leadership on the island. The native bourgeoisie was weak and venal: the tame Ceylon National Congress was a pale reflection of its Indian analogue. Especially with the implementation in 1931 of the reforms recommended by the British Donoughmore Constitutional Commission, the Ceylonese bourgeoisie enthusiastically collaborated with the British imperialists, accepting ministries in the new State Council, a "parliamentary" adjunct to the colonial administration. The militant labour movement of the '20s had been dissipated by the economic depression of 1929-1935. The leaders of that movement, such as Goonesinha, had moved decisively toward class collaboration with the employers and racism against workers of Indian origin.

A character in a Romesh Gunesekera short story evokes the situation:

"In those days I was equally dismayed by our political leadership: at the time it seemed to me so uninspired. I wished we were in India where there was so much more of a struggle. Some fight, some idealism. Gandhi, Bose. You know, men who were doing something for their country. But Ceylon seemed full of lackeys. Everyone wanted to be Head Boy in the Governor's House. How could they? Only when the leftists started up in 'thirty-five did we begin to see a real future. They went out into the villages during the malaria to help our people. And the people recognized their concern. When the elections finally came they responded. I joined up."

—Romesh Gunesekera, "Ullswater," *Monkfish Moon* (New York: The New Press, 1992)

The LSSP was founded as a broad party fighting for independence, reform and socialism (*sama samaja*, coined from the Sinhala for "equal society"). It was modernising and secular, though with a soft underbelly in regard to the Buddhist revivalism that was an early response to British rule. The party's influence grew rapidly, and pretty soon it was the recognised leadership of the struggle for national independence. In 1936, Gunawardena and fellow LSSP member N.M. Perera were elected to the State Council. Though they often sounded like liberal social democrats, they were nonetheless denounced as the "honorable members for Russia, or the Communist members for Ruanwella and Avissawella"

by one vehement right-wing opponent, Samarakkody's own older brother, Siripala (quoted in George Lerski, *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon* [Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1968]). The LSSP succeeded in establishing a mass trade-union base, particularly in Colombo. Samarakkody was active in the LSSP-led strikes and unionisation drives, and was arrested in Colombo in 1937 for these activities.

As in Bolivia and Indochina, working-class political consciousness arrived sufficiently late in Ceylon that Stalinism was unattractive to militant anti-colonial fighters. In 1935, the Stalinised Communist International (CI) embraced the "popular front," a new label for the old, social-democratic programme of class collaboration with a supposedly progressive wing of the bourgeoisie. Its application for colonial countries was to build "national united fronts" with the native bourgeoisies. Originally promulgated as a confused and implicitly stagist slogan at the CI Fourth Congress in 1922, by 1927 the "anti-imperialist united front" had become synonymous with the liquidation of the Chinese Communist Party into the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang and the betrayal of the Second Chinese Revolution. The slogan's revival under the signboard of the popular front with a "democratic" wing of the bourgeoisie was unambiguously class-collaborationist. And with Stalin's wartime alliance with the Allied imperialists following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, it became evident that the working class was to be subordinated not just to the venal local capitalists but to the "democratic" imperialist overlords. Thus the vanguard section of the proletariat became at least nominally Trotskyist in a number of colonial and semicolonial countries.

### The LSSP's Contradiction

At the heart of this development toward Trotskyism in the LSSP was what became known as the "T group." Initiated by Gunawardena, this was an informal network with features of both a political tendency and a Young Turks clique. The arrival of Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed*, published in English in 1937, had a significant impact among the edu-

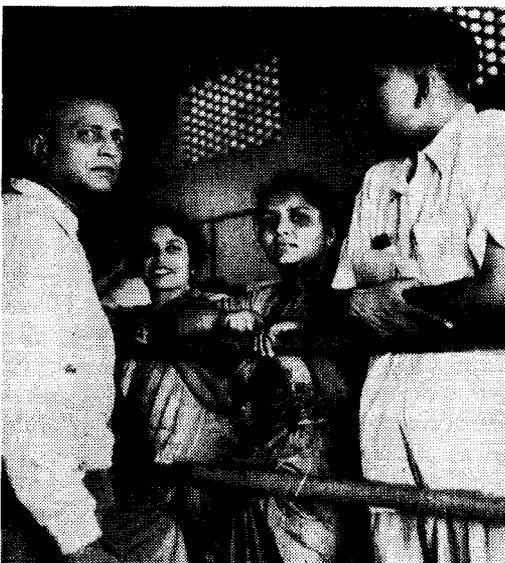
cated leaders of the T group who could read it. In December 1939, the LSSP Executive Committee passed a motion by 29 votes to five declaring, "Since the Third International has not acted in the interests of the international revolutionary working-class movement, while expressing its solidarity with the Soviet Union, the first workers' state, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party declares that it has no faith in the Third International" (quoted in *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*). At the next meeting of the Executive Committee, those opposed to this line were preemptorily expelled, without any attempt to take the struggle to the membership.

In good part, the LSSP's adherence to Trotskyism was nominal and never went very deep. What was lacking was a flesh-and-blood struggle to cohere a revolutionary cadre in opposition to the nationalists and reformists for whom Trotskyism was but a superficial convenience, a talisman against support to the local colonial power. Yet authentic Trotskyism, and the theory of permanent revolution, did provide the revolutionary answers for a party faced with national-democratic tasks of colonial liberation and with leading the workers class struggle to victory.

A central question in this regard was (and is) the national oppression of the largely Hindu Tamil people, the most significant among a number of national, ethnic and religious minorities on this majority Sinhalese and Buddhist island. (Among other minorities were Christians, Muslims and Burghers, the latter being descendants of intermarriages with European colonists.) Linguistically and culturally linked to the people of Tamil Nadu in southern India, the Tamils were divided into two distinct groups. The Ceylon Tamils—concentrated in the Jaffna peninsula and in the northeastern region including Trincomalee, as well as in Colombo—had been established on the island for many centuries and were favoured by the British for positions in the colonial administration. The so-called Indian Tamils had been brought over beginning in the late 19th century to do backbreaking, low-paid work in the highly profitable British-owned tea plantations. The strategic Tamil plantation workers were of triple importance: as key producers in the economy, as a vital element in the struggle against Sinhala chauvinism and as a potential bridge to the Indian revolution.

As long as these heavily low-caste and women workers remained quiescent and isolated in the hill country, possessing neither political nor trade-union rights, they were not seen as a threat. But as soon as they began to assert themselves, they confronted the class-based fears of the bourgeoisie combined with chauvinist prejudices that fed on the majority Sinhalese notion of being a beleaguered minority in the region as a whole.

The LSSP generally stuck to a line of class unity against ethnic division, and throughout this period LSSP meetings were attacked by communalist *goondas* (thugs). Its developing influence in the working class no doubt played a role in forestalling outbreaks of communalist violence,

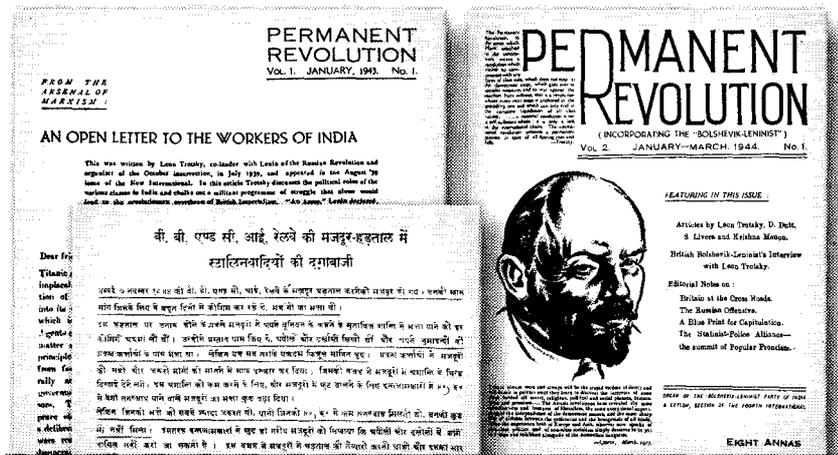


Associated Newspapers of Ceylon



Arjuna, Philip Gunavardhana caritaya

**N.M. and Selina Perera, Vivienne and Leslie Goonewardene. Right: Philip and Kusuma Gunawardena, 1939.**



**Issues of BLPI theoretical journal, *Permanent Revolution*, January 1943, January-March 1944. November 1944 Hindi-language BLPI leaflet denounced Stalinist betrayal of railway workers strike.**

as had occurred in 1915 with anti-Muslim riots. However, the LSSP was clearly not immune to the prevailing Sinhalese prejudices: for example, in September 1937 it presented a motion to the State Council aimed at a ban on Indian labour immigration. Unlike Lenin's Bolsheviks, the LSSP did not see the struggle against national oppression as a motor force for the proletarian revolution. The party's failure to establish a mass base among the strategic Tamil plantation workers was exacerbated by the peremptory manner in which the 1939 split with the Stalinists was carried out, allowing the latter to easily retain leadership of important areas of work, such as among low-caste Tamils in the Jaffna peninsula.

Nonetheless, when an unprecedented strike wave broke out among the plantation workers in late 1939 and early '40, the LSSP played a leading role in these struggles in Uva Province, and Samarakkody was a key organiser. In May 1940, the LSSP organised a huge rally in Badulla. Staged in defiance of a ban by the authorities, the rally was a spectacular show of strength. This promising work was cut off by the wartime crackdown by the British colonial rulers. The way was left open for the growth of exclusively Indian Tamil formations, pre-eminently the Ceylon Indian Congress (which became the Ceylon Workers Congress in 1950), to gain control of this historically key section of the proletariat. The LSSP's own later account of this work is revealing:

“The militant leadership provided by the party made a deep impression among the plantation workers. But the party was never able to build on this goodwill because firstly, repression descended on the party immediately afterwards leaving the trade union field in the plantations free to the Ceylon Indian Congress; and secondly because even after the war, the measures of the Government against workers of Indian origin drove these workers quite naturally in the circumstances into the arms of the Ceylon Indian Congress.”  
 —Leslie Goonewardene, *A Short History of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party* (Colombo: LSSP pamphlet, 1960)

There is more to this fatalistic dismissal than the fact that it was written not long before the LSSP's parliamentarist degeneration culminated in entry into a capitalist popular-front government. Even in its early years, the LSSP perceived no contradiction in Jack Kotelawala being one of its primary organisers among the tea plantation workers and later holding a position as the legal officer of the Ceylon Estates Employers Federation, in which capacity he would appear in court

against the workers. Rather than relying on men of independent means, what might have happened if the LSSP had taken a few of the best plantation worker militants and made them full-time party organisers while training them thoroughly in revolutionary Marxism? Unfortunately, the LSSP's work methods were far removed from such Bolshevik practices.

From its founding, the LSSP was saddled with a profound contradiction. As Charles Wesley Ervin wrote in a 1988 article on the formative period of Ceylonese and Indian Trotskyism: “The LSSP had a split personality from birth. Its leaders were sophisticated leftists, but the LSSP was deliberately intended to be a very broad, ‘soft’ Socialist party, more nationalist than Marxist” (“Trotskyism in India—Part One: Origins Through World War II (1935-45),” *Revolutionary History*, Winter 1988-89). In a

follow-up article, Ervin described Philip Gunawardena and Perera as “opportunist hustlers” and “slick revisionists” (“Trotskyism in India, 1942-48,” *Revolutionary History* Vol. 6, No. 4, 1997).

Ervin still showed some sympathy for revolutionary Trotskyism when he wrote those articles. However, he has since moved to the right, joining “death of communism” leftists like the British Labourite *Revolutionary History* crowd in glorifying “the politics of the possible.” In a recent book, Ervin idolises Gunawardena as “the driving force behind the formation and spectacular growth of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), one of those few Trotskyist parties to ever achieve a mass following for a long period of time” (*Tomorrow Is Ours: The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48* [Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2006]). Acknowledging that “in hindsight, there was much about the early LSSP that might seem ‘Menshevik’ or ‘reformist,’” Ervin apologises for this programmatic and organisational Menshevism by claiming that “context is critical. The LSSP was really the first political party that had ever been formed in sleepy Ceylon” (*ibid.*).

Ervin was far closer to the mark the first time. Ervin notes in his book that Gunawardena “solidarized with Trotsky” in the early '30s, after a period in the British Communist Party (*ibid.*). Yet under Gunawardena's stewardship, the early LSSP studiously avoided taking a stand on the burning questions of the world revolution posed in Trotsky's struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy. To the extent it dealt with international questions at all, the resolution adopted at the first annual conference of the LSSP in December 1936 called only for solidarity with the Republican forces fighting against Franco in the Spanish Civil War, with not a word on the decisive question of the popular front.

Instead of fighting for programmatic clarity, Gunawardena set out to build a big party on a small island by cutting corners. He promoted the LSSP as follows: “Our party is not a Communist Party.... It is a party which is much less militant and less demanding” (quoted in *Origins of Trotskyism in Ceylon*). He viewed as a model the loosely organised Congress Socialist Party (CSP) of J.P. Narayan, which was an organic part of Gandhi's bourgeois Congress in India. Gunawardena had befriended Narayan as a student in the

U.S., and the newly formed LSSP established fraternal relations with the CSP. Notwithstanding its nominal adherence to Trotskyism in late 1939, the LSSP did not really begin to resolve its internal contradictions until it embarked on the profoundly internationalising experience of fighting to build a Trotskyist organisation in India. And at every decisive step, Gunawardena was an obstacle on the road to forging such a party.

**The Heroic Period: the BLPI**

The LSSP opposed World War II as imperialist from the outset, and the work among the tea plantation workers was concrete proof that it would pursue the class struggle and national independence irrespective of the consequences for the British war effort. With its tea and rubber production and the strategic harbour of Trincomalee, Ceylon was viewed by Britain as a vital outpost. The Trotskyists raised the call to turn the imperialist war into a civil war and directed revolutionary antiwar propaganda at the large British garrisons in Ceylon and India. Faced with the LSSP's outspoken opposition to the war and its role in the Uva plantation strikes, the British authorities moved to suppress the socialists, shutting down the LSSP press. While Leslie Goonewardene was instructed by the party to evade capture, the other top leaders—Philip Gunawardena, Perera and Colvin R. de Silva—passively courted arrest, perhaps in fatuous expectation of glorious courtroom battles. On 18 June 1940, a few days after the German army marched into Paris, the three were hauled off to prison. The following day, having returned to Colombo to organise protests in their defence, so was Samarakkody. That he was arrested along with the best-known party leaders likely reflected his prominent role in the plantation strikes.

With the LSSP's top leaders cut off from State Council seats and their legal careers, the party was propelled in altogether healthier directions. If somewhat arbitrarily, a reckoning had been made with the Stalinists, who made it clear after 1941 that they would sacrifice the struggle for colonial freedom to Stalin's alliance with "democratic" imperialism. In conditions of illegality, the LSSP moved toward becoming more sharply programmatically defined. This development was to the credit of a new layer of leaders who stepped up to the responsibility. The party had hitherto been too dependent on the top leaders and lacked the requisite organisation for revolutionary functioning, let alone under conditions of illegality.

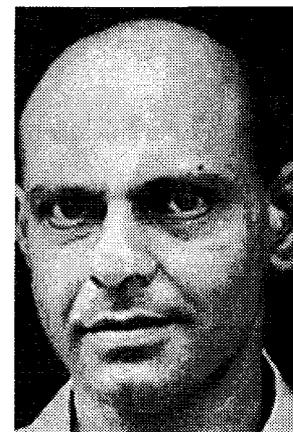
In the context of repression on the island and the massive upsurge of nationalist agitation across the Palk Straits in India, the LSSP was powerfully compelled to the conclusion that the revolution in Ceylon was integrally connected to that in India. At its 1941 conference, the LSSP proclaimed its transformation into a Bolshevik cadre organisation, and simultaneously advanced the perspective of actively fighting to build a Trotskyist party in India. The LSSP had already begun undertaking practical steps to this end. In late 1940, in consultation with a small Trotskyist grouping in Calcutta, the LSSP sent Bernard Soysa to work in India. Others followed, including de Silva, Perera and Gunawardena, who escaped to Madras on fishing boats after the legendary jail break of 7 April 1942; they were later recaptured and returned to Ceylon. Samarakkody remained behind, working underground. He was rearrested and sentenced, along with Perera and Gunawardena, to six months' rigorous imprisonment in 1944.

Alongside their Indian comrades, the exiled LSSP cadres worked to unify a number of isolated Trotskyist circles into a pan-Indian organisation. The Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India (BLPI) was formally constituted in May 1942, with functioning groups in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), and the LSSP as its Ceylonese unit. The Draft Programme of the BLPI (which was not formally ratified until 1944) argued for revolutionary defeatism against all the imperialist combatants in World War II while calling for unconditional military defence of the Soviet degenerated workers state. (The draft programme appears as an appendix in Ervin's book; sections of the programme were initially published in the SWP's *Fourth International*, March, April and October 1942.) It gave concrete expression to the Trotskyist perspective of permanent revolution, describing Congress as "the classic party of the Indian capitalist class" and comparing it to "the Kuomintang, which led the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 to its betrayal and defeat." Noting that the CSP and other petty-bourgeois formations (M.N. Roy's Radical Democratic Party and the Forward Bloc of radical-nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose) within or under the influence of Congress "have repeatedly lent themselves to be used by the bourgeoisie as a defensive colouration before the masses," the BLPI stressed:

"The leadership of the peasantry in the coming petty bourgeois democratic agrarian revolution that is immediately posed can therefore come only from the industrial proletariat.... The revolutionary alliance between the proletariat and peasantry can mean only proletarian leadership of the peasant struggle and, in case of revolutionary victory, the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship with the support of the peasantry."

—Draft Programme of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India (Colombo: LSSP(R) pamphlet, 1970)

Within months of its formation, the BLPI had the opportunity to intervene with this programme in a mass struggle. On 9 August 1942, the morning after Gandhi proclaimed before a huge crowd in Bombay the call for a non-violent mass campaign to force the British to "quit India," he and the rest of the top Congress leaders were rounded up and imprisoned. The arrests provoked an immediate upheaval, which spread rapidly. The Communist Party (CPI) and the Royists, backing British imperialism in its "war against fascism," opposed the "Quit India" movement outright, while Bose lined up with Germany and Japan. The Trotskyists threw their meagre forces into the struggle to bring the



AP      Sunday Observer  
**Colvin R. de Silva, Doric de Souza**

proletariat to the fore in the fight for independence and socialist revolution (see “The ‘Quit India’ Movement 50 Years On: Stalinist Alliance with Churchill Betrayed Indian Revolution,” *Workers Hammer* Nos. 131 and 132, September/October and November/December 1992; reprinted in *Workers Vanguard* No. 970, 3 December 2010).

Beginning on 9 August, the BLPI issued a number of leaflets aimed at mobilising the workers on a class basis and warning against any reliance on the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois misleaders. With Gandhi & Co. in prison, the Congress Socialists dissolved themselves as a distinct current in order to become the leadership of Congress. The CSP looked to the peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie to engage in guerrillaist clashes with the British forces, urging the workers to simply leave the factories and return to their home villages. As a 1944 BLPI document put it, the CSP’s role in the August struggle “proved completely, in action it was simply unable to outstep the bounds of bourgeois ‘pressure politics’ perspectives, and that, though ‘socialist’ by label, it was merely Congress in fact” (“The Present Political Situation in India,” 4 August 1944, reprinted in *Fourth International*, October 1944).

The difficult war years in India were the heroic days of the Ceylonese Trotskyists. Many BLPI militants were arrested, including in July 1943 as a result of Stalinist tip-offs. Yet the small BLPI provided a revolutionary working-class pole in the struggles against British imperialism. Though driven underground, the Trotskyists managed to publish a high-grade theoretical journal, *Permanent Revolution*, whose first issue in January 1943 reprinted Trotsky’s July 1939 “An Open Letter to the Workers of India” (also published as “India Faced With Imperialist War”). The BLPI established a base among sections of the proletariat, winning significant influence in some militant unions in Madras and elsewhere.

### The 1942 Split and the Struggle Against Liquidationism

The formation of the BLPI provoked a split among the Ceylonese Trotskyists between a self-styled “Workers Opposition” under Gunawardena and Perera and the Bolshevik-Leninist faction of more junior leaders such as Doric de Souza and Samarakkody. The split was formalised in 1945 with the expulsion of Gunawardena and Perera. Though the dispute was couched in terms of “tactics,” it was clearly analogous to the 1903 split between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Samarakkody later observed: “It was the attempt on the part of the Marxist wing to re-organise the party programmatically and organisationally on Bolshevik lines that led to opposition from the Philip Gunawardena/N.M. Perera reformist wing and to the split of 1942” (“The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon”).

Gunawardena and Perera revolted at the prospect of a hard, disciplined, internationalist organisation. As Ervin put it in his earlier article on the BLPI, “The opportunist wing of the old



**Congress leader Mahatma Gandhi flanked by Lord and Lady Mountbatten, April 1947. Right: J. P. Narayan, leader of Congress Socialist Party.**

LSSP rebelled, leading to a *de facto* split.... At bottom, it was a fight over what kind of party would lead the Indian struggle for liberation—proletarian revolutionary or petit-bourgeois radical?” (*Revolutionary History*, Winter 1988-89). The Workers Opposition railed against allegedly sectarian, petty-bourgeois intellectuals out to “transform the party from a living and growing entity with its deep roots in the masses into a narrow conspiratorial sect” (quoted in “Trotskyism in India, 1942-48”). In effect, Gunawardena sought to return the LSSP to the days when it looked something like the CSP, with a vaguely socialist and anti-imperialist programme and a politically uneducated “mass” membership—and himself calling the shots. It’s notable that on at least two occasions, Gunawardena resorted to physical violence or scurrilous, unsupported cop-baiting against his opponents inside the party, directed in particular at Doric de Souza, a key underground organiser of the Bolshevik-Leninists.

In India, Gunawardena et al. wanted the Trotskyists to enter the petty-bourgeois radical Congress Socialist Party. So long as the proletarian vanguard strictly maintained its programmatic independence from the bourgeois nationalists, work by a small nucleus of Leninist revolutionaries inside a mass bourgeois-nationalist formation in a colonial or semi-colonial country in certain circumstances was not ruled out in principle. Trotsky adamantly opposed the liquidationist entry of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) into the Guomindang (GMD) beginning in 1923, which subordinated the proletarian vanguard to the bourgeois nationalists. But he did not in principle reject the CCP’s initial partial entry into the GMD in 1922, as he made clear in a 1 November 1937 letter to Harold Isaacs criticising a passage in Isaacs’ draft of *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (1938):

“You invoke the fact that even if the Chinese [Communist Party] leaders opposed the entry they referred not to principles but to their ‘belief that the Kuomintang was defunct.’ This assertion is repeated twice or more. I find it incorrect in this case to oppose principles against the facts. In those times in the past when the bourgeois parties were capable of guiding toiling masses the duty of a revolutionary was to join them. Marx and Engels for instance joined the Democratic party in 1848 (correctly or not is a matter for concrete analysis). ‘The Kuomintang is not capable of leading revolutionary masses. It is from the revolutionary point of view a *defunct*

party. That is why we are against the entry,'—such an argument could have a totally principled value.

"I can go further: the entering in itself in 1922 was not a crime, possibly not even a mistake, especially in the south, under the assumption that the Kuomintang at this time had a number of workers and the young Communist party was weak and composed almost entirely of intellectuals. (This is true for 1922?) In this case the entry would have been an episodic step to independency [sic], analogous to a certain degree to your entering the [U.S.] Socialist Party. The question is what was their purpose in entering and what was their subsequent policy?"

—Trotsky Papers Cataloging Records (MS Russ 13.11), Houghton Library, Harvard University (No. 8558)

The BLPI took a clear stand for the class independence of the proletariat from all wings of the Congress bourgeoisie, rejecting the CSP's call for mass affiliation of the trade unions and *kisan sabhas* (peasant leagues) to Congress. The 1942 BLPI programme asserted: "To regard the Congress as a 'National United Front,' or to entertain any illusions whether of capturing the Congress from the bourgeoisie or of successfully exposing its bourgeois leadership while remaining loyal to the Congress, would be fatal to the independence of the proletarian movement" (*Draft Programme*). At the same time, the programme stated:

"This does not of course absolve Bolshevik-Leninists from the task of doing fraction work (of course, in all cases under strict party discipline) within the Congress, so long as there remain within their folds revolutionary and semi-revolutionary elements who may be won away from these organisations."

But this purpose was at odds with what Gunawardena had in mind, which was certainly not a short-term entry aimed at winning potential revolutionaries in the CSP to Trotskyism. As indicated above, he had always been fascinated with the CSP as a "broad" socialist organisation nestled inside Congress. He saw the effort to forge a hard Trotskyist organisation in India in 1942 as the work of "revolutionary romantics," as he was to put it later when the question of liquidation into the CSP was revisited ("Bolshevik-Leninists Should Enter Immediately the Socialist Party of India [CSP]," *Internal Bulletin* [LSSP] Vol. 1, No. 2, March 1947; quoted in *Tomorrow Is Ours*).

In 1943, Gunawardena and Perera argued that the BLPI should merge forces with the CSP as part of "a scheme to broker a broad regroupment of Congress Socialists and other nationalist parties which had played a prominent role in the 'Quit India' struggle," as Ervin put it in one of his earlier articles ("Trotskyism in India, 1942-48"). Ervin continued: "Their opportunist proposal was couched in terms of 'tactics,' a ploy which these slick revisionists would repeat over the next several decades."

Here, again, the later Ervin contradicts his earlier writings in order to rally to the defence of Gunawardena and Perera, falsely likening their opportunist proposal to the American Trotskyists' entry into the Socialist Party in 1936-37. That entry was carried out with the aim of intersecting a layer of leftward-moving workers and youth and winning them to the fight for a revolutionary party, not of submerging the Trotskyists in an unprincipled left-nationalist lash-up in a capitalist party. In his book, Ervin sneeringly describes the Bolshevik-Leninists as "purists" for opposing Gunawardena's opportunist manoeuvres with a pro-imperialist labour bureaucrat in Ceylon in 1945. He then claims:

"The BLPI directed biting propaganda at the Congress Socialists, pointing out their contradiction. The Socialists wanted struggle, but refused to break with the 'bourgeois' Congress. But these barbs, fired from afar, carried little sting. If the Trotskyists had been working in the Congress Socialist Party, as Philip Gunawardena had urged all along, they might have been able to influence a chunk of the Congress left."

—*Tomorrow Is Ours*

To have dissolved the small and largely unjelled BLPI into the Congress/CSP would have led to the abortion of Indian Trotskyism. This became painfully evident in 1948 when, despite widespread initial opposition at the base, the BLPI did carry out a full-scale entry into J.P. Narayan's Socialist Party, formed after the CSP finally left the Congress, which was now the ruling party of an independent India. Denied the right to form an organised internal opposition by the Socialist leaders, over the course of the next few years the Trotskyists were fully assimilated into Indian social democracy.



Keystone



Hulton-Deutsch

Mass protest on 10 August 1942 against arrest of Congress leaders defies British tear-gas attack. Right: Demonstrators in Bombay carry off wounded comrade, 15 October 1942.

In fact, the CSP had long made it clear that it would not countenance organised opposition to Congress within its ranks. When the Stalinist CPI, having entered the CSP in 1936, began winning over significant numbers and entire CSP branches, they were subjected to an anti-Communist witch-hunt and finally purged completely in 1940. One-time American Bukharinite Bertram Wolfe recalls how a CSP leader he knew, Yusuf Meherally, explained that he had ordered the purge of the CPI on the grounds that it "had constituted itself as a hostile conspiracy within our movement. They kept up a faction of their own, slandered our movement and its leaders" (quoted in Wolfe, *Strange Communists I Have Known* [London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1966]). Meherally recalled telling the CPI leaders: "You have proved unworthy of membership in the Congress Party and you have proved unworthy of the moral principles of Ghandhiji" (quoted in *ibid.*). It is willfully illusory to believe that the CSP leadership would have allowed a small Trotskyist entry faction to engage in a principled struggle based on *revolutionary* opposition to Congress, the CSP leadership and the Indian bourgeoisie.

### Postwar Opportunism and Reunification

The end of the imperialist war saw most of the Ceylonese Trotskyists returning to the island. The Indian connection was steadily abandoned. Weakened by the departure of the Ceylonese cadre and pressured by the emergent Pabloite leadership in the International Secretariat of the Fourth International into a liquidationist entry, a Bombay-centred pro-entry faction ultimately won out and the BLPI collapsed into Narayan's Socialist Party. The LSSP's *Short History* argues that the organisational connection between the Ceylonese and Indian Trotskyists "ceased to have any meaning" after the transfer of power in India in 1947 and Ceylon in 1948. This is a flagrant denial of the necessary interrelation of socialist revolution in India and Ceylon.

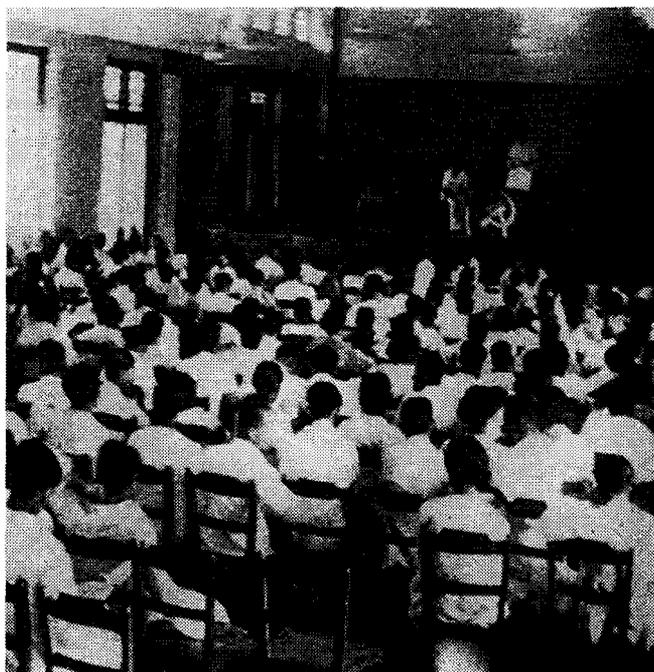
The political basis of the split between the Bolshevik-Leninists and the Gunawardena/Perera reformist wing was not clarified and sharpened. As early as late 1946 there was an abortive attempt at reunification, and in 1950 an unprincipled merger of the Bolshevik-Leninists, by then called the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party (BSP), and LSSP was effected, with the blessing of Pablo & Co. Early in our contact with Samarakkody we raised the question: "What would seem to require explanation in the 1950 Ceylonese reunification is the internal incapacity of the left Trotskyists to resist it in favor of their previously overtly principled course" (Letter to Samarakkody, 27 October 1973, reprinted in *iSt International Discussion Bulletin* No. 3, May 1974). We further observed that from then on, the LSSP, "operating within the limitations of a merely national perspective and with a focus on the parliamentary arena," was on a downhill slide from tacit reformism to increasingly overt class collaboration, culminating in the 1964 popular-front government.

Certainly, the BSP was itself affected by parliamentarism, and the opportunity for these leftists to become MPs must have played a part in their incorporation back into the LSSP. Samarakkody himself was elected to parliament in 1952. A pattern was set in the LSSP whereby the leftists could say whatever they wanted while the right wing, centred on the parliamentary leaders, determined policy at every crucial juncture. The LSSP lefts, appearing as revolutionaries before the masses, had real value to the reformists in this division of

labour. But in the end, the lefts could only act as a pressure group on the rightist leadership core.

The postwar movement for independence took place in the context of a wave of working-class struggles between 1945 and 1947. The spectre of struggles by urban and plantation workers had the capitalists screaming about the "Indian menace" and the "Red Peril." A series of strikes in 1946 won promises of concessions, but a general strike in May-June 1947 was violently suppressed. Though the United National Party (UNP) won the most seats in the 1947 elections, the LSSP (with ten seats) and the Bolshevik-Leninists (with five seats) did surprisingly well. Samarakkody was chosen to stand in Mirigama against UNP leader D.S. Senanayake, a "kinsman," through his brother Siripala's marriage into that notable landlord-capitalist family. In what was meant to be a Senanayake pocket borough, Samarakkody shook the prime minister-to-be by getting nearly 11,000 votes compared to 26,000-plus votes for Senanayake.

In his article in *Spartacist*, Samarakkody noted the highly indicative fact that LSSP leaders Perera and Gunawardena refused to join the Bolshevik-Leninists in 1946 in rejecting the Soulbury Constitution granted by Britain, which bequeathed formal independence while leaving intact key British institutions, such as the Trincomalee naval base and the monarchy, in the form of a British-appointed Governor-General. Certainly in hindsight the question of the Soulbury Constitution appears less significant than the vicious anti-working-class and anti-Tamil legislation which the government, with the support of Tamil bourgeois politicians, passed in the period immediately after independence. The great majority of the nearly one million Tamils of Indian origin, who made up the bulk of the plantation proletariat, were disenfranchised and deprived of citizenship. Thus, the largest and most powerful section of the working class, whose superexploitation allowed for the educational, medical and other welfarist measures implemented by the capitalists in



C.W. Ervin collection

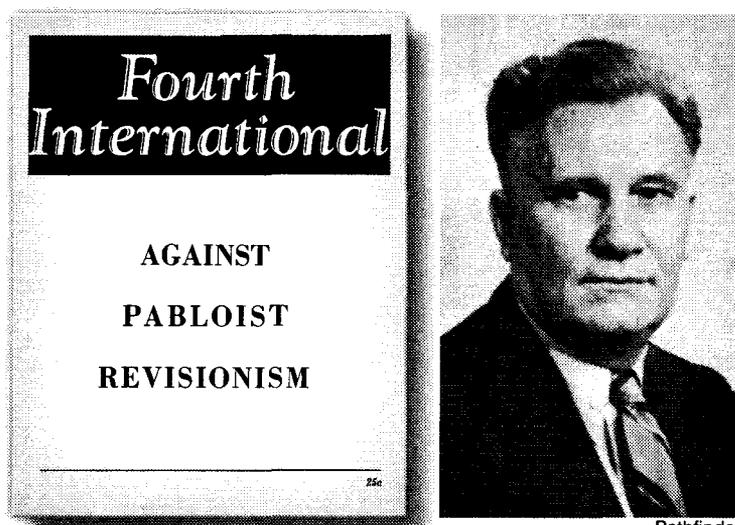
1950 BSP-LSSP unification conference in Colombo.

those years, was made voteless and stateless. While LSSP and BSP MPs spoke eloquently in parliament against these measures as racist and anti-working-class, there is little to no evidence that they did much more.

The 1950 BSP-LSSP unification conference document said nothing about the plantation workers or the removal of their citizenship rights. Yet the merger with the Bolshevik-Leninists was too much for Gunawardena, who led a significant split in the direction of petty-bourgeois Sinhala populism. The following year, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike split from the UNP to form the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party, with its greater emphasis on Sinhala chauvinism and “anti-imperialist” rhetoric. Certainly as viewed through the eyes of the Tamil plantation workers, not to speak of principled Marxists, it was impossible to see Bandaranaike, notwithstanding his verbal radicalism, as a “lesser evil.” Yet the LSSP approached Bandaranaike for a no-contest agreement for the May 1952 elections. No protest against this was registered by Pablo’s International Secretariat, though from the standpoint of proletarian revolution this was already a crime.

Again in 1953-54 the Ceylonese Trotskyists were not well served by the international movement. The LSSP leadership initially rejected Pablo’s line in 1952 fleshing out the perspective of long-term entrism into the dominant Stalinist and social-democratic parties in West Europe. In a 23 February 1954 letter to Leslie Goonewardene, founding American Trotskyist James P. Cannon wrote: “The LSSP—more than any other party, I venture to say—requires an international leadership which will be a source of strength and support to its Trotskyist orthodoxy” (reprinted in *SWP Education for Socialists*, “Towards a History of the Fourth International, Part 3: International Committee Documents 1951-1954,” Vol. 4). But when Cannon and the SWP majority had belatedly declared war on Pablo’s revisionism in 1953, they did not carry out a hard fight throughout the International. Rather, the International Committee led by Cannon boycotted the Fourth World Congress organised by the Pabloites. As a result, the wavering LSSP was not polarised and was instead allowed to drift with Pablo. We later observed, “Had a hard principled anti-revisionist fight been waged in the Ceylon section in 1953, a hard revolutionary organization with an independent claim to Trotskyist continuity might have been created then, preventing the association of the name of Trotskyism with the fundamental betrayal of the LSSP” (“Genesis of Pabloism,” *Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972).

Pablo’s liquidationist perspectives found resonance in the LSSP and encouraged a grouping which was to split away with a sizable minority of the membership, eventually coming to rest either in the Communist Party, Gunawardena’s increasingly communalist group or the SLFP itself. This tendency wanted a “Democratic Government which would have meant, at its lowest level, a Bandaranaike government, and at its highest level, a Government by a Sama Samaja majority” (quoted in “The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon”). Samarakkody further noted, “In fact, all the basic questions of Trotskyism, the program, the application of the theory of the permanent revolution, the character of the Ceylon revolution, the role of the ‘national’ bourgeoisie, questions of strategy and tactics, the Leninist concept of the party, were



Pathfinder  
**Founding American Trotskyist James P. Cannon led fight against Pabloite liquidationism in 1953.**

the issues that were involved in this factional struggle that burst into the open.”

And just as the factional struggle was bursting into the open, events in Ceylon provided clear evidence that the LSSP leadership was incapable of leading a revolutionary upsurge in the direction of a proletarian struggle for power. With the end of the economic boom precipitated by the outbreak of the Korean War (which had led to a sharp increase in world market prices of rubber and other raw materials), the UNP launched new attacks on the working masses—jacking up prices and cutting the rice ration subsidy. The LSSP called a one-day stoppage, the 12 August 1953 hartal (general strike). The strike was greeted with an outpouring of popular support from all ethnic groups, including workers on plantations where LSSP unions remained active. Colombo was shut down, and road and rail transport was halted throughout the South and West; in the town of Moratuwa, near Colombo, women workers halted trains by waving red flags. The Cabinet was forced to hold meetings aboard a British warship, the HMS *Newfoundland*.

But the LSSP was utterly unprepared for anything but a day of extra-parliamentary pressure. Recognising this, the government rallied and struck back, crushing the ill-organised, fragmented pockets of resistance. Nine people were killed, and though the prime minister was eventually compelled to resign, capitalist rule was restabilised.

The demonstrated incapacity of the LSSP helped lay the basis for the SLFP’s populist, “anti-imperialist” chauvinism to triumph in the 1956 elections and paved the way for anti-Tamil pogroms in 1958. Later, Samarakkody enumerated some powerful lessons of the hartal as vindicating the programme of permanent revolution:

“1. ...The Hartal showed that, given a revolutionary leadership, the masses could soon shed their parliamentary illusions and enter the road of mass struggle leading to the revolution itself.

“2. The masses did not divide the Ceylon revolution into two stages, (a) an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal stage and (b) an anti-capitalist stage....

“4. The alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry, which is basic to the Ceylon revolution, was achieved in action. The struggle showed that it was not necessary for the proletariat to

form a political alliance with a bourgeois or petty-bourgeois party in order to win the peasantry.”

—“The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon”

### The SLFP and “Sinhala Only”

But the leadership of the LSSP was on another trajectory. In the 1950s, the focus of Sinhalese chauvinism shifted decisively to the Tamils. (The Malayalis had mostly returned to India in the 1940s and the migration of many Burghers made them an increasingly less plausible bogeyman.) In 1955 the SLFP embraced the policy that Sinhalese be the sole official language (as had Gunawardena the year before). Though this was sometimes couched in egalitarian terms directed against the English-speaking elite, the real target of “Sinhala only” was the Tamils. That same year the LSSP cemented a no-contest agreement with the SLFP. While formally maintaining that the SLFP was a bourgeois party, the LSSP put emphasis on the SLFP’s supposedly “progressive” aspects and on the need to defeat the UNP. When the SLFP-led People’s United Front (MEP), which included the Gunawardena group, won a clear majority, the LSSP, now the main opposition party, offered to engage in “responsive cooperation” with the new government.

Several factors intervened to check the full flowering of this popular-frontist capitulation. In contradiction to its abject posture toward Bandaranaike, the LSSP continued to uphold a policy of parity of status for the Sinhala and Tamil languages; in 1955-56, its public meetings were attacked by communalist thugs. One of the SLFP’s first acts was to introduce a Sinhala Only Act. The LSSP opposed this act, but more from the standpoint of some vague anti-imperialist unity—a “common bond of Ceylonese consciousness,” as Leslie Goonewardene put it in 1960 (*A Short History of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party*)—than that of a class-based tribune of the people. Anxious about its declining influence in the petty-bourgeois Sinhalese electorate, the LSSP was hardly oriented to take advantage of the openings posed by the government’s virulently anti-Tamil policies. While the LSSP’s Lanka Estate Workers Union grew considerably, when the CP embraced “Sinhala only” in 1960, its disil-

lusioned Tamil supporters turned not to the LSSP but to Tamil communal and nationalist politics.

As well, the organised working class rapidly became disillusioned with the new “socialist” government, and a wave of strikes broke out. The LSSP abandoned its cooperation with the government, and Bandaranaike whipped up communalist hysteria, culminating in the May 1958 anti-Tamil riots and a ten-month state of emergency under the Public Security Act. With parliament shut down, the LSSP as a whole did little. Indicatively, it confined its main protest to the Public Security Act to a parliamentary gesture in February 1959, when nine LSSP MPs (including Samarakkody) were forcibly removed by the police from the chambers of parliament.

In 1957, Samarakkody and several other Central Committee members came together in opposition to the policy of “responsive cooperation,” arguing:

“Whatever was the intention of the party, in the eyes of the masses, the key to the understanding of the fundamental position of the party in relation to the government was the offer of co-operation (responsive) by the party. This offer of co-operation to the capitalist government was wrong. The party could have and should have offered support to the progressive measures of the government while stating categorically that the MEP government was a capitalist government.”

—quoted in “The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon”

The opposition grouping also argued:

“The aim of the party in relation to the MEP government is revolutionary overthrow of the government, i.e. by the method of the mass uprising. The masses are not ready now (today) for the overthrow of the government. But in view of the failure of the government to solve the pressing problems of the people, in view of the ever increasing dissension in the MEP, and the demoralisation of its own ranks, in view of the growing militancy of the working class, the situation can change very rapidly, and at any moment from now, the masses could well raise the slogan ‘Down with the MEP government.’ As a bridge between their present consciousness and the stage when they will be ready for the call for the overthrow of the Government, the party will adopt as a central agitational slogan ‘We do not want the capitalist MEP government, we want a workers and peasants government.’”

—quoted in *ibid.*

Samarakkody assessed the 1957 opposition as follows:



LSSP Collection photos

August 1953 hartal posed revolutionary opportunity: protesters block railway line at Moratuwa (left); cops attack hartal militant.



Spartacist photos

### Tamil women tea plantation workers in 1981, a strategic component of proletariat in Lanka.

“Undoubtedly this group failed to come to grips with the roots of reformism in the party. It only focused attention on some aspects of party policy. Nevertheless, the orientation of this group gave promise of possibilities for the growth of a real revolutionary tendency” (*ibid.*).

Following Bandaranaike’s assassination in September 1959 by a disgruntled ultra-chauvinist Buddhist monk who had earlier supported the SLFP regime, the LSSP had high hopes of riding to parliamentary power. But the LSSP stagnated at ten seats in the March 1960 elections, and the SLFP failed to secure a majority. Two months later, the reformist wing led by Perera finally won the LSSP to a coalition with the SLFP, and a no-contest pact was signed. The LSSP stopped talking of parity for the Tamil language. As it was, Bandaranaike’s widow, Sirimavo (popularly known as Mrs. B), won an outright victory in a second election, in July 1960, and had no need for coalition partners. The LSSP voted for the Throne Speech, the governing party’s principal policy address to parliament, and outlined its policy as support “so long as the Government in line with its socialist professions, subverts the needs of the mass movement for socialism” (*A Short History of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party*). Those left MPs, including Samarakkody, who voted against the Throne Speech were censured by the LSSP.

In response to this overt support to a bourgeois government, the Pabloite International Secretariat delivered nothing more than a mild public rebuke to the LSSP over the no-contest agreement and the vote for the Throne Speech. The American SWP, then still affiliated to the International Committee, stated in a letter to the LSSP that the “policy of working for the creation of an SLFP government appears to us to be completely at variance with the course of independent working class political action” and was “a form of ‘popular frontism’” (Letter by Tom Kerry to LSSP, 17 May 1960). When the SWP declined to publicly denounce this betrayal, James Robertson, who was to be a co-founder of the Revolutionary Tendency, strenuously objected to the party’s public silence in an 8 August letter to the SWP Political Committee (see “No to Public Silence on LSSP

Betrayal,” page 24). Healy, notwithstanding his later song and dance about opposing the LSSP betrayal, urged the SWP to “proceed with caution—as you have in the past so rightly insisted” (Letter to Joe Hansen, 14 August 1960). Finally, months after the fact, the SWP’s *Militant* (3 October 1960) carried a limp pro forma statement chastising the LSSP for its support to the SLFP.

### Popular Front Consummated

It is important to understand the backdrop to the formation of a coalition government in 1964. In 1961 and 1962, mass struggles erupted among the Tamil minority, led by the bourgeois Federal Party, in defence of their language and democratic rights. The SLFP government sent in the army to crush the protests. While Samarakkody personally joined with Tamil MPs in condemning the army’s actions, his party did nothing. The abandonment of any defence of minority rights was mirrored in the collapse of the LSSP’s Tamil union support on the plantations and elsewhere.

New waves of workers strikes also broke out. The bridge between the extraparliamentary workers struggle and the safe channels of parliament was the United Left Front (ULF) with the Communist Party and Gunawardena’s group (which now called itself the MEP), launched by the LSSP in 1963 and enthusiastically promoted by the Pabloite International Secretariat. The ULF was clearly a Sinhala-chauvinist popular front. Whatever question might have existed about the class character of Gunawardena’s group when he split in 1950, the MEP was now a rabidly communalist petty-bourgeois party; Gunawardena insisted that no Tamil organisations be invited to a joint LSSP-CP-MEP May Day rally in 1963. Samarakkody and a minority on the LSSP CC opposed the ULF, correctly noting that it was but the preparatory step to coalition with the SLFP. But wider reservations in the party about a coalition were steadily worn down.

Faced with defections and army coup attempts, Tamil mobilisations and now mass working-class struggle, Mrs. B desperately needed allies. As 40,000 rallied in Colombo on 21 March 1964, the bourgeois press was already reporting

## 1960 Letter by James Robertson to SWP Political Committee No to Public Silence on LSSP Betrayal

New York  
August 8, 1960

To the Political Committee:

Dear Comrades,

I am addressing you on the matter of our party's public silence concerning the recent and continuing betrayal of the Ceylonese working class and of the world Trotskyist movement by the Lanka Sama Samaja Party. I refer, of course, to that party's entry into a "Popular Front" electoral pact with the Stalinist party and with the left bourgeois nationalist party represented by the widow Bandaranaike.

In raising this matter privately with several members of your body I was told that letters have been sent the Ceylonese and that your view is that for the present a greater advantage is to be gained by revolutionary Marxists in the LSSP through our remaining publicly silent. I must disagree and urge you to reconsider.

When I read in the NY Times of the electoral pact and then of the election and finally of the continued support by the LSSP to the new capitalist government, my concern over this classically social-democratic capitulation was mitigated by two thoughts: 1) first that the construc-

tion of a genuine Trotskyist party for the island could perhaps emerge out of the shambles, and 2) that now the blocks would really be put to Pablo, not over an obscure vote by his followers in a provincial British Labour Party meeting, but over a clear act of historic proportions by a major party, an act about which the central world organs of the FI would have to take a stand and on the grounds *for or against* elementary revolutionary principle.

But the silence in the Militant weakens both these hopes. Within Ceylon our silence, while it may temporarily continue our "respectability" in the mouths of the leaders, also places a terrible weapon in their hands against any militants they may have to contend with—"Even the Americans are only privately disturbed and are treating this as a matter between comrades." And as for Pablo's stature before the world movement, every day of delay allows him to say in effect: "You're another maneuverer—subordinating principle to tactics."

Comrades, that you condemn the Ceylonese ex-Trotskyists, I have no doubt; but your failure to raise this publicly and with great seriousness does the movement internationally a disservice.

With comradely greetings,  
James Robertson

talks between Perera and the SLFP. At a special LSSP conference on 6-7 June, the right wing under Perera got a big majority for joining the SLFP in government. A minority resolution presented by 14 CC members stated:

"To agree to accept office in Mrs. Bandaranaike's Government, either separately or in association with the other parties in the United Left Front would be to agree to join hands with the SLFP Government in staving off the rising tide of working class and mass discontent against it, and to seek to provide working class collaboration with its policy of maintaining capitalism in Ceylon within the capitalist constitutional framework.

"The entry of the LSSP leaders into the SLFP government will result in open class collaboration, disorientation of the masses, the division of the working class and the abandonment of the struggle-perspective, which will lead to the disruption of the working class movement and the elimination of the independent revolutionary axis of the Left. In the result, the forces of capitalist reaction, far from being weakened or thwarted, will be ultimately strengthened."

—reprinted in (Healyite) *Fourth International*,  
Summer 1964

Defeated, most of the 159 delegates who opposed the coalition left to form the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary), declaring that the LSSP decision was "a complete violation of the basic principles of Trotskyism" (*Education for Socialists*, "Towards a History of the Fourth International, Part 6: Revolutionary Marxism vs. Class Collaboration in Sri Lanka").

The LSSP(R), which now replaced the LSSP as the USec's Ceylonese section, retained two MPs, Samarakkody and Meryl Fernando. Beset by further defections, the coalition did not have a parliamentary majority. On 3 December 1964 it was defeated by one vote on an amendment to the Throne

Speech by an independent rightist (and one-time LSSP member), W. Dahanayake, which asserted that "the people have no confidence in the government as it had failed to solve the problems of the people, such as employment, high cost of living and housing" (quoted in T. Perera, *Revolutionary Trails—Edmund Samarakkody: A Political Profile* [Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2006]). Samarakkody and Fernando voted for the amendment. In a statement issued by Samarakkody, the LSSP(R) declared that it "has no tears to shed whatsoever for the Government" (reprinted in M. Banda, *Ceylon: The Logic of Coalition Politics*).

The LSSP(R) was not a homogeneous group. A pro-coalition tendency led by V. Karalasingham soon headed back into the LSSP. Moreover, it quickly became evident that Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU) boss Bala Tampoe was intent on making the LSSP(R) the adjunct of his grossly opportunistic trade-union activities. Tampoe later boasted: "Even though I was a member of the LSSP I never allowed the LSSP to control the Mercantile Union. I am proud that I have steered the Union from political entanglements" (Colombo *Sunday Times*, 22 October 1995). The LSSP(R) also contained supporters of the British Healy group, who engaged in unprincipled manoeuvres with both Karalasingham and Tampoe until the Healyites departed to form their own organisation.

Samarakkody's main fight was with Tampoe. Having taken over the CMU from A.E. Goonesinha in 1948, Tampoe was, despite various "democratic" trappings, ensconced as head of the union for life, prompting the popular joke that it was easier to change the constitution of the country than that of the CMU. Tampoe's conduct, opposing joint action with other unions and even hobnobbing with the



Plough Press photos

**Labor struggles in 1964: CMU harbor workers in Colombo celebrate strike victory (left); Velona garment factory workers, mainly women, on strike picket line (above).**

class enemy and visiting imperialist officials during important class battles, reached scandalous proportions. Repulsed by this, Samarakkody led a split in 1968. His appeal to the United Secretariat to be recognised as its official section was turned down. Subsequently, we collaborated with Samarakkody's RWP in publicising Tampoe's impermissible activities (see "The Case of Bala Tampoe" and "USec Covers Up Tampoe Scandal," *Spartacist* Nos. 21 and 22, Fall 1972 and Winter 1973-74).

Samarakkody went about as far left as he could within the confines of the United Secretariat. Somewhat attracted to SWP spokesman Joseph Hansen's seemingly orthodox criticisms of the USec majority's then-guerrillaist line, Samarakkody stated in a document for the 1969 USec World Congress: "It is time for the whole of the International to consider whether our tactics during the last three decades has taken us along a strategy that is alien to our movement" ("Strategy and Tactics of Our Movement in the Backward Countries" [undated]). After being cast out of the USec, Samarakkody's critical examination went further:

"During the first two years the revolutionary tendency had the task of drawing up a proper balance sheet of the experience of the LSSP and the LSSP(R) and to cleanse itself of the hangovers of Pabloism, which substituted empiricism and pragmatism for dialectical materialism and which abandoned the task of building the revolutionary party to the participation and 'integration' in the so-called living movement of the masses, leading the Pabloites to parliamentarism and syndicalism. The Revolutionary Workers Party cannot but reject the politics of both wings of the United Secretariat—the ultra-left opportunist mixture of Mandel, Livio [Maitan], [Pierre] Frank, as well as the opportunist group of Hansen-Novack."

—"The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ceylon"

### Discussions with Samarakkody

Samarakkody first wrote to us in 1971. For us this was a significant development. Ceylon had considerable importance in the history of the Trotskyist movement and as a staging area for revolution throughout the Indian subcontinent. Samarakkody and Fernando were old, tested cadres with a track record. Cadres represent the accumulated capital of long experience, and Trotsky himself, for exam-

ple, had spent long years trying to win over the likes of Henk Sneevliet, a veteran of the Communist movement, in the struggle for the Fourth International. In another sense, Samarakkody was important to us in the same way as were Healy, Lambert and the Bolivian Guillermo Lora. We kept probing for elements in and around the United Secretariat and other ostensibly Trotskyist formations, understanding that local groupings might not be firmly bound to Pabloite centrism or Hansen's reformism. This necessary testing suggested that all such wings, splinters and fragments claiming the mantle of the Fourth International were finished as revolutionary forces, that it was necessary to build anew including by regrouping revolutionary cadres from these organisations through a process of splits and fusions.

Moreover, we were conscious of the mistake that Cannon and the American SWP had made after Trotsky's death of not accepting the challenge of international leadership and instead waiting for someone else to do it. Consequently, we set out to see if there was a principled basis for us to join together with the RWP in the struggle to reforge the Fourth International. This necessarily involved an attempt to determine to what extent those of the old Ceylonese Trotskyists who had split over the 1964 betrayal had actually succeeded in transcending the "old," "good" LSSP. Discussions also developed, among other questions, over our propaganda group perspective, the popular front and the national question.

We had learned through hard experience that one could not evaluate a group from a distance simply on the basis of its written propaganda. While the Healyites, for example, produced a number of excellent documents in the late 1950s and early '60s, we learned through our contact with them that behind these fine words there lurked a wretched history of political banditry and thuggery. Samarakkody's 1964 vote against the popular front constituted a verifiable demonstration of revolutionary principle. But it was only through painfully expensive visits to Sri Lanka—perhaps half a dozen in as many years—that any real sense was gained of the perspectives and work of the RWP.

An initial focus of our differences on the national question

was the Near East. The RWP disagreed with our position of revolutionary defeatism in the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973, maintaining that Israel was simply an imperialist outpost and thus it was necessary to extend military support to the Arab bourgeois states. The RWP also rejected our contention that in the case of geographically interpenetrated peoples—as in Israel-Palestine and Cyprus—the realization of self-determination for one people could, under capitalism, only come at the expense of the democratic rights of the other. Thus, in a 1975 letter Samarakkody asserted that “the possibility, or probability, of the oppression of the Turkish Cypriot minority, will not deter revolutionary Marxists in supporting the just struggle of the Cypriot people for complete independence” (“National Question: RWP-SL/U.S. Differences,” 31 October 1975, reprinted in *iSt International Discussion Bulletin* No. 7, March 1977). The problem with this is that there is no single “Cypriot people,” as was demonstrated with the compacting of two mutually hostile statelets under Turkish and Greek suzerainty, respectively, involving mass population transfers. Such conflicting national interests in the case of interpenetrated peoples can only be *equitably* resolved within the framework of proletarian state power.

The crucial point of difference between us and the RWP was the popular front. In the 1970 elections, the RWP (then the Revolutionary Samasamaja Party) had advocated support to the LSSP or CP, which were part of the SLFP-led popular front, in those constituencies where their opponents were candidates of capitalist parties:

*“As a first step in the direction of ending Coalition politics and all form of class collaboration, and for the re-groupment of the working-class under its own independent class banner, in the perspective of the anti-capitalist struggle, the Revolutionary Samasamaja Party calls for support of the candidates of working-class parties only where they are pitted against the candidates of capitalist parties.”* [emphasis in original]

—“Revolutionary Samasamaja Party and the General Elections,” May 1970

Our position is that there is no basis for critical electoral support to a bourgeois workers party in a popular front, since any exploitable contradiction between the reformists’ political subordination to capitalism and their claim (implicit or explicit) to represent the interests of the working class is suppressed when they are part of a bourgeois coalition. The popular front violates the principle of proletarian class independence from the bourgeoisie. The history of the workers movement on the island speaks volumes to what is wrong with any form of support to the popular front.

In 1974, a delegation from the RWP was able to visit Canada for extensive discussion with the international Spartacist tendency. There we learned that Samarakkody had lately repudiated the 1964 vote which brought down the popular front. The discussions on this question, then and later, were clouded by tactical questions. The vote for the rightist amendment had been awkward and inept, the comrades falling into a UNP manoeuvre. Nonetheless it was principled, obligatory, courageous and honourable. Sooner rather than later, Samarakkody and Fernando would again have faced the question of voting to bring the government down, likely with their two votes being the decisive ones. Behind all the RWP’s talk of a “tactical mistake” lay the capitulatory conclusion that the preservation of the coalition was more important than Marxist principle. The basis of our respect for Samarakkody was

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**Toward the Rebirth of the Fourth International!**

**Declaration for the Organizing of an International Trotskyist Tendency**



Portrait near Naples, 1933

ADOPTED IN JULY 1974

1. The Spartacist League of America and New Central and the Socialist League of the United States hereby...  
2. The Spartacist League of America and New Central and the Socialist League of the United States hereby...  
3. The Spartacist League of America and New Central and the Socialist League of the United States hereby...

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**Our 1974 call for international Trotskyist tendency pointed to Samarakkody's article on Ceylonese Trotskyism as part of our programmatic heritage.**

the 1964 vote, and now he deplored it. In the words of one comrade: “He said he was sorry, we thought he was great (before we knew he was sorry).”

The LSSP reaped only disillusion and disaffection from its support for coalitionism, its working-class base delivered up to Sinhala chauvinism. Soon after joining the coalition, the LSSP backed the Shastri-Sirimavo pact signed by Mrs. B and Indian prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, which called for deporting more than half a million Tamils to India. In January 1966, the LSSP, in league with the CP, organised a communalist campaign to protest against limited concessions proposed by the UNP government on Tamil language rights. The 1970 election campaign by the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition reached new heights of anti-Tamil chauvinism. LSSP Colvin R. de Silva's crowning triumph is to bear responsibility as Minister for Constitutional Affairs for the 1972 constitution that enshrined “Sinhala only” and abrogated previous formal safeguards for Lanka's minorities.

From the Velona Mills strike of young women workers in Moratuwa led by the LSSP(R) in July 1964 through the strike waves of the next six years, the LSSP stood with the communalist bourgeois coalition against workers struggles. What emerged as a reaction to coalitionism was the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which began as a rural-based, radical leftist movement inspired by Che Guevara and the revolutionary Vietnamese struggle against U.S. imperialism and its local puppets. Responding to one Ceylonese correspondent in 1972, we noted:

“The main point of our concern with the youth uprising impinges on our principal historical criticism of the Ceylonese Trotskyist movement—that its deep strain of petty-bourgeois impulse found expression in a relatively privileged Ceylonese nationalism rather than in struggle to win the proletariat in Ceylon (and especially the Tamil plantation work-

ers) as a staging area for proletarian revolution on the Indian subcontinent as a whole.”

—quoted in Letter to Samarakkody, 27 October 1973, reprinted in *iSt International Discussion Bulletin* No. 3, May 1974

In the late 1960s, the JVP was the organisation that subjectively revolutionary youth joined in opposition to the parliamentary shell game and coalition betrayals. JVP leader Rohana Wijeweera presented himself as “a modern Bolshevik.” The JVP’s base included many educated rural youth who spoke only Sinhalese and thus faced bleak prospects in the semicolonial economy. A JVP-led uprising in early 1971 was drowned in blood by the SLFP-LSSP-CP coalition government, which slaughtered thousands of young militants. In the aftermath, the JVP’s growing emphasis on Sri Lanka’s “liberation” from the “Indian threat” (as well as its petty-bourgeois, peasant-based strategy) ultimately transformed it into a reactionary communalist organisation intent on destroying the Tamil people. This was the product, in no small part, of the “Sinhala only” education policies pushed by the SLFP and now embraced by the LSSP.

One thing that attracted us to Samarakkody and the RWP was the principled stand they took on the 1971 uprising. While the LSSP and CP coalitionists tried to cover the tracks of their butchery by howling about the JVP being CIA reactionaries, Samarakkody acted as a defence lawyer for imprisoned JVPers while publicly criticising the JVP’s politics:

“In these circumstances, there was no question of the party supporting this struggle. The party did not and could not have supported this struggle nor do anything, nor could have done anything by way of assisting to promote or continue this armed struggle.

“But as this struggle was between the oppressed youth on the one side and the forces of capitalism on the other, the side of revolutionary Marxists is the side of the fighting youth, meaning thereby, that they should defend the fighting youth against the actions of the capitalist state. Concretely, this meant that revolutionary Marxists should oppose and fight the government in its attempt to kill, torture, imprison and harass the fighting youth, their supporters or relatives.”

—“Revolutionary Samasamaja Party & the Armed Struggle,” 1971

The JVP grew on the basis of the failure of working-class leadership, and despite Samarakkody’s principled role in 1971, it is indicative of a preoccupation with the parliamentary coalition milieu that the RWP was never able to attract any militants from among these radicalised youth. Even when fissures later opened up between the Sinhala-chauvinist leadership of Wijeweera and more leftist-inclined elements of the JVP prepared to acknowledge Tamil rights, the RWP ignored our suggestions to have some orientation to these youth.

### **Emergence of Spartacist League/Lanka**

Given the impasse reached in 1974, we were somewhat surprised when, in April 1979, we received a proposal for fusion from the RWP. A special conference of the RWP in February 1979 had voted for this perspective. The impetus clearly came from younger, active elements in the RWP’s Marxist Youth, who wished to break out of stagnancy. We did not know then that the historic leaders of the RWP, Samarakkody and Fernando, were opposed to the fusion perspective. In our reply to the RWP, we wrote:

“As with all sections and candidates for fusion we would need to have a mutual sense of assurance—in a programmatically

definable way—that the Ceylonese comrades seek proletarian revolution in Ceylon and in South Asia. If these two considerations exist—the determination to act in concert internationally and the programmatically expressed appetite to seek proletarian revolution—then there is a basis for a valid fusion.”

—quoted in “Toward the International Trotskyist League!” *Spartacist* (English edition) No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80

Leftists, especially ostensible Trotskyists, in Lanka are attuned to seeking an international connection to enhance their authority, and Samarakkody certainly liked to get off the island, be it on MPs’ junkets to the USSR and Egypt or for international gatherings of ostensible Trotskyists. However, we were not interested in a ceremonial or federated “international” but rather an authentically Leninist, democratic-centralist international party. We gave the RWP access to our internal discussion bulletins, but the RWP never opened up its internal life to us.

Understanding that a fusion would be of incalculable value, we sent an authoritative delegation to Sri Lanka. A unification agreement was signed that noted, despite amendments by the RWP to water down the key formulations, the political obstacles to a valid unification:

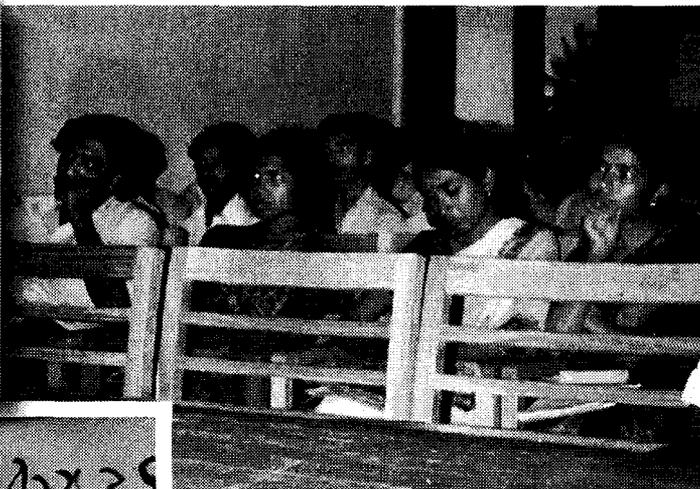
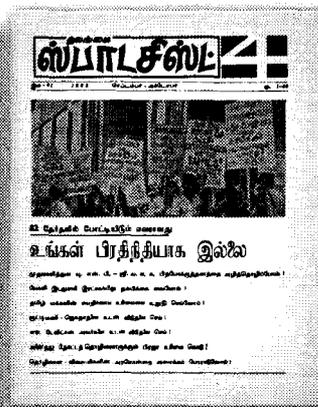
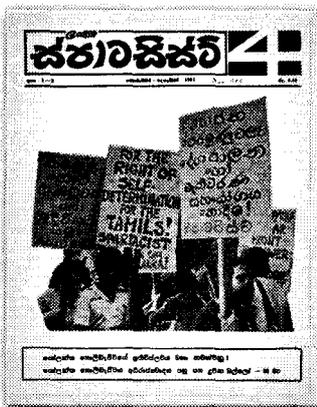
“Politically and as an extreme characterisation the RWP could see elements of sectarian ultra-leftism in the iSt, centering upon at best indifference to national struggles of the oppressed, and willful ineffectuality in approaching the masses and in party building. The iSt for its part could perceive, as an extreme characterisation, the RWP as partaking at least in part of a centrism which tails petty-bourgeois nationalism and gives critical support to the worst aspects of revisionism and reformism, while in its own propaganda is largely unable to transcend mere democratic demands.”

—quoted in *ibid.*

The draft document for our 1979 international conference described the unification as an important opportunity for the extension of the international Spartacist tendency, but a difficult one, especially given the magnitude of the outstanding political differences, the geographical distance and the divergent cultural and living standards. In line with their prevalent notion that the leadership is anointed and eternal, the RWP sent a delegation to the conference consisting of Samarakkody, Fernando and Tulsiri Andrade, another leader who had abstained on the fusion perspective. Hidden from us was the fact that the delegation did not include anyone from the pro-fusion majority, already a sign of bad faith.

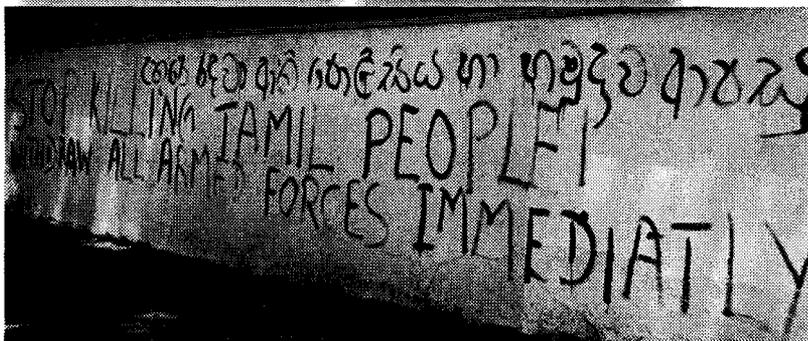
At the conference the turning point was a panel discussion on the popular-front question. While the iSt speakers sought to draw on the international experience of Trotsky’s struggles and more recent examples, Samarakkody focused narrowly on Ceylon, more and more turning political differences into questions of personal credibility and the integrity of “Edmund.” Our minimum condition for the unification was that, in the context of international democratic-centralism, the 1964 vote would be defended and supported publicly. The panel discussion underlined that for our part there would be no diplomatic non-aggression pact, but Leninist political struggle for a common international line. The RWP leaders would not accept this.

But the delegation could hardly return to Sri Lanka and report that the unification had broken down over the popular-front question, since most of the pro-fusion majority of the RWP agreed with the iSt position. Instead Samarakkody found his pretext with the trial of Bill Logan, a former leader of our Australian and British sections, for



Spartacist photos

**Spartacist League/Lanka was committed to fight against Tamil national oppression. Clockwise from above left: First issues of Lanka Spartacist in Sinhala (November-December 1981) and Tamil (1982); Tamil students attend Spartacist public meeting at Jaffna University, December 1981; SL/L in Colombo denounced anti-Tamil terror in the North in 1981.**



crimes against communist morality and human decency (see ICL Pamphlet, *The Logan Dossier*). Samarakkody was a member of the trial body and agreed that Logan had had a fair trial and was a “monster” guilty of “a pattern of calculated personal and sexual manipulation.” But he sought to lay responsibility for Logan’s crimes at the feet of other leading comrades, who had been among his main victims, and argued that Logan should not be expelled because he had not acted out of “personal interests.”

Samarakkody’s lawyering for Logan provoked deep anger and disgust among the conference participants. As one comrade noted, the range of unappetising human desires is not exhausted by pecuniary gain or power: “Did Jack the Ripper kill to make money or become the Prime Minister?” Perhaps Samarakkody calculated that the question of sex would elicit a prudish revulsion in the context of the deep sexual repression in Lankan society. Certainly his stance connoted a disregard for the question of women’s oppression. Though women workers constitute a strategic component of the proletariat on the island, the RWP had no women members; one member of the RWP delegation had argued that since women were four or five times more difficult to recruit, it was better to concentrate on recruiting four or five men rather than one woman.

The next day the RWP delegates packed their bags and left, throwing away the opportunity to argue their positions before hundreds of Trotskyists. Significantly, the RWP delegates’ reports to their membership did not even mention the popular-front discussion, but rather consisted of a litany of supposed bureaucratic abuses, often laughable and generally more revealing of their state of mind than the iSt’s alleged bureaucratism. They were not purged, as they alleged, nor intimidated; they simply ran away. Samarakkody was never so concerned about decorous procedures when he was in parliament, but maybe that was all just a bunch of “old boys” play-acting. The experience at the 1979 conference

proved Samarakkody & Co. to be used-up human material. Our prolonged fraternal experience was resolved in a decidedly negative way. But its clarification had political value.

Nor did the RWP delegation succeed in inoculating their members against the iSt. The fight continued within the RWP itself. Those comrades who upheld the 1964 vote and the fusion perspective formed the Bolshevik Faction. In 1981, the Bolshevik Faction fused with the iSt and formed the Spartacist League/Lanka. The 24 May 1981 fusion document was explicitly based on the lessons of the struggle against “the parochial and vacillating centrism” of the Samarakkody RWP leadership (see “Stepping Stone Toward South Asian Revolution: Spartacist League Formed in Sri Lanka,” *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 31-32, Summer 1981). A keystone of the SL/L’s programme was the recognition that a consistent, principled line on the Tamil question was integrally related to categorical opposition to the popular front in all its variants: “Coalition politics has meant not only subservience to the capitalists but also Sinhala chauvinism” (*ibid.*). This went hand in hand with the understanding that Ceylonese Trotskyism could be reformed only on the basis of a revolutionary perspective encompassing the Indian subcontinent:

“The revolutionary intentions of Sri Lankan militants will be proven by their practice on the Tamil question. Across the narrow Palk Straits live many millions more Tamils. The struggle to win Tamil comrades expresses the commitment to helping build a revolutionary party in India.”

—*ibid.*

Our comrades’ commitment to the struggle against anti-Tamil chauvinism was put to the test almost immediately. At the initiative of an SL/L supporter at Colombo University, student strikers there raised the demand for admission of Tamil freshmen, cutting against the grain of an island-wide practice barring Tamils from any university other than Jaffna University. This struggle was the first recent instance

of Sinhalese students championing Tamil rights. Despite its tiny numbers, the SL/L published journals in both Sinhala and Tamil. And in the face of anti-Tamil terror in the North, the SL/L distinguished itself in raising its voice in protest.

Throughout the 1980s, other sections of the iSt, often uniquely among Western left groups, initiated or participated in protests around the world against escalating anti-Tamil terror in Sri Lanka. Our comrades were invited to address mass Tamil rallies in London's Trafalgar Square, a measure of the authority accrued as a result of our principled stand in this increasingly nationalist milieu. In 1983, decades of Sinhala-chauvinist popular-frontism culminated in unprecedentedly murderous pogroms orchestrated by the UNP government of J.R. Jayawardene. These pogroms, aimed at eliminating the important Tamil merchant and business layer in Colombo, were a decisive step in destroying the economic interpenetration of the island's peoples. Thousands were killed and upwards of 100,000 Tamils were forced to flee as refugees to the North or to India; in addition, as many as 200,000 "stateless" Tamil labourers were terrorised into fleeing from the hill country plantations. We recognised that this was a watershed in the island's history, noting:

"While the rest of the left opposed Tamil self-determination, we were for that *right* but argued against exercising it, pointing out that economically and in other ways, it would be a catastrophe. Now this catastrophe has happened, national separation is a reality. Thus today we demand: 'For the right to Tamil Eelam! For a Socialist Federation of Eelam and Lanka!'"

—"Protest Mass State Terror Against Lankan Tamils!"  
*Workers Vanguard* No. 361, 31 August 1984

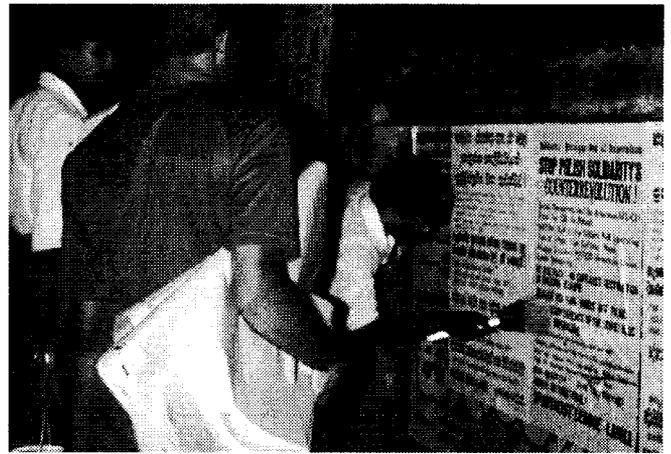
However, in our desperate attempt to find a means to defend the Tamil people against further massacres, we also raised the unprincipled call: "Patriation of Tamils in Sinhala areas to the North under the protection of the Indian army" (see *Workers Vanguard* No. 336, 12 August 1983, and *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 35, Autumn 1983). While the articles in question explicitly warned against placing any confidence in the Indian bourgeois state of Indira Gandhi to defend the Tamils in Sri Lanka, in fact the slogan amounted to a statement of confidence in the Indian bourgeoisie and could also be read as a call for forced population transfers of the remaining Tamils in Colombo and elsewhere on the island. In the interest of maintaining our record of Marxist clarity and integrity, the recent Sixth ICL Conference voted to publicly repudiate the 1983 "patriation" slogan.

Another decisive aspect of the SL/L's repudiation of the legacy of class collaboration and reformist betrayal on the island was its forthright stand in defence of women's rights. As the 1981 fusion document stated:

"Recent events in Iran and Afghanistan have sharply demonstrated that in the underdeveloped countries of the East the woman question has particular significance. We must raise demands that address the special oppression of women and develop special methods for work among women, for once aroused the working women will provide many of the best fighters for communism, as they did for the Bolshevik Revolution in Soviet Central Asia. The Tamil women plantation workers and as yet unorganized women workers in Free Trade Zone industries like textiles are important sectors of the Ceylonese proletariat and must be won to our cause."

—"Spartacist League Formed in Sri Lanka"

When strikes broke out among mainly Sinhalese women garment workers in 1984, the SL/L solidarily with the strikers and the iSt launched international fund-raising efforts to support their struggles. In the course of this work, the SL/L won



Spartacist

**SL/L comrades put up posters in Colombo opposing December 1981 counterrevolutionary power bid by Polish Solidarność.**

a number of these militants to the revolutionary programme.

Escalating anti-Tamil terror and general repression against the left took its toll on our tiny organisation. In 1984, Vincent Thomas, editor of the SL/L press, was ordered to appear at the notorious fourth floor offices in Colombo of the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) secret police, where his life was threatened. To his credit, Samarakkody assisted in the legal defence of our comrade. The SL/L and iSt were subsequently the target of a scurrilous anti-communist, terror-baiting assault in the reactionary Lankan press.

The 1983 pogroms, the nationalist Tamil insurgency and the intense state repression combined to cut short the possibility of public work on the island. The capacity to assist our small and vulnerable organisation in combating the enormous pressures weighing down on them, through international discussion and collaboration, was decisively undermined by the absence of a common language. Whereas Samarakkody's first language was English, allowing for real discussion, this was not the case with the comrades who constituted the SL/L. Notwithstanding our efforts to bridge the language gap—with comrades in New York studying Sinhala and comrades in Lanka taking classes in English—our Lankan section was very much a victim of the "Sinhala only" policies pushed through by the popular front.

### The Continuing Legacy of Popular-Frontism

With the popular front's chauvinist treachery played out in full, why did Samarakkody renege on the 1964 vote? It is clear that he switched his position following the emergence within the LSSP of an oppositional tendency, which became the Nava [New] Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) in 1977. Here, it seemed, was an opportunity to revive the old LSSP, to once again be a respected member of the old crowd. One iSt comrade visiting Lanka in October 1975 reported that the RWP "seem to be quite happy with their prospects, especially since the LSSP being thrown out of government has opened LSSP supporters up to them" and that Samarakkody's appetite to have a weekly paper "seemed too much a matter of replying to what N.M. Perera and Colvin de Silva had just said in parliament."

In an obituary on Samarakkody in the British *Workers Power*, the late Al Richardson, then editor of *Revolutionary History* and a consummate Labour Party entrant, wrote:

“Karalasingham’s contention that they should have undertaken entry work within the old LSSP received full confirmation within a decade when a mass left did indeed split away from it to set up the NSSP led by Vasudeva Nanayakkara. But Edmund preferred to stand by his principles, alone if necessary.”

—*Workers Power*, February 1992

Contrary to Richardson and all the popular-front apologists, Samarakkody’s failing was that he did not make a sufficient break from that calamitous tradition.

Aside from its complicity in all the crimes of the popular front, the NSSP is a replica of many of the worst features of the old LSSP. It has been repeatedly involved in the never-ending popular-front line-ups, including with the SLFP. NSSP founder Nanayakkara was himself an LSSP MP from 1970 to 1977. In June 1990, the NSSP joined with the SLFP and LSSP in a six-party statement that supported the UNP government’s genocidal onslaught against the Tamils in the name of a fight against “the fascism of the LTTE [Tamil Tigers]” (quoted in *Revolutionary Trails*).

The NSSP and its offspring continue that treacherous tradition to this day. For a number of years, the NSSP was affiliated to the international tendency led by the late Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe. In the late 1980s, the United Socialist Party (USP) was formed as a putatively left split from the NSSP. The USP sided with Taaffe when he and Grant broke up a few years later, while the NSSP went on to join the USec. During the bloody SLFP government offensive against the Tamils in 2009, the USP built a popular-frontist “Platform for Freedom” with the right-wing UNP. As for the erstwhile Healyites in Lanka, now linked to David North’s World Socialist Web Site, their occasionally orthodox criticisms of the popular-frontism of the NSSP, USP, etc. are belied by their abject refusal to recognise the right of self-determination of the Tamil people.

### Bolshevik Methods of Party Building

The conception of party building that Samarakkody carried with him from the LSSP was far removed from Leninism. Lenin explicitly rejected the argument that the differences between backward Russia and the advanced capitalist countries of West Europe rendered the Bolshevik experience inapplicable for these countries. But the lessons of Bolshevism were also patently applicable to countries like

Sri Lanka, which have similar features of the combined and uneven development that marked prerevolutionary Russia:

“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 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 (1903-1917) 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.”

—“*Left-Wing*” *Communism—An Infantile Disorder* (1920)

Central to the Bolsheviks’ capacity to uphold the revolutionary lessons they had learned and to intervene effectively was Lenin’s struggle for a democratic-centralist vanguard party of professional revolutionaries. In his 1902 polemic against Economism, Lenin argued that it was “our duty to assist every capable worker to become a *professional* agitator, organiser, propagandist, literature distributor, etc., etc.” (*What Is To Be Done?*). He stressed: “A worker-agitator who is at all gifted and ‘promising’ *must not be left* to work eleven hours a day in a factory. We must arrange that he be maintained by the Party” (*ibid.*).

The LSSP demonstrated features of general social-democratic functioning as well as of the particular bourgeois society in which it operated. The leadership was the educated, English-speaking elite—MPs, lawyers and trade-union officials. They kept their connections to the rest of the petty-bourgeois and bourgeois elite. UNP Cabinet members would attend the weddings of LSSP leaders’ daughters. Samarakkody’s wife would tell the story of running into Mrs. Bandaranaike at her old school girls’ association and being asked how the “old lion” Edmund was.

The caste, family and social structures of Sri Lanka all emphasise status and hierarchy. Ideas are examined not for their merit but according to the status of the presenter. To question or challenge an idea implies disrespect and ingratitude. Thus in political parties or in trade unions, the educated leader becomes a kind of benevolent patron and guardian, to whom deferential loyalty should be extended. What full-timers the LSSP had were often ill-educated activists, unemployed volunteers or workers in the party press, while the lawyers and MPs acted as public spokesmen for the party. And while the English-



SL/Lanka

Tamil homes and shops in Colombo were burned down during government-orchestrated massacre in 1983.



# M. N. Roy: Nationalist Menshevik

In a review enthusing over Charles Wesley Ervin's *Tomorrow Is Ours: The Trotskyist Movement in India and Ceylon, 1935-48*, the British journal *Revolutionary History* takes particular note of Ervin's "excellent section (pp 29-38) on the work of the neglected Indian Marxist, M. N. Roy" (*Revolutionary History* Vol. 9, No. 4). In fact, Ervin's treatment of this pseudo-Marxist adventurer, who figured prominently in the Bukharinite Right Opposition from its inception in 1928, is a piece of philistine idolatry fully in line with bourgeois academic studies of Indian Communism, in which Roy is far from neglected. What distinguishes Roy, and makes him attractive to such types, is that he embodied the revisionist endeavour of trying to blend Communism and nationalism. In pursuit of this effort, Roy became a vulgar democrat who pushed the bourgeois ideology of nationalism, albeit with some Communist colouration, making him an opponent of the fight for a Leninist vanguard party based on proletarian internationalism.

Notwithstanding their occasional attempts to dress as "Trotskyists," the motley crew of Labourite leftists who publish *Revolutionary History* have long held high the banner of Right Communism in order to alibi the "left wing of the possible." They dismiss the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 as an aberrant historical event—at best, a failed experiment—and provide slick lawyers' arguments to whitewash the betrayal of revolutionary opportunities elsewhere. To this end, *Revolutionary History* has embraced Heinrich Brandler, leader of the German Communist Party during the aborted revolution in 1923 and later of the International Right Opposition, and amnestied the Spanish POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification) of one-time Left Oppositionist Andrés Nin. Nin's fusion with the Right Communist Joaquín Maurín to form the centrist POUM in 1935 dealt a death blow to the prospects of forging a Leninist vanguard party in Spain on the eve of the Civil War. (For more on these questions, see "A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern" and "Trotskyism vs. Popular Frontism in the Spanish Civil War," *Spartacist* [English edition] Nos. 56 and 61, Spring 2001 and Spring 2009.)

Ervin's case for Roy begins with the standard academic/nationalist account that falsely depicts Roy as a left critic of Lenin in the discussion on the national and colonial questions at the 1920 Second Congress of the Communist International (CI). To believe Ervin, Roy was prescient in advocating Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution in the colonial East. Ervin asserts that "Roy rejected a 'Menshevik' model for India" whereas Lenin, per Ervin, insisted "that the bourgeoisie of Asia still had a revolutionary role to play in world history. As we have seen, that was the conception he had formed in the period before WWI, when he was still a left social democrat" (*Tomorrow Is Ours*). Ervin continues: "By all accounts Lenin showed a willingness to reconsider some of his assumptions" in light of Roy's criticisms.

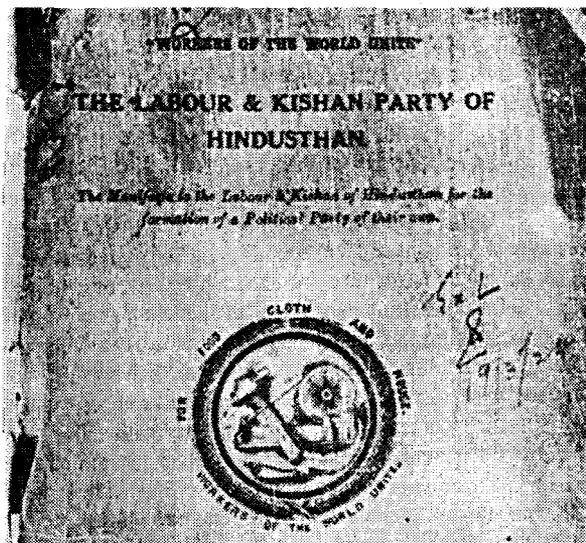
Lenin's chief aim in regard to the colonial question at the Second Congress was to draw a hard line within the workers movement of the advanced capitalist countries against the social-imperialism of the Second International. As we have noted elsewhere (see "The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism," *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 53, Summer 1997), the proletarian movement in the colonial world was then new and small; it was not at all clear what role the nascent bourgeoisies would play in the struggle for national liberation nor whether the programme of permanent revolution that had been vindicated in tsarist Russia was applicable in places like China and India. Thus the theses submitted by Lenin dealt with the relationship between the Communist parties and bourgeois-nationalist movements in broad outline. But Lenin's draft theses, which were approved without any substantive changes, were categorical in their insistence on proletarian class independence, asserting: "The Communist International must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form" ("Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions," June 1920).

Lenin did accede to Roy in speaking of support to "national-revolutionary" rather than "bourgeois-democratic" movements in the colonies. To Lenin, there was no programmatic or principled distinction here, as "any national movement can only be a bourgeois-democratic movement, since



V. K. Bulla

Delegates to Second CI Congress, July 1920. Lenin (in forefront), Zinoviev (at center), Roy (second from right).



no credit

**Indian Communists call for worker-peasant party, May 1923. In China, this line paved way to betrayal of 1925-27 Revolution and Guomindang massacre of Communists and workers in 1927 (right).**

the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consists of peasants who represent bourgeois-capitalist relationships” (“Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions,” 26 July 1920). So much for Lenin supposedly “reconsidering” his allegedly “left social-democratic” views!

In his effort to bolster Roy’s credentials at Lenin’s expense, Ervin completely disappears the fact that it was Roy who was compelled to “reconsider some of his assumptions” in the course of the discussion. A particular focus of criticism was Roy’s argument that the proletariat of Europe was so corrupted by imperialism that it could not seize power before the colonial revolution. Thus Roy’s draft supplementary theses, written as Germany was in the throes of revolutionary turmoil and proletarian struggles swept Europe, had initially asserted: “Without the breaking up of the colonial empire, the overthrow of the capitalist system in Europe does not appear possible” (*Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite!—Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920* [New York: Pathfinder, 1991]). Notably it was the delegate from the Communist Party of Iran, Ahmed Sultanzadeh, who most forcefully addressed Roy’s prejudices against the West European proletariat in the discussion, stating, “Does that really mean, as Comrade Roy would have us believe, that the fate of communism throughout the world depends on the victory of the social revolution in the Orient? Certainly not” (*ibid.*). Sultanzadeh added, “The thunder of revolution in the West shook the Orient to the roots, giving strength to revolutionaries in Persia and Turkey” (*ibid.*). Roy was an early advocate not of permanent revolution but of the Maoist/Guevarist notion of the “Third World” “countryside” surrounding the imperialist “cities.”

Also stricken from Roy’s draft theses, which were adopted by the Congress in heavily amended form, were repeated assertions that the colonial masses were already breaking from the bourgeois nationalists toward revolutionary politics—this at a time when there was not yet even an (ephemeral) émigré group of Indian Communists, which was formed in Soviet Tashkent only some months after the Second Congress. Like many a millenarian newcomer to the Communist movement, Roy failed

to fathom the arduous struggle needed to forge a party capable of leading the working masses to power, a lesson Lenin had sought to drive home in “*Left-Wing*” *Communism—An Infantile Disorder*, written on the eve of the Congress.

As his Pollyannaish expectations crashed up against objective reality, Roy went from minimising the hold of bourgeois nationalism over the masses to accommodating to it. Ervin asserts that Roy “was, of course, absolutely right” in arguing at the Fourth CI Congress in November-December 1922 that the colonial bourgeoisie was bound ultimately to become a counterrevolutionary force (*Tomorrow Is Ours*). Ervin does not, of course, indicate that Roy made this unexceptional observation in the context of unqualified support for the “anti-imperialist united front” adopted at the Fourth Congress, which implicitly posed a Menshevik, two-stage programme for the colonial revolution, with the first stage being a democratic struggle, in a political bloc with bourgeois nationalism, against imperialism. As we observed in “The Origins of Chinese Trotskyism,” it was a sharp descent from the opportunist impulses expressed at the Fourth Congress of the revolutionary Comintern to the full-blown catastrophic betrayal of the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 carried out by the Comintern of Stalin/Bukharin; in the wake of the political counterrevolution of 1923-24 in the Soviet Union, the CI was progressively transformed from a party of world revolution to an instrument of Stalin’s diplomatic manoeuvres. However, on one significant programmatic question, Roy stood to the right even of the Fourth Congress Theses.

Ervin acknowledges, without explanation, that Roy, “after emphasizing the need to ‘develop our parties in these countries,’ added, rather ambiguously, that only ‘a political party representing the workers and peasants’ could ensure the ‘final victory’” (*Tomorrow Is Ours*). Ervin continues, “After the Fourth Congress Roy pursued the People’s Party strategy for India” and “was beginning to toy with the idea that other classes could be pressured to start the revolution.” In fact, in the months before the Fourth Congress Roy was already calling for a worker-peasant party in India and amalgamating the interests of the proletariat and the peasantry, writing, for example: “The leadership of the national struggle must

be taken over by a mass party consciously representing the interests, immediate as well as ultimate, of the workers and peasants" ("Wanted a New Party," October 1922, *Selected Works of M. N. Roy* [Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1987]). On this question, Roy truly was prescient, anticipating the line subsequently purveyed by Stalin and Bukharin with disastrous effect.

In his incisive 1928 exposure of the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern, Trotsky tore apart the anti-Marxist notion of a "two-class" party, writing:

"Marxism has always taught, and Bolshevism, too, accepted, and taught, that the peasantry and proletariat are two different classes, that it is false to identify their interests in capitalist society in any way, and that a peasant can join the communist party only if, from the property standpoint, he adopts the views of the proletariat...."

"The celebrated idea of 'workers' and peasants' parties' seems to have been specially created to camouflage bourgeois parties which are compelled to seek support from the peasantry but who are also ready to absorb workers into their ranks. The Kuomintang has entered the annals of history for all time as a classic type of such a party."

—*The Third International After Lenin* (1928)

Under Roy's guidance, the Communist Party of India (CPI) set out from its inception in December 1925 to build a Peasants' and Workers' Party in Bengal. In 1926 Roy insisted that the CPI "is bound to be a small sect without any political influence" unless it itself became a Workers and Peasants Party, arguing that this was the way to gain control over "a large revolutionary element" that was not "ideologically prepared and courageous enough to join openly a Communist Party" (quoted in V. B. Karnik, *M. N. Roy: Political Biography* [Bombay: Nav Jagriti Samaj, 1978]). Roy's aim in all this was to capture the bourgeois Indian National Congress and make it a "people's" or "revolutionary nationalist" party based on a democratic programme of national independence. Historian John Patrick Haithcox writes: "Roy hoped that Indian communists would be able to duplicate the apparent success of their Chinese counterparts in working within the Kuomintang" (Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M. N. Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920-1939* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971]).

Ervin plays down Roy's role in promoting two-class parties while giving faint praise to Trotsky for opposing Stalin/Bukharin on this question in 1928. As is typical of the *Revolutionary History* school, Ervin then cynically chastises Trotsky, citing a 1928 article by Trotsky in which he supposedly "recognized, belatedly, that the Opposition should have fought this line much earlier, during 1923-25, when it was being formulated and implemented experimentally" (*Tomorrow Is Ours*). What Trotsky recognised in that 1928 article was rather different, to wit: "We underestimated the full depths of the backsliding, expressed as early as 1924-25, in the illiterate slogan of 'two-class workers' and peasants' parties for the East'" ("The Opposition's Errors—Real and Alleged," May 1928).

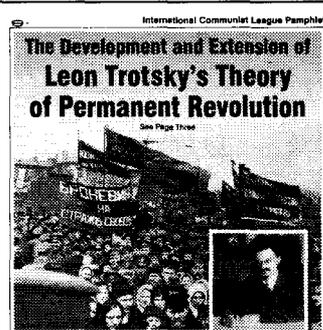
More recently, in a 23 August 2010 letter criticising *Workers Vanguard* for daring to describe Roy as a "pseudo-Marxist adventurer," Ervin goes so far as to make Lenin and Trotsky complicit in Roy's two-class party schema, claiming that "neither Lenin nor Trotsky objected" to Roy's call for a "people's party" at the Fourth Congress (see "An Exchange on M. N. Roy," *Workers Vanguard* No. 969, 19 November 2010). This is spurious, to say the least. Lenin was already gravely ill by the time of the Fourth Congress and played a very limited role there, but the entire body of Lenin's works is replete with warnings against confusing the class interests of the proletariat and the peasantry. The same is true for Trotsky.

Ervin to the contrary, Trotsky *had fought* against the "two-class" party *in 1924*, when it reared its head on the American terrain. Under the influence of the transplanted Hungarian adventurer John Pepper, the American Communists were supporting the Farmer-Labor Party, which became an electoral vehicle for the presidential campaign of bourgeois "progressive" Robert La Follette. Had Trotsky not waged this fight, leading the Comintern to pull the American party back from supporting La Follette, it would have signified the early shipwreck of American Communism.

As for Roy being a pseudo-Marxist adventurer, it is worth noting that he attended the Second CI Congress in 1920 as a delegate of the Communist Party of Mexico (CPM), whose "founding conference" in late 1919 consisted of at most seven

people: Roy, his wife and several cronies. Roy later admitted that before "founding" the new party he sought the consent of Mexican president Venustiano Carranza, a *hacendado* (wealthy landowner), who had sponsored Roy's "Socialist Party." Roy explains that it was necessary "to reassure the Government and the numerous 'fellow travelers' of revolutionary Socialism that the flamboyant resolutions of the [founding] conference did not really mark a break with the past," adding: "The Communist Party remained committed to the revolutionary democratic [i.e., *bourgeois*] programme of the defunct Socialist Party" (*M. N. Roy's Memoirs* [Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Ltd., 1964]).

Roy also confesses that less than a month before founding the CPM, he had served as a strikebreaking adviser to the Mexican minister of labour. And before that, Roy was living off funds he had



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raised from the German embassy, ostensibly to buy arms for Indian nationalists, as well as from the Carranza regime. Roy's scheme to found a "Communist Party," which likewise failed to distinguish between the proletariat and the peasantry, was hatched in league with Mikhail Borodin, who was then visiting Mexico and later worked with Roy in helping to subordinate the Chinese proletariat to the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang.

Indeed, Roy played a key role in implementing Stalin/Bukharin's liquidationist policies on the ground in China. Their "democratic," "anti-imperialist" stage ended in the April 1927 slaughter of thousands of Communists and other workers in Shanghai by Guomindang leader Chiang Kai-shek, whom Stalin had made an honorary member of the Comintern Executive, no less. Shortly thereafter, Trotsky wrote of Roy:

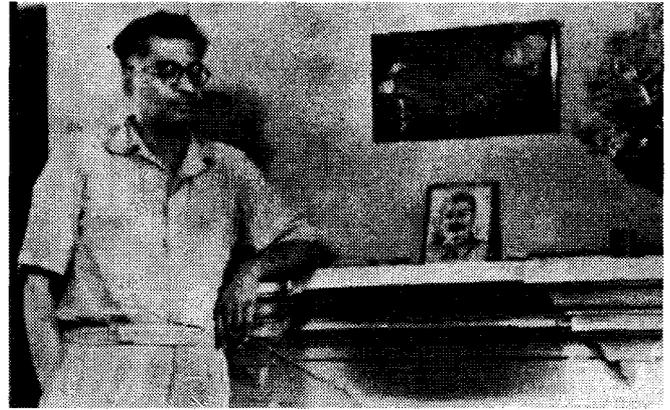
"It is doubtful if greater harm could be done to the Indian proletariat than was done by Zinoviev, Stalin and Bukharin through the medium of Roy. In India, as in China, the work has been and is oriented almost totally toward bourgeois nationalism. In the whole period since Lenin, Roy has conducted propaganda in favor of a 'people's party' which, as he himself has said, should be 'neither in name nor in essence' the party of the proletarian vanguard. This is an adaptation of Kuomintangism, of Stalinism, and of La Follettism to the conditions of the national movement in India. Politically this means: through the medium of Roy, the leadership of the International is holding the stirrup for the future Indian Chiang Kai-sheks. As for Roy's conceptions, they are a hodgepodge of Social Revolutionary ideas and liberalism flavored with the sauce of the struggle against imperialism.... It is not necessary to say that this national democrat, poisoned by an adulterated 'Marxism,' is an implacable foe of 'Trotskyism!'"

—"Who Is Leading the Comintern Today?"  
(September 1928)

When Stalin launched the Comintern on its "third period" left turn, Bukharin and Roy opposed Stalin from the right. Bukharin soon capitulated to Stalin; Roy was expelled from the CI in September 1929. Having learned nothing from the debacle in China, upon his return to India in December 1930 Roy made it his task to subordinate the proletariat to the bourgeois Congress of Mahatma Gandhi. To this end, Roy and his group acted as a cat's-paw for the nationalists in driving the Communists out of the leadership of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). Intoxicated by "third period" sectarianism, after losing control of AITUC the CPI facilitated the Royist-led anti-Communist purge by splitting from AITUC to form a separate Red Trade Union Congress.

In the following years, Roy was to demonstrate his fealty to the bourgeois nationalists time and again. In mid 1934, when the Communists called to transform a militant textile strike centred in Bombay into a countrywide general strike, Roy's followers opposed this and instead sought, unsuccessfully, to end the strike. A year later, the Royists denounced the CPI's efforts to build trade unions, peasant leagues and youth organisations outside the Congress fold, declaring this to be an attack on the unity of Congress as the sole "organization of national revolutionary struggle" (quoted in *Communism and Nationalism in India*).

Roy had hoped that following the 1935 Seventh CI Congress, which proclaimed the "people's front" line, his consistent rightism would regain him Stalin's favour as against the CPI. Stalin was not so forgiving. In any case, Roy's pretensions to Communism were getting pretty threadbare. When he was released from prison in November 1936, after serving more than five years on sedition charges stemming from the



Princeton University Press

M.N. Roy in the early 1950s, with portrait of Stalin on his mantel.

early '20s, he immediately shuttled off to meet with Congress leader Nehru—in an attempt to convince Nehru to soft-pedal his socialist rhetoric. Roy declared in a press interview: "My message to the people is to rally in the millions under the flag of the National Congress and fight for freedom. Socialism or communism is not the issue of the day, and socialists and communists should realize that the immediate objective is national independence" (quoted in *ibid.*).

Little more than three years later, Roy was urging the Indian masses to rally under the Union Jack of British imperialism. After initially proclaiming a policy of neutrality in World War II, within months Roy was calling for unconditional cooperation with the British war effort. In October 1940, while the Stalinists were temporarily posturing as militantly anti-imperialist under the aegis of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the Royists declared Congress membership to be "incompatible with anti-fascist conviction" and split to form the Radical Democratic People's Party (quoted in *ibid.*). Roy was not the only alumnus of the Right Opposition to end up as an abject apologist and agent for "democratic" imperialism. In the U.S., Jay Lovestone parlayed his support for the "anti-fascist" war into building up a counterrevolutionary cadre to be deployed by the CIA and the pro-imperialist American labour bureaucracy in the Cold War against Communism beginning in the late 1940s.

The formation of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party (BLPI) in 1942 brought to the Indian proletariat the only voice of revolutionary internationalism. The BLPI called for revolutionary defeatism toward both imperialist camps in the war, while standing for unconditional military defence of the Soviet degenerated workers state. Against the strikebreaking of the Stalinists and Royists, the small forces of Indian Trotskyism did their utmost to mobilise the proletariat on an independent class basis in the struggle for national independence and socialist revolution. In a fitting epitaph for what *Revolutionary History* describes as "the neglected Indian Marxist, M. N. Roy," the BLPI wrote in a 1945 statement:

"Stalinism and Royism are at one in their hostility to the mass movement and mass struggle, and in their support of imperialism and the imperialist war. They are also at one in their support of the Soviet bureaucracy—with this difference, however, that while the Stalinists come to their support of imperialism from their support of the Soviet bureaucracy, the Royists come to their support of the Soviet bureaucracy from their support of the imperialists."

—"For An Anti-Imperialist Left Front: An Appeal to the Left Forces in the Country," 20 May 1945 ■

## IN DEFENSE OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

# LENIN AS PHILOSOPHER

BY PETER FRYER

Some four decades later, Fryer's study of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, too, took place against a back-

Since the time of its publication in the British Trotskyist journal *Labour Review* (September-October 1957), Peter Fryer's "Lenin as Philosopher" has been barely available to English-speaking students of Marxism and, to our knowledge, was never translated into another language. The International Communist League has long used Fryer's article as an educational tool for our own party and youth comrades, and we are pleased to now make this cogent explanation of dialectical materialism available to a broader audience.

As Fryer makes clear at the outset, his article is a polemical defense of Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin's writings on dialectical materialism against an attack by the historian E.P. Thompson, who later wrote the renowned book, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). In defending Lenin against Thompson's depiction of him as a crude economic determinist, Fryer relied heavily on Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, largely compiled during an intensive period of study, following the onset of World War I, of the German philosopher of the dialectic, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).

In August 1914, the contradictions generated by four decades of capitalist-imperialist development erupted in the horrific carnage of the first interimperialist world war. The Second International, pledged to oppose the war but rotted out by a quarter of a century of relatively peaceful capitalist development, collapsed in ignominy. Forced to take refuge in neutral Switzerland, Lenin undertook his study of Hegel to better understand and intervene into a world marked by cataclysmic change. Lenin wrote of Hegel:

"As the most comprehensive and profound doctrine of development, and the richest in content, Hegelian dialectics was considered by Marx and Engels the greatest achievement of classical German philosophy. They thought that any other formulation of the principle of development, of evolution, was one-sided and poor in content, and could only distort and mutilate the actual course of development (which often proceeds by leaps, and via catastrophes and revolutions) in Nature and in society."

—"Karl Marx," July-November 1914

In the notebooks based on his studies, published in Volume 38 of the *Collected Works*, Lenin declared, paraphrasing Engels, that he was trying to read the idealist philosopher "materialistically: Hegel is materialism which has been stood on its head" ("Conspectus of Hegel's Book *The Science of Logic*," September-December 1914, *Philosophical Notebooks*).

In those tumultuous war years, Lenin made a number of theoretical and programmatic advances that were indispensable to the success of the October Revolution in 1917 (e.g., whether the revolution in Russia should be proletarian or bourgeois!). In describing this period of theoretical rearming, Lenin's wife and close collaborator, Nadezhda Krupskaya, wrote in her 1930 memoir: "Struggle and studies, study and research with Ilyich were always strongly linked together" (*Reminiscences of Lenin* [Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959]).

drop of political turmoil. In 1956, Stalinist Communist parties around the world were shaken by two events: Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" about Stalin's terror, followed by the Soviet military suppression of a workers political revolution in Hungary. In Britain, over 7,000 members walked out of the Communist Party (CP), including Thompson and fellow historian Christopher Hill. Fryer was then the correspondent in Hungary for the CP's *Daily Worker*. His truthful dispatches, contradicting Stalinist lies that the uprising was counterrevolutionary, led to his expulsion from the CP. He then turned them into the best single account of the Hungarian Revolution, *Hungarian Tragedy*, published in late 1956 (see "Chronicler of Hungarian Revolution: Peter Fryer, 1927-2006," *Workers Vanguard* No. 883, 5 January 2007).

The Hungarian uprising decisively refuted the notion of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a new ruling class, powerfully confirming the program and analysis explicated in Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936). A brittle caste resting parasitically atop proletarian property forms, the bureaucracy split vertically, with 80 percent of the Hungarian ruling party going over to the side of the revolution. Fryer led the way for some 200 former British CP militants and intellectuals, including Brian Pearce, Cliff Slaughter and Tom Kemp—as well as a layer of industrial workers led by Brian Behan—to be won to Trotskyism and the group led by Gerry Healy.

E.P. Thompson chose another path. After leaving the CP, Thompson launched the magazine *New Reasoner*, whose first issue (Summer 1957) contained his manifesto, "Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines." Thompson aimed most of his fire at Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908). The late 19th century had seen a wholesale assault on materialism associated with the German philosopher Richard Avenarius, who coined the term empirio-criticism, and the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach. They denied the existence of material reality independent of sensory experience or observation. In his thoroughgoing defense of materialism (and science!), Lenin pointed out that Machian idealism denied objective criteria to judge scientific truth, or the means to distinguish between science and religion or quackery. Indeed, empirio-criticism, popular even among some Bolsheviks in the dark days of tsarist reaction after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution, took the form of "socialist" spiritualism or "god building."

Taking out Thompson for his attack on Lenin's philosophical writings, Fryer stressed that dialectical materialism "is above all else a tool in the hands of the working class for use in refashioning society, and whoever blunts the keen edge of this tool, no matter how slightly, is doing a disservice to the working-class movement." As Fryer indi-

cates, he had to make use of the 1955 French edition of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* (a section of which first appeared in French in *Cahiers de Lénine sur la dialectique de Hegel* [Paris: Gallimard, 1938]), which had not yet been translated into English. Therefore, it was Fryer who introduced this seminal work to the English-speaking world. The complete edition of the *Notebooks* (Volume 38) came out in English only in 1961, prompting a series of three articles by Cliff Slaughter in *Labour Review* (Spring 1962, Summer 1962 and Winter 1962-63). Slaughter's articles, which later appeared as a pamphlet titled "Lenin on Dialectics," are inferior to Fryer's earlier polemic. By then, Fryer was *persona non grata*. He had quit the Healy group in 1959 when it launched the Socialist Labour League (SLL), disgusted by the bullying of members and the lack of political debate.

The founding cadres of the Spartacist tendency were impressed from a distance by the SLL's nominal orthodoxy, represented by its 1961 document *The World Prospect for Socialism*, but were unaware of Healy's methods and his history of adaptation to the Labour Party "lefts." And the orthodoxy of the SLL, which later declared itself the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), was increasingly belied by opportunist practice. By 1967, the Healyites had come out for Mao's intra-bureaucratic "Cultural Revolution" in China and for a classless "Arab Revolution." The Healyites' political banditry would find full flower in their conciliation of oil-rich Arab despots, their grotesque hailing of the 1979 execution of 21 Iraqi Communists by the Ba'athist regime and their anti-Soviet provocations against British miners' leader Arthur Scargill on the eve of the miners' heroic 1984-85 strike. All this was overseen by a brutal internal regime, leading to the spectacular implosion of the WRP



Sidney Weaver

Peter Fryer with son James in mid 1960s.

in 1985 (see "Healyism Implodes," *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 36-37, Winter 1985-86).

In addition to his literary contributions to Marxism, Peter Fryer left behind a rich and varied legacy of other writings, including books such as *Mrs Grundy: Studies in English Prudery* (New York: London House & Maxwell, 1964) and *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984). We reprint "Lenin as Philosopher" as it first appeared in *Labour Review*, with only minor stylistic changes. As a result the passages cited by Fryer from the works of Marx, Engels or Lenin may differ slightly from the versions published in the *Marx/Engels Collected Works* and the *Lenin Collected Works*, which *Spartacist* normally cites.

In the first issue of *The New Reasoner* there is a discussion article by E.P. Thompson called "Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines." One section of this article, entitled "Questions of Theory,"<sup>1</sup> includes a reference to Lenin's philosophical work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. The author seeks to show that several of the features of Stalinist ideology have their roots in Lenin's contribution to Marxist philosophy—that they can be traced to "ambiguities in the thought of Marx and, even more, to mechanistic fallacies in Lenin's writings," these "fallacies" being due to "his concern with the first premise of materialism." Lenin is accused in particular of holding a "passive," "automatic" theory of knowledge, of losing the concept of human agency in a "grotesque" "determinism," of transforming the Marxist view of the relationship of freedom and necessity into a theory whereby man's "'freedom' becomes slavery to 'necessity,'" and of being so "absorbed in philosophical nuances" that he "removed the cause of social change from the agency of man to the agency of economic necessity." Thompson's attack is summarized in these words: "Lenin's inspired political genius was not matched by an equal genius in the field of philosophy."

In my opinion Thompson is here waging, under the cloak of correcting Lenin's "mechanistic fallacies," an all-out assault on the philosophy of dialectical materialism. It is an assault on the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge, on historical materialism, on the Marxist conception of human

freedom and how it is won, and, not least, on the dialectical method. Many such assaults have been made in the past, and one of the first duties of Marxists is to meet them. This is not an academic question of preserving the purity of an immutable doctrine, but a class duty, for dialectical materialism is above all else a tool in the hands of the working class for use in refashioning society, and whoever blunts the keen edge of this tool, no matter how slightly, is doing a disservice to the working-class movement. The working class needs a consistently materialist world outlook because only such an outlook can show it what its historical tasks are and how it can perform them. The entire history of the fight for materialism against idealism demonstrates that the slightest concession to idealism, under whatever fashionable and novel guise it presents itself—positivism, pragmatism, empirio-criticism, or even socialist humanism—has its own fatal and compelling logic, which leads inevitably into the swamp of subjectivism and solipsism. Between the various shadings of idealism there are no impassable logical barriers: the only barrier is that between dialectical materialism and all other philosophical trends and schools, which in the last analysis serve the interests of exploiting classes by helping to justify, disguise and perpetuate their rule.

To E.P. Thompson, who has been waging a sturdy and admirable battle against Stalinism, these may sound "hard" and dogmatic things to say. But when we are discussing materialism and idealism and their irreconcilability, we are

in the realm of basic principles, where the requirements of the class struggle impose the need for complete clarity, firmness, consistency and partisanship. It would be in the highest degree improper to transfer eclectically methods which often have an important place in the political struggle—concessions, detours, alliances—to the philosophical field, for fear of being accused of “dogmatism.” This would help neither the fight against Stalinism nor the fight against capitalism, both of which require the utmost firmness on principles and the utmost flexibility on other matters.

Besides that concern with the first and other premises of materialism which should animate every Marxist one further consideration has prompted the writing of this article. Not only must Marxist philosophy be defended from its revisers, but Lenin’s immense and extraordinary contribution to it must be defended and fully appreciated, for Lenin the man of action cannot be properly understood in separation from Lenin the philosopher. How far some of Thompson’s remarks spring from the fact that there is as yet no English edition of Lenin’s remarkable *Philosophical Notebooks* I do not know, but it is hard to see how he would have written in the way he did if he had been at all familiar with this fundamental work.

## I. THE THEORY OF REFLECTION

According to Thompson, the first fallacy in Lenin’s *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is “the repeated lumping together of ideas, consciousness, thought and sensations as ‘reflections’ of material reality.” He adds in parentheses: “But a sense-impression, which animals share with men, is not the same thing as an idea, which is the product of exceedingly complex cultural processes peculiar to men.”

It is important to understand that Thompson is here attacking not merely Lenin’s views, but those of Marx and Engels too. This, of course, does not in itself make Lenin right and Thompson wrong, but it must be made clear that Lenin’s theory of knowledge is no different from that of Marx and Engels, and that when Lenin writes that “mind is secondary, a function of the brain, a reflection of the external world,”<sup>2</sup> he is not adopting some new terminology.<sup>3</sup>

### Levels of Consciousness

Now Thompson, in the very act of accusing Lenin of “lumping together” ideas, consciousness, thought and sensations as reflections of material reality, himself loosely “lumps together” four disparate categories. Consciousness is a generic term for the relationship of animals (including men) with the external world that is brought about by the activity of the brain; it *includes* sensations, the elementary form of consciousness, perceptions (which Thompson unaccountably omits)—the fitting together of sensations into a complex but concrete representation of the complex relationships of complex objects—and ideas, which reproduce the properties and relations of things in abstraction, and which are, as Thompson says, specifically human.<sup>4</sup> Thought is the name we give to this higher form of consciousness, where ideas are produced and manipulated.

Thompson’s description of ideas as “the product of exceedingly complicated cultural processes” is over-simplified and misleading. In comparison with the activity of animals many

specifically human processes are undoubtedly complex. But there are manifold levels of complexity in human cultural (and other) processes, and corresponding to these there are a great many levels of abstraction in ideas (and hence in language), from elementary ideas (and words) that directly reflect the relationship of the thinker with other men and with objects and that relate to concrete activities and things directly perceptible by the senses, through concepts of varying degrees of abstraction, reflecting activities and things not directly perceptible by the senses, and their properties and relations, right up to such highly abstract and often far-fetched, illusory, mystifying, fantastic and inverted reflections of men’s social relations as religious, philosophical and political concepts and their elaboration in ideologies. But neither the abstract nature of ideas nor the apparent remoteness from reality and “false consciousness” of ideological illusions make them any less reflections of material reality.

That ideas as well as sensations and perceptions are reflections of material reality is not a materialist dogma; though science has still much to find out about the brain all that it has found out so far serves to confirm the materialist theory of knowledge; and fresh proof is always being added. Anyone who wishes to show that ideas, as distinct from more elementary forms of consciousness, are *not* reflections of the objective universe, is not merely abandoning the materialist view of the relationship between object and subject; he is abandoning science. He is free to do so—but it is surely incumbent on him to explain in what sense ideas are *not* reflections of the objective world, how such ideas arise and what function they perform.

### The Contradictory Nature of Concepts

Thompson’s confusion on the question of the relationship between the more advanced and the more elementary levels of consciousness tends in particular to blur one important aspect of their relationship, an aspect seemingly paradoxical but of great importance in understanding the nature of concepts and the genesis of philosophical idealism. At one and the same time concepts are closer to the objective reality they reflect and more remote from it than are sensations and perceptions. They are closer to objective reality because they reflect, with of course only approximate accuracy, the essential, internal relationships of phenomena, their laws of motion. Yet they are more remote because between nature and the abstract thought which reflects it there operates a series of mediations—language, technique, etc.—which, far from rendering concepts any less a reflection of reality, are indispensable for this reflection. These mediations express both the power of social practice and also its limitations, its relative lack of power at each given stage of social development. From this flows the dual, contradictory character of conceptual consciousness, in which are intermingled the true and the illusory, the scientific and the mystical, the known and the unknown (or rather yet to be known, and therefore guessed at, dreamed about), that which is tested and proved a million times a day and that which is fantastic and chimerical. Men’s power to change their world progressively crystallizes out and perfects the scientific element in their concepts; their relative helplessness on the other hand gives rise to the tendency of abstract ideas to fly away from reality and weave themselves into marvellous, internally consistent systems of myth and illusion, from which the

real world and real relationships of men to nature and men to men are then deduced. This mediation of human consciousness implies that the subject can never fully embrace the object, that concepts can never give a full, total, direct reflection of reality, can never contain the whole richness of the properties, qualities, relations and contradictions of the objective world. Theory need never be exactly “grey”; but the most exact, splendid and exciting theory can never glow with the warmth, colour and immediacy of sensations and perceptions, whose content is the appearance, the phenomenon, not, as with concepts, the “calm reflection”<sup>5</sup> of the phenomenon in its essence, in its laws.

The contradiction within concepts themselves between the element of knowledge and the element of fantasy and illusion runs through the history of human thinking, and will do as long as class or caste preconceptions require the maintenance of systematic deception and self-deception of people. It is a contradiction which is continually being reinforced by the gap between the subjective reflection of reality in concepts and the objective reality they reflect. If concepts were anything other than reflections of reality then this seed of the conflict between materialism and idealism that has dominated and shaped the entire history of philosophy could neither have existed nor germinated.

### Consciousness as Creator

The dialectical materialist view of the origin of ideas would indeed be mechanistic if it vouchsafed to ideas no active role in life. But dialectical materialism sharply opposes the view that ideas are a mere epiphenomenon, a useless froth on the surface of human activity, playing no more part in the direction of human affairs than the steam plays once it comes out of the locomotive funnel. When Thompson uses the words “passive” and “automatic”—“passive mirror-reflection of social reality,” “passive ‘reflection,’” “automatic ‘reflection’”—he is doing a grave injustice to the Leninist theory of knowledge, which places enormous stress on the active part played by ideas.<sup>6</sup>

Many quotations could be given to show that Lenin saw the process of the reflection of reality in the human brain, not as something “passive” and “automatic,” but as a complex, contradictory, zigzag, dynamic process, in which a capital part is played by human practice; in which the mind passes from the reflection of the appearance of things to the reflection of their essence, their inner laws of motion; and in which knowledge tested and corrected in practice becomes more accurate and more profound. I will confine myself to five quotations.

“Knowledge is the process by which thought endlessly and eternally draws nearer to the object. The *reflection* of nature in human thought must be understood, not in a ‘dead,’ ‘abstract’ fashion, *not without movement*, WITHOUT CONTRADICTIONS, but in the eternal PROCESS of movement, of the birth and resolution of contradictions.”<sup>7</sup>

In other words, consciousness is not a stereotype or mirror-image, but the dynamic reflection of a dynamic universe, which, if it were not reflected, would not be knowable. The dialectic of knowledge is

“an endless process of the deepening of men’s knowledge of things, phenomena, processes, etc., proceeding from appearance to essence and from essence less profound to essence more profound.”<sup>8</sup>

“When the (human) intelligence grapples with a particular

thing, draws from it an image (= a concept), that is *not* a simple, direct, dead act, it is not a reflection in a mirror, but a complex, twofold, zigzag act....”<sup>9</sup>

“Knowledge is the reflection of nature by man. But it is not a simple, direct, total reflection; this process consists of a whole series of abstractions, formulations, formations of concepts, of laws, etc.—and these concepts, laws, etc....*embrace* relatively, approximately, the universal laws of an eternally moving and developing nature. Here there are *really*, objectively, *three* terms: (1) nature; (2) man’s knowledge=man’s *brain* (as the highest product of nature) and (3) the form in which nature is reflected in human knowledge; this form is the concepts, laws, categories, etc. Man cannot seize=reflect=reproduce nature in its *entirety*, in its ‘direct totality’: all he can do is *eternally* draw closer to it by creating abstractions, concepts, laws, a scientific picture of the universe, etc., etc.”<sup>10</sup>

And lastly—and least “mechanistic,” “passive” and “automatic” of all!—“Human consciousness not only reflects the objective world but also creates it.”<sup>11</sup> From Lenin the author of “mechanistic fallacies” this may sound startling; but from the point of view of dialectical materialism it is as little an “idealist fallacy” as Lenin’s insistence on the secondary and derivative nature of ideas is a “mechanistic fallacy.” There is no contradiction here. Lenin is calling attention to the part played by human practice in the development of knowledge—and by knowledge in the development of human practice.

### Practice and Knowledge

Social practice—production, experiment, industry, class struggle—is both the source and the criterion of knowledge. There is, according to Marxists, a sequence something like this. On the basis of their social practice, their immediate, direct experience in changing parts of material reality (and so changing themselves) men elaborate ideas, partly a true and accurate reflection of reality, partly a false and inaccurate or distorted reflection of it. On the basis of these ideas men then improve their practical activity, so testing and correcting their ideas, and sifting out truth from error, knowledge from illusion. This improved practice gives rise to further ideas, which approximate more closely to objective reality, to the essence of things—which are, in a word, more scientific. This is a never-ending process, in which consciousness develops through *acting on* the universe which gave rise to it, hence through *changing* the universe, hence in a sense through *creating* the universe.

It is social practice which enables men to pass from sensations and perceptions to ideas, since only our activity in changing material reality makes it possible for us to gain knowledge of it, to dig below the superficial aspect of things to their essence. It is ideas, thought, knowledge, which permit men so to shape and organize their practical activities as to change material reality more successfully and more fruitfully.

The word “reflection,” as used by Lenin of human consciousness, signifies *active* reflection, penetrating through social practice deeper and deeper into the inexhaustible vastness and richness of reality, and offering to thinking men the possibility of bringing reality more and more (but never completely) under their conscious control.

It might be asked why such a theory is called by Marxists the “theory of reflection,” since this terminology gives critics the opportunity to talk about “passive” and “automatic” “mirror-images,” about “the passive connotation sometimes

attached by [Marx and Engels] to the concept of 'reflection'."

First, the word "reflection" is the proper word because it draws attention to the most essential aspect of consciousness. Without an object to reflect there could be no reflection. Without a material universe there could be no consciousness.

Secondly, understood dialectically, the word "reflection" as applied to consciousness signifies the specific form that the universal interaction and mutual dependence and determination of phenomena take in the case of organisms with a nervous system. Marxists mean by reflection in general not merely a subjective process in human consciousness, but first of all the unity and interdependence of every aspect of the infinite universe with every other aspect, the reciprocal interaction of everything with everything else. Every particle of matter is connected with the rest of the universe in manifold ways, at different levels of organization of matter, and reflects by its different forms of motion—mechanical, physical, chemical, etc.—and by its obedience to the laws of these different forms the whole of the universe which environs, conditions and determines it. With the transition to living matter, this property of "reflection" takes qualitatively new forms, connected with the relationship of the living organism with its surroundings: new forms, which nevertheless continue on a higher plane, on the plane of consciousness, this universal interaction and interdependence. Where Lenin uses the word reflection he is using it in its deeper, dialectical sense.

## II. SOCIAL BEING AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Thompson finds that "Lenin slipped over from Marx's observation 'social being determines social consciousness' to the quite different (and untrue) statement that 'social consciousness reflects social being.'" The use of the term "reflection" as an "observation upon the way in which men's ideas have been determined by their 'social being' in their history" does not, he says, "follow from the first premise"—i.e., that "sense-impressions 'reflect' external material reality which exists independently of human consciousness." "Because a sense-impression may be described (metaphorically) as a 'reflection' of material reality, it by no means follows that human culture is a passive mirror-reflection of social reality."<sup>12</sup> Thompson suggests that Marx and Engels "tended...to enquire very little into the problem of *how* men's ideas were formed, and wherein lay their field of *agency*."<sup>13</sup>

This is rather confused. To begin with, Thompson seems far from sure whether he is criticizing Marx or attempting to play off "partially true" Marx against "untrue" Lenin. It must be said that the latter is not a very fruitful undertaking. The suggestion that Lenin "slipped over" from an observation of Marx's—"social being determines social consciousness" (the actual quotation is: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness"<sup>14</sup>)—to the "quite different" and "untrue" observation of his own, that "social consciousness reflects social being" is demolished instantly when we pick up the book from which Marx's observation is taken and read a little further. Soon we find Marx writing about the "ideological forms

in which men become conscious of [the] conflict [between forces of production and relations of production] and fight it out." We cannot, Marx adds, judge of a period of social transformation by its own consciousness; "on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life."<sup>15</sup>

Again, because Marx and Engels held the same opinion, and employed the same method of studying history, as Lenin, does not imply that they and Lenin were necessarily right and Thompson is necessarily wrong—but that Lenin "slipped over" in good company.

### Marxism and Culture

While historical materialism views social consciousness as the reflection of social being, it should be pointed out that no Marxist has ever suggested that human culture is "a passive mirror-reflection of social reality." This is a caricature of Marxism. It is perfectly true that in a letter to Mehring in 1893 Engels made clear that he and Marx had been bound to lay the main emphasis on the derivation of ideology from basic economic facts and that in doing so "we neglected the formal side—the way in which these notions come about—for the sake of the content."<sup>16</sup> But this is something quite different from their having suggested that art and literature passively mirrored social reality. On the contrary, Marx went out of his way to stress "the unequal relation between the development of material production and art":

"It is well known that certain periods of highest development of art stand in no direct connexion with the general development of society, nor with the material basis and the skeleton structure of its organization."<sup>17</sup>

Marx, Engels and Lenin did indeed see human culture as a reflection of material reality, but as a reflection in the dialectical sense, not as a direct, immediate, mechanical, automatic, passive reflection. Certainly Lenin wrote an article called "Leo Tolstoy as a Mirror of the Russian Revolution"—but almost every line is a refutation of the "mechanical" and "passive" view of artistic reflection and a striking affirmation of its profoundly contradictory nature.

"Can you use the term mirror of something which obviously does not reflect phenomena correctly?... If it is a really great artist we have before us, his works are bound to have reflected at least some of the essential aspects of the revolution.... The contradictions in Tolstoy's works, views, teachings and school are glaring indeed.... On the one hand we have the brilliant artist who has produced not only incomparable pictures of Russian life but also first-class works of world literature. On the other hand we have a country squire acting the fool in Christ.... On the one hand we have a ruthless criticism of capitalist exploitation...on the other hand we have the fanatical preaching of 'non-resistance to evil'.... The contradictions in Tolstoy's views are really the mirror of those contradictory conditions in which the historical activity of the peasantry was placed in our revolution."<sup>18</sup>

To Marxists there is in fact a constant and complex interaction among all the elements of the ideological superstructure, and, not least important, a constant and often extremely powerful reaction of men's ideas on the social and economic causes which give rise to them. The suggestion that because Marxists deny any independent historical development to ideological spheres they therefore deny them any effect on history was described by Engels as "fatuous."<sup>19</sup> He attributed this idea to a lack of understanding of dialectics, to a metaphysical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles, to a "total disregarding of interaction." It is equally

fatuous to suggest that Marxists believe that works of art are no more than a reflection of economic needs and processes. If so they would surely have a higher regard—to take one obvious example—for Zola, the Left-wing writer, who believed that a good novel could be written by the methods of a journalist, who consciously carried realism to the point of naturalism, to the point of “the direct, mechanical mirroring of the humdrum reality of capitalism,”<sup>20</sup> than for Balzac, the royalist, the legitimist, the reactionary. And Lenin would surely have had a higher regard, say, for Mayakovsky than for Pushkin. Marxism would indeed be an impoverished and sterile dogma if it had no more understanding of the process of artistic creation than Thompson gives it credit for.

### The Illusions of the Epoch

Thompson’s denial that social consciousness reflects social being prompts immediately the questions: what *does* social consciousness reflect if it does not reflect social being? What is the *content* of social consciousness, whence is it derived, what part does it play in life, if it is not essentially the expression in ideas of the social practice carried on by men in a given set of social relations? Or has the mind of the ideologist, the philosopher, theologian, legal theorist or artist, some special spring from which flow rich and wonderful ideas that do not reflect some real aspect of the objective world? Are ideologies spun out of ideologists’ heads? If so, how? And how is their peculiar character to be explained?

Thompson makes no attempt to answer these questions. Yet he does not hesitate to bring grist to the mill of all the many opponents of Marx and Lenin who oversimplify or vulgarize their views when he suggests that Lenin deduced the reflection of social being in social consciousness from the physiological fact that consciousness reflects being. Marxists have in fact made this generalization—the only consistently materialist generalization about the origin of ideologies—from a detailed, concrete study of social consciousness as it has evolved at widely different periods of history. If Marx’s and Lenin’s own writings are studied it will be seen that there are no “ambiguities” in the thought of the one, or “mechanical fallacies” in that of the other, on this question.

An examination of the history of human thinking shows that social practice, as determined by each specific set of social relations, is reflected in ideologies, not consciously, deliberately and accurately but spontaneously and often in an inverted fashion. Spontaneously, because ideological illusions constantly and irresistibly well up in men’s minds out of the soil of their social relations. The ideologist seems to himself to be operating with “pure” concepts; very often (and this is the more frequent, the more remote a particular ideological sphere is from the economic structure of society) the thought material with which he works contains little that is new, but is largely traditional material taken over from his predecessors; it is because its connexion with the real relationships in his own or earlier societies is unknown to the thinker that we speak of his “false consciousness.” We do not thereby reproach him. He does not, generally speaking, set out to build a system of false ideas with which to deceive the exploited masses—or where he does he himself is just as profoundly deluded by fundamental preconceptions of whose real roots he has no inkling. Each generation of thinkers finds in existence a set of production relations without which society could not exist, which are independent

of the will of the men who make up that society and of the ideas in the minds of the thinkers. These relations appear, not as historically determined and transitory, but as eternal and immutable. And again and again they colour the thought of the philosopher or artist, however original and brilliant he may be, stamp his work indelibly with the peculiar flavour of an epoch, seep into the remotest and most fantastic channels of thought. The characteristic illusions of each epoch<sup>21</sup> are at bottom the refraction of the social relations of that epoch through the prism of the ideologist’s mind.

In this process of refraction reality is inverted. Men fancy that they have created their social relations in the image of their abstract ideas, and that their actions, institutions and conflicts are the practical expression of these abstract ideas. Social being seems to be the reflection of social consciousness. The harsh facts of class exploitation and class domination are disguised and sweetened by a vast body of illusory ideas which portray the existing state of affairs as just, heaven-decreed and permanent.

If it is “untrue” that social consciousness reflects social being, then a long series of the most dramatic instances of correspondence between the development of ideology and the development of social relations is crying out for interpretation, explanation and analysis. To work, Comrade Thompson! Let us have your explanation of the philosophy of Heraclitus of Ephesus if it is not in essence the ideological reflection of new-born commodity production. Let us have your interpretation of the divine hierarchy of Thomas Aquinas, if it is not ultimately the reflection of the feudal hierarchy of his time. What is the mechanical materialist view of the world as a collection of discrete material particles interacting according to the laws of mechanics if it is not essentially a reflection of the need of the rising bourgeoisie for the smashing of feudal ties and the development of a free market? How are the materialism and humanism of Spinoza to be understood if not as the most logical and most profound expression of the interests of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of Europe’s most advanced capitalist country in its struggle against feudal superstition and obscurantism—so logical and profound that the class for whom he spoke repudiated him? What was the basic content of Puritanism if not a reflection of a conflict in contemporary society in the minds of the revolutionary bourgeoisie of England?

### Did Lenin Neglect Human Agency?

But historical materialism does not stop there. It seeks to show, in each specific case, how these ideological reflections are functionally involved in the further development of the social structure which gave rise to them, often determining to a very great extent the *form* of a particular social transformation and the *speed* with which it takes place.

Thompson accuses Marx and Engels of tending to neglect the problem of the field of *agency* of men’s ideas, and he implies that Lenin neglected it still more. This is a truly amazing charge. What on earth is *What Is To Be Done?* about if it is not a polemic against those who bowed to the spontaneity of the Labour movement and belittled the role of socialist ideas? Lenin took up arms precisely against those who said that the spontaneous movement of the workers gives rise to socialist ideology. On the contrary, he said, socialist consciousness must be brought to the working class from outside. “Without a revolutionary theory there can be

no revolutionary movement.”<sup>22</sup> If Lenin “lost” the concept of human agency and underestimated the role of human consciousness why did he spend his entire life building and educating a revolutionary party instead of sitting back and letting the revolution make itself? Perhaps Thompson is referring to some other Lenin: perhaps the Lenin he attacks for “slipping” into the “fallacy” that “a passive ‘reflection’ [can] initiate, plan, make revolutions” was a harmless fellow “absorbed in philosophical nuances” and no relation to the man who spent thirty eventful years disproving in practice his namesake’s alleged “fallacies.”

### A Case of Quotation-Carving

In order to make some semblance of a case against Lenin, Thompson is not always careful in his use of quotations. In one passage in particular he not only quotes from Lenin’s summary of an argument of Engels without making clear that the thought is Engels’; he follows this by carving up a quotation from *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in such a way as to omit words *which specifically take into account and answer the very objection which Thompson raises!* Here is the passage from Thompson in full (a) in order to be fair to Thompson and (b) in order to demonstrate his technique of quotation-carving:

“(4) From this [i.e., from the statement that ‘social consciousness reflects social being’], he slipped over to the grotesque conclusion that ‘social being is independent of the social consciousness of humanity.’ (*How can conscious human beings, whose consciousness is employed in every act of labour, exist independently of their consciousness?*) (5) From this it was a small step to envisaging consciousness as a clumsy process of *adaptation to* independently-existing ‘social being.’ ‘The necessity of nature is primary, and human will and mind secondary. The latter must necessarily and inevitably adapt themselves to the former.’ (S.W.11, p. 248). ‘The highest task of humanity is to comprehend the objective logic of economic evolution...so that it may be possible to adapt *to it* one’s social consciousness...in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.’” (p. 376)

Two quotations, two examples of carving. The first quotation (S.W.11, p. 248) is from a passage in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* where Lenin is summarizing an argument in *Anti-Dühring* and explaining its epistemological premises, and doing so quite fairly. The words immediately following the quotation chosen by Thompson are: “Engels regards this as so obvious that he does not waste words explaining his view.”<sup>23</sup> Here is one of the “grotesque,” “mechanical,” “clumsy,” “emotive” fallacies that Lenin “slipped over” into—yet we find that, after all, it is only a paraphrase of something that Engels regarded as a commonplace of the materialist world outlook.

The second quotation, which Thompson splits into two without making clear he is doing so, leads him to ask a question, which I have emphasized above. Now here is the full passage from Lenin, with the words omitted by Thompson restored and emphasized:

*“Every individual producer in the world economic system realizes that he is introducing a certain change into the technique of production; every owner realizes that he exchanges certain products for others; but these producers and these owners do not realize that in doing so they are thereby changing social being. The sum-total of these changes in all their ramifications in the capitalist world economy could not be grasped even by seventy Marxes. The paramount thing is that the laws of these changes have been discovered, that the objective logic of these changes and their historical development have at bot-*

*tom and in the main been disclosed—objective, not in the sense that a society of conscious beings, men, could exist and develop independently of the existence of conscious beings (and it is only such trifles that Bogdanov stresses by his ‘theory’) but in the sense that social being is independent of the social consciousness of men. The fact that you live and conduct business, beget children, produce products and exchange them, gives rise to an objectively necessary chain of events, a chain of development, which is independent of your social consciousness, and is never grasped by the latter completely. The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt to it one’s social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.”<sup>24</sup>*

Note how Thompson’s question is answered in the words he himself omits. Note how Lenin makes it absolutely clear that he is not talking about the crude idea, the “trifle,” that “a society of conscious beings, men, could exist and develop independently of the existence of conscious beings,” that “conscious human beings, whose consciousness is employed in every act of labour [could] exist independently of their consciousness”—which is the way Thompson picks up and brandishes this “trifle,” for all the world as if Lenin had never mentioned it.

If Lenin’s philosophical writings have to be mutilated and tampered with in this way before his lack of philosophical genius and his “fallacies” can be demonstrated, may this not indicate that the “fallacies” exist only in the imagination of the critic? No one would wish to suggest that Thompson has deliberately falsified what Lenin wrote—but he seems to have reread a difficult text in haste in order to find confirmation in isolated sentences of his impression that this text contains the seeds of Stalinism. This impression has no real foundation, as Thompson himself would, one hopes, admit if he were to read *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the *Philosophical Notebooks* with the care they deserve.

The example Lenin gives here is one of great interest and dialectical beauty. Of course, he is saying, the men who produce and exchange are conscious. No one but a fool (or a “trifler”) would carry on the argument at that level. But they are conscious only of the *appearance* of the activities they are engaged in. The *essence*, the objective *laws* which govern the ultimate results of their productive and commercial efforts are hidden from them (precisely because human consciousness does not give an immediate mirror-reflection of reality!) and can only be brought to light through scientific research. It was this scientific research which Marx carried out in *Capital*. Here, through the “force of abstraction,” the essential laws of capitalist economy are revealed, the transition from appearance to essence, from phenomenon to law, is accomplished, and human consciousness is deepened, enriched and made more scientific as a result. No one but a fool or a “trifler” would suggest that men are anything but conscious of the appearance of their economic activities; no one but a fool or a “trifler” would suggest that, before science has probed below the surface, they are anything but unconscious—or at best conscious in the most rudimentary and sketchy way—of the essential “social being” (value, surplus value, etc.) which exists independently of this limited consciousness. Whoever has not grasped the importance of this transition “from appearance to essence and from essence less profound to essence more profound”<sup>25</sup> has not begun to appreciate the richness, complexity and scientific value of

dialectical methodology—and is destined to be misled again and again by impressionism.

### III. NECESSITY AND FREEDOM

The core of Thompson's attack on dialectical materialism is his attack on the Marxist conception of human freedom and how it is won. Once again, there is the attempt to separate Lenin's views from those of Marx and Engels. Marx is talking "common sense"; Lenin "slips" into "mystique":

"Marx's common-sense view that man's freedom is enlarged by each enlargement of knowledge ('Freedom...consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature which is founded on knowledge of natural necessity.' Engels) is transformed into the mystique of man's freedom consisting in his recognizing and serving 'the objective logic of economic evolution': his 'freedom' becomes slavery to 'necessity'."

One or two preliminary points. First, we have already shown that one of the quotations from Lenin on which Thompson relies is in fact a paraphrase of Engels. But Engels "slipped" a good deal, it seems. For, secondly, here is a bit more of the quotation from *Anti-Dühring*, only the concluding sentence of which is given in parentheses by Thompson:

"Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves—two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. Therefore the *freer* a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, the greater is the *necessity* with which the content of this judgment will be determined."<sup>26</sup>

Ponder that last sentence, Comrade Thompson. Here is "common-sense" Engels calling us "slaves to necessity"!

And thirdly, in the phrase "his 'freedom' becomes slavery to 'necessity,'" Thompson himself "slips," alas, into the most blatant anthropomorphic superstition. His choice of words betrays the image in his mind: of human beings "enslaved" to natural laws as if to laws of governments, and pining to be "free" of them. To Thompson the path to freedom, it would appear, lies through ending this "slavery": to Marxists the path to freedom lies through acknowledging the existence of objective laws, getting to know as much as possible about them, and adapting social practice accordingly. No amount of... "emotive" talk about "slavery" can alter Comrade Thompson's own dependence on, and the determination of his activities by, a range of objective laws: mechanical, physical, chemical, biological, physiological, social, etc. In practice he is bound by these laws twenty-four hours a day; he calls this "slavery." Well, let us be frank: Marxism does not admit the possibility of leaping outside the sphere of action of objective laws, of violating them or becoming "free" from them. To Marxists such "freedom" is neither possible nor has it meaning. Yet Marxism alone shows the way to the achievement of real human freedom. Let us try to see why.

#### Necessity

The category of necessity is closely bound up with those of essence and law. "Law," says Lenin, "is the reflection of the essential in the movement of the universe."<sup>27</sup> The law of

a process of natural or social development states approximately the objective regularities, essential relationships and necessary connexions in that process. Scientific laws sum up more or less precisely the causal processes operating in events, tell us what characteristics a particular phenomenon is bound to manifest by its very nature and express the inevitability of its development in a particular way under particular conditions. The materialist recognition of the objectivity of being and its laws is, not yet freedom, but the requisite for all real freedom.

It is of course perfectly true that men act with conscious aims and intentions. But no attempt to explain human history in terms of the conscious aims and intentions, wills and desires of men will advance our understanding very far. Man's aims clash, and something happens which no one had intended, desired or foreseen. Therefore any scientific understanding of social development has to start from the "inner general laws"<sup>28</sup> which ultimately govern both the development of human society and the aims and intentions, ideas and theories, in people's heads.

"People make their own history. But what determines the motives of people, of the mass of people, that is: what gives rise to the clash of conflicting ideas and strivings; what is the sum-total of all these clashes of the whole mass of human societies, what are the objective conditions of production of material life that form the basis of all historical activity of man; what is the law of development of these conditions—to all this Marx drew attention and pointed out the way to a scientific study of history as a uniform and law-governed process in all its immense variety and contradictoriness."<sup>29</sup>

To be free is not to violate the laws of nature and society, which is not possible. Men are no more the miracle-workers that idealists make them out to be (when they hold that freedom is really independence of the human will in relation to the laws of nature and society, or when they deny that there are any objective laws) than they are the puppets or robots that the mechanistic materialists take them for (when they hold that necessity is quite outside the reach of social practice, that human consciousness cannot take account of it and utilize it, that man is in effect a prisoner of objective laws).

To be free, according to dialectical materialism, is to act in accordance with objective laws. Every step forward in the knowledge of these laws is potentially a step forward in the conquest of freedom. Just as men enlarge their freedom in proportion to their knowledge of, and therefore their power over, nature, so men also enlarge their freedom in proportion to their knowledge of, and therefore their power over, their social life, as they foresee more and more precisely the effects of their social activity instead of being at the mercy of laws which, "blind" and unreckoned with, lead to economic crises. To the extent that men plan their actions with knowledge of the factors involved, they are in a position to win real freedom.

The supreme example is the working-class struggle for socialism. Is the working class helped by ignorance of economic laws? Is it not rather by acquiring knowledge of its real situation that it becomes capable of revolutionizing society and so winning freedom, since by its very class position it is in itself objectively the dissolution of capitalist society?<sup>30</sup> Is it, in other words, such a terrible thing to tell the working class that its highest responsibility is to adapt its consciousness to the objective realities of economic development "in as definite, clear and critical fashion as possible"<sup>31</sup>—to equip itself, that is to say, with knowledge of the

history and workings of the capitalist system and its own tasks in the struggle for that system's overthrow? A strange kind of humanism which, at the same time as it stresses the importance of human consciousness, turns its back on this fundamental requirement of any successful working class struggle: that it should be consciously based on knowledge of the realities of society, on the laws of social change. A strange kind of humanism which would disarm the working class by advising it not to acquire such knowledge.

Lenin points to the road to freedom for the workers. Enrich your consciousness, he says, with as accurate knowledge as possible of the laws of social development. Don't listen to him, cries Comrade Thompson; he wants you to adapt yourselves clumsily to "economic stimuli"; he is absorbed in philosophical nuances....

Lenin knows full well that the level of consciousness of the working class does not depend automatically on its class position. He knows that the ideological superstructure of bourgeois society fosters all kinds of illusions to sap the workers' confidence in their strength, to make them think they cannot do very much to improve things, to make them support the capitalist system. He knows that socialist theory depends on knowledge of the essence of capitalism, not its appearance, and that this profound knowledge can only be brought to the working class from outside, by Marxists. Therefore he calls on communists to seek to "adapt" the "consciousness of the advanced classes" to the facts of historical development, i.e., to teach them, to educate them, to persuade them to "adapt" their consciousness to...the truth. "Such a pattern might be built within an electronic brain," complains Comrade Thompson, professing, in the best tradition of English empiricism, his outrage at such a grotesque, mechanical fallacy, at such absorption in philosophical nuances....

### Freedom

To gain knowledge about things it is not enough to sit and contemplate them. We have to put them in the service of man, submit them to his needs and aims, work on them, change them. We get to know the laws of nature and society, not by divine inspiration, but by acting on them. And our knowledge of necessity, derived from our practical activity, applied, tested and made more accurate in further practical activity, is the indispensable premise and pre-condition of human freedom.

Of itself, knowledge of necessity is not enough automatically to confer freedom on us, as Thompson at one point seems to think ("Marx's common-sense view that man's freedom is enlarged by each enlargement of knowledge"). It is as yet only the *theoretical* expression of our relationship to necessity. When, however, we enter into *practical* relationships with necessity, when we *utilize* our knowledge in human practical activity, we win freedom thereby.

"Until we know a law of nature, it, existing and acting independently and outside our mind, makes us slaves of 'blind necessity.' But once we come to know this law, which acts (as Marx pointed out a thousand times) *independently* of our will and our mind, we become the masters of nature. The mastery of nature manifested in human practice is a result of an objectively correct reflection within the human head of the phenomena and processes of nature, and is proof of the fact that this reflection (within the limits of what is revealed by practice) is objective, absolute and eternal truth."<sup>32</sup>

Freedom is thus men's power to satisfy their needs and

achieve their aims, based on knowledge of what their needs and aims are and how they can be satisfied and achieved. Men are unfree to the extent that they are ignorant of and therefore unable to control the factors which affect the satisfaction of their needs and the fulfilment of their aims. They are free to the extent that they know what these factors are and therefore in practice consciously control them.

Freedom is a specifically human attribute, which is won by men as social beings. In primitive times men faced natural forces blindly, and were therefore at the mercy of nature. They achieved freedom gradually in struggle, winning knowledge of necessity scrap by scrap and applying that knowledge in further struggle to win more knowledge, freedom and material progress.

Throughout class society men have faced their social relations rather as early man faced natural forces. For the most part social forces have appeared to be completely outside human control, and great social events, wars and revolutions and the collapse of empires, have presented themselves as catastrophes no less terrible and uncontrollable than natural calamities. Despite the tremendous increase in knowledge of natural laws in the past hundred years, bourgeois science has now for the most part despaired of foreseeing, explaining or controlling the wars and crises which periodically shake capitalist society to its foundations.

Again, men's progressive mastery over nature has been of only limited benefit to the masses of the people, because of their lack of social freedom. As long as society is dominated by successive exploiting classes it is possible neither to put forward in its full complexity nor to solve the problem of men's relationship with nature. An obsolete social system is hampering the proper application of human scientific and technical knowledge, utilizing advanced productive forces for profit and destruction and standing in the way of progress. The road to freedom lies through the overthrow of this system. It is the historical task of the working class, armed with the scientific knowledge of its real situation and tasks which is provided by Marxism, to end the social relations of capitalism which are acting as a fetter on the free development of the productive forces and as a barrier to their utilization for the free satisfaction of human needs. By carrying through the socialist revolution, establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, building a socialist society and going forward to communism the working class wins social freedom—men's complete mastery over their own social organization—and makes possible gigantic strides forward in their conscious mastery over nature.

Thus, far from eliminating man and his activity, dialectical materialism shows how human society is necessarily developing; why men act as they do and think as they do; how freedom can be won; and which is the social force which, properly organized, equipped ideologically and led, can win it, so advancing the whole of humanity "from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom."<sup>33</sup>

## IV. THE DIALECTICAL METHOD

In his reference to Lenin Thompson does not employ the word "dialectic." (Elsewhere he puts it in inverted commas, in a context where the meaning is equivocal, but where he seems to be equating dialectics with "soul.") His attack

on the dialectical method is never made explicit: but it is implicit in his whole attack on Lenin as philosopher. The theory of knowledge he opposes is a *dialectical* theory. The theory of ideologies he opposes is a *dialectical* theory. The theory of freedom he opposes is a *dialectical* theory. And since Lenin's outstanding contribution to philosophy was in the field of the dialectical method, Thompson's disparaging reference to "philosophical nuances" can scarcely be interpreted as anything but a reproach to Lenin for his "absorption" in *dialectics*. To Lenin, dialectics was "the *valuable* fruit of the idealist systems...that pearl which those farmyard cocks, the Buchners, the Dührings and Co. (as well as Leclair, Mach, Avenarius and so forth), could not pick out from the dungheap of absolute idealism."<sup>34</sup> Comrade Thompson, alas, does not recognize pearls when he sees them. But Lenin regarded dialectics as indispensable for the working-class movement if it was to understand and make use of the contradictions of capitalist society. It is not accidental that Lenin's central philosophical study was a long, almost page-by-page commentary on Hegel's *Science of Logic*, in which the method which Hegel enveloped in idealism is set right side up, worked through and digested from a materialist standpoint and revealed in all its intricacy, suppleness and above all precision, as the only method by which human thinking can fathom the complexity and many-sidedness of the eternal process of becoming.

It is not accidental that Lenin plunged into this study of Hegel in the autumn of 1914, at the very moment when the contradictions of capitalist society had come suddenly and explosively to the surface (and when the Second International had collapsed in opportunism and betrayal). Almost isolated in his opposition to the imperialist war, Lenin sought in the "philosophical nuances" of Hegel the method by which events could be judged, not from their superficial aspects, but from their essential contradictions, leaps in development, revolutions, negations, transitions beyond the limit, transformations into the opposite. Lenin found in Hegel, understood materialistically, adequate philosophical justification for his judgment, to be so strikingly confirmed three years later, that the conditions for proletarian revolution had matured.

These notes on Hegel reveal, in a way that none other of Lenin's works reveals, the innermost workings of his mind as he chews over the thought of a profound and difficult thinker and extracts the vital juices.

The compass of the present article will not allow more than a sketchy and inadequate reference to the heart of the *Philosophical Notebooks*: the concept of contradiction. In the fight against Stalinism this concept, as elaborated by Lenin, has threefold importance. Stalin's well-known booklet *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* has more fundamental, and more serious, philosophical flaws than those Thompson discusses in his article (since Thompson concentrates on the section on historical materialism) and it needs, strangely enough, an acquaintance with Lenin's "philosophical nuances" to understand and expose them. First, the section on the dialectical method stresses the struggle of opposites, but ignores their identity. This is of particular importance in considering the categories of dialectical logic which, despite their basic epistemological importance, are ignored by Stalin: this is the booklet's second flaw.<sup>35</sup> And thirdly, there is no mention in it of the negation of negation, possibly because it might have been felt in 1938 to have awk-

ward political implications (Zhdanov even invented in 1947 a new dialectical law, presumably to replace it—the "law" of criticism and self-criticism).<sup>36</sup> The conception of contradiction set forth in the *Philosophical Notebooks* shows how essential to a proper understanding of the dialectical method are these three aspects of that method neglected by Stalin.

### Identity of Opposites

To Lenin dialectics was "the theory which shows how opposites can be and habitually are (and become) *identical*—under what conditions they transform themselves into each other and become identical—why the human mind should not take these opposites as dead and rigid, but as living, conditional, mobile, changing into each other."<sup>37</sup> Applied subjectively, this suppleness, flexibility, elasticity of dialectical thinking became eclecticism and sophistry; applied objectively, i.e., reflecting the universality and unity of the material process of becoming, it was the precise, dialectical reflection of the eternal development of the universe.<sup>38</sup> The identity of opposites was "the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive*, opposite tendencies in *all* phenomena and processes of nature (*including* mind and society)."<sup>39</sup> This side of dialectics, Lenin pointed out, usually received inadequate attention: the identity of opposites was not a sum-total of examples but a *law of knowledge* and of the objective world.<sup>40</sup>

The identity of opposites is of course an abstraction, and an abstraction of an exceedingly high level: one of the most general laws of universal becoming. The word "identity" is here used not in the ordinary sense, but in a special, philosophical sense, which includes the notions of unity (or inseparability) in a single process, mutual penetration, mutual dependence, transformation of each into the other. The identity of opposites implies that the existence and development of each opposite is the condition for the existence and development of the other; that under certain conditions every property or aspect turns into its opposite; and that in the case of the categories both contradictory aspects are interwoven throughout the universe at every level of motion of matter. Lenin saw the identity of opposites as conditional, transitory and relative, the struggle of opposites as absolute, in the sense that development and motion were absolute. Development was the struggle of opposites; this conception of development furnished the key to the self-movement of everything in existence, to the leaps, breaks in continuity and transformations into the opposite, to the destruction of the old and emergence of the new.

### The Categories of Dialectical Logic

"There is before man a network of natural phenomena. The savage does not separate himself from nature. Conscious man does separate himself from it, and the categories are the degrees of this separation, i.e., of man's knowledge of the universe. They are nodal points in the network, which enable him to know it and assimilate it."<sup>41</sup>

Thus does Lenin show that these most abstract of concepts, the categories of dialectical logic (i.e., of the dialectical materialist theory of knowledge) are derived from and linked with the whole of the concrete, material universe. Shamefully neglected by Stalinism, ostensibly because of their "difficulty" but in reality because they expose the wooden schematism of Stalin's famous exegesis, the categories are indispensable for any genuine

dialectical thought, investigation and research. We cannot think properly and precisely, we cannot grapple with changing reality, without them. And it was Lenin who more than any other Marxist developed this fundamental aspect of the dialectical method, and who left us indications drawn from his own experience as a student on the method of studying it in a way that discloses the elements of all the dialectical categories already present in any proposition or phenomenon.

"To begin with the simplest, most ordinary, common, etc., with *any proposition*: the leaves of a tree are green; John is a man; Fido is a dog, etc. Here already we have *dialectics*... the *particular* is the *general*... Consequently, the opposites (the particular as opposed to the general) are identical: the particular exists only in the connexion that leads to the general. The general exists only in the particular and through the particular. Every particular is (in one way or another) a general. Every general is (a fragment, or a side, or the essence of) a particular. Every general only approximately comprises all the particular objects. Every particular enters into the general incompletely, etc., etc. Every particular is connected by thousands of transitions with other *kinds* of particulars (things, phenomena, processes), etc. *Here already* we have the elements, the germs, the concepts of *necessity*, of objective connexion in nature, etc. Here already we have the contingent and the necessary, the appearance and the essence; for when we say: John is a man, Fido is a dog, *this* is a leaf of a tree, etc., we disregard a number of attributes as *CONTINGENT*; we separate the essence from the appearance, and juxtapose the one to the other.

"Thus in *any* given proposition we can (and must) disclose as in a 'nucleus' ('cell') the germs of *all* the elements of dialectics, and thereby show that dialectics is a property of all human knowledge in general."<sup>42</sup>

Of all the categories Lenin seems to have considered as most important, richest and most fruitful those of appearance and essence (with which are closely connected those of phenomenon and law). The identity and struggle of appearance and essence as two aspects (or "moments") of material reality takes us at once right to the heart of the dialectical method, as a method of thinking about processes in a way that will give us more, and more precise, knowledge of their inner relationships and laws. The appearance at one and the

same time hides the essence and reveals it, for "the appearance is the essence in *one* of its determinations, in one of its aspects, in one of its moments."<sup>43</sup>

This thought is clear when we ponder over it a little. In analyzing any phenomenon we pass from superficial, perceptual knowledge, knowledge of its appearance, to knowledge of its essence; this in turn becomes for us an appearance which both hides and reveals a still deeper essence. Often the solution of a political or organizational problem—e.g., the analysis of a situation, the elaboration of a policy, the concentration of forces, etc.—turns on discovering concretely how and why at a given stage the essence of a particular process is manifested through certain events and masked by others. When we gain knowledge of the essence we can understand the appearance in a new light. Lenin gives an example: "the movement of a river—the foam on top and the profound currents below. *But the foam also* is an expression of the essence."<sup>44</sup> Each essence, each law, each necessity he discovers is for man a degree in the infinite process of acquiring more and more knowledge of the universal process of becoming in its unity, interconnection and interdependence.

It would be wrong to suppose that Lenin merely picked out from Hegel what was useful without *developing* his thought in a materialist fashion. The dialectic of appearance and essence, for instance, is more concrete and more dynamic, and hence more dialectical, in Lenin's hands than in Hegel's. To Hegel appearance and essence were in a state of logical coexistence. To Lenin they were in continuous dynamic interaction. At times the essential contradictions suddenly find expression—dramatically and explosively—in the appearance, as, for instance, when capitalist society is shaken by wars and revolutions. At other times the appearance is the arena of slow and gradual changes behind which the essence remains latent. Lack of understanding of this dialectical interaction is at the heart of much of the present confusion about events in the USSR in the minds of commentators and interpreters who see only the appearance of things, who misunderstand it,

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and who are therefore frequently thrown off balance by some new and unexpected turn of events.

### The Negation of Negation

The law of negation of negation ("A development that seemingly repeats the stages already passed, but repeats them otherwise, on a higher basis...a development, so to speak, in spirals, not in a straight line"<sup>45</sup>) is fundamental to a correct understanding of the profoundly contradictory nature of development through stages, of the emergence of the new contradiction from the old, and of the subsumption, the transcendence, the "overcoming and at the same time preservation"<sup>46</sup> of the old in the new. "Abolished" by Stalin, this law obstinately continues to operate in nature and society, even in the Soviet Union.

Lenin saw negation as the most important element in dialectics:

"Neither barren negation, nor purposeless negation, nor sceptical negation, nor vacillation, nor doubt are characteristic or essential in dialectics—which of course contains, as its most important element even, the element of negation—no, negation as a moment of interconnexion, as a moment of development which preserves the positive, i.e., without any vacillations, without any eclecticism."<sup>47</sup>

Understood dialectically, negation is not mere empty negativity, the annihilation or destruction of something, but "is equally positive...is something definite, possesses a determined content whose internal contradictions lead to the replacement of the old content by a new, higher content."<sup>48</sup> The old is surpassed when it has produced the conditions for the new, when its internal contradictions have pushed it beyond itself, as it were, have driven it to its "negation"; its own development leads to its negation; however the advance that has been made in the old stage is not destroyed but subsumed, "transcended," overcome and preserved in the new.

The concept of negation is, so to say, the point where the dialectical laws of the identity and struggle of opposites and of the transformation of quantity into quality intersect. A process is said to be negated when the struggle of opposites within it drives it beyond its qualitative limit. It is often said that "everything contains the seeds of that which will destroy it." It is more accurate to say "of that which will negate it"—and probably more accurate still to say "everything contains its own negation." For the negation is the new that grows within the womb of the old and finally supplants it.

But this is a never-ending process. Every new stage becomes in time an old stage; every negation is itself the arena of new contradictions, the soil of a new negation that leads inexorably forward to a new qualitative leap, to a still higher stage of development, carrying forward the advances made in the previous stages, often seeming to repeat—on a higher level, enriched by the intervening development—a stage already passed.

The negation of negation is thus a further "transcendence," a further overcoming and preservation in the new of the stages already passed through. Frequently there is a return on a higher level to the original starting-point.

Too often the negation of negation has been presented as the "sum-total of examples"—and often hackneyed examples at that. Examples have to be given, but the law is an abstraction, and its content is neither exhausted nor fully clarified by examples, for it is a universal law of nature, society and human knowledge.

The appearance of classes and the eventual destruction of the whole fabric of "primitive" communist society was a negation of that society. Communism will be in many respects a return on a world scale to the human relationships and attitudes of "primitive" society, enriched by all the scientific, technological and cultural discoveries and achievements of five thousand years of class society: in other words, the negation of class society, the negation of negation.

Old knowledge is continually being replaced—negated, not destroyed—by new knowledge. Hegel described the process rather well. "Cognition," he wrote, "rolls forward from content to content." The concept "raises to each next stage of determination the whole mass of its antecedent content, and by its dialectical progress not only loses nothing and leaves nothing behind, but carries with it all that it has acquired."<sup>49</sup> "This fragment," commented Lenin, "sums up dialectics rather well in its own way."<sup>50</sup> But what Hegel saw as the self-development of the Idea, Lenin saw as the reflection in eternally deepening human knowledge of the development of material reality.

In every process of nature, society and thought we find in one form or another this "repetition in the higher stage of certain features, properties, etc., of the lower and apparent return to the old."<sup>51</sup>

### Method

Lenin's "absorption in philosophical nuances" twice led him to set forth tentatively, but highly suggestively, the elements of the dialectical method. In *Once Again on the Trade Unions, the Present Situation and the Mistakes of Comrades Trotsky and Bukharin* (1921) the requirements of dialectical logic are set forth under four headings. First, "in order really to know an object we must embrace, study, all its sides, all connections and 'mediations'." Secondly, we should "take an object in its development, its 'self-movement'...in its changes." Thirdly, "the whole of human experience should enter the full 'definition' of an object as a criterion of the truth and as a practical index of the object's connexion with what man requires." Fourthly, "dialectical logic teaches that 'there is no abstract truth, truth is always concrete'."<sup>52</sup>

In the *Philosophical Notebooks* the dialectical method is summarized from a different standpoint in sixteen points, which, though terse and unexemplified, constitute a highly dialectical presentation of this method:

- (1) *Objectivity* of investigation (not examples, not digressions, but the thing itself);
- (2) The totality of the manifold *relations* of each thing with others;
- (3) The *development* of the thing (or phenomenon), its own movement, its own life;
- (4) The internal contradictory *tendencies* (and aspects) in the thing;
- (5) The thing (phenomenon, etc.) as the sum and *unity of opposites*;
- (6) The *struggle* or unfolding of these opposites, the contradiction of the trends, etc.
- (7) The unity of analysis and synthesis—the analysis into separate elements and the totality, the sum, of these elements.
- (8) The relations of each thing (phenomenon, etc.) are not only manifold, but universal. Every thing (phenomenon, process, etc.) is connected with *everything* else.
- (9) Not only the unity of opposites, but the *transition of EACH* determination, quality, feature, aspect, property, into *every* other (into its opposite?);

- (10) An infinite process of the discovery of new aspects, relationships;
- (11) An infinite process of the deepening of human knowledge of things, phenomena, processes, etc., proceeding from appearance to essence and from essence less profound to essence more profound;
- (12) From coexistence to causality and from one form of connexion and interdependence to another, deeper and more universal;
- (13) The repetition in the higher stage of certain features, properties, etc. of the lower; and
- (14) The apparent return to the old (negation of negation);
- (15) Struggle of content with form and *vice versa*. Throwing off of the form, rearrangement of the content.
- (16) Transition from quantity to quality and *vice versa*.
- (15) and (16) are examples of (9)<sup>53</sup>

Those to whom these sixteen "philosophical nuances" appear too sententious will find practical examples of their concrete application throughout the whole of Lenin's political writings. "Dialectics," he wrote, "can be briefly defined as the theory of the unity of opposites. The core of dialectics is thereby grasped, but explanation and development are needed."<sup>54</sup> That explanation and development—materialist dialectics in action—are seen at their most concrete in the building of the Bolshevik Party, the carrying through of

the October Revolution, the leadership of the Soviet State, and even in the campaign against bureaucracy which Lenin waged from his sick-bed until death silenced him. Those who study Lenin's approach to the problems which confronted him in the course of three decades of political activity are studying the masterly application of the dialectical method in the "concrete analysis of concrete conditions."

\* \* \*

This article has merely touched the fringe of Lenin's creative work as a Marxist philosopher. Fields of great interest and topicality, such as his views on objectivity and partisanship and his theory of social-economic formations, have necessarily been omitted, since this is primarily a polemical and not an expository article. Conversely, only a very small part of "Socialist Humanism" has been discussed: a mere couple of pages out of thirty-eight. There are many thought-provoking things (and many excellent things) in the other thirty-six. But the passage commented on here raises issues that are fundamental to Marxism, and "a spoonful of tar spoils a barrel of honey." Or, as somebody once remarked, "to leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality." ■

## Notes

1. *The New Reasoner*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 132-5, Summer 1957.
2. *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1952 edition), p. 85.
3. See, e.g., *Capital*, Vol. 1 (1946 edition), p. xxx; *Dialectics of Nature* (1954 edition), p. 271; *Anti-Dühring* (1954 edition), pp. 34, 467; Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 328.
4. Nevertheless the "uniqueness" of human thinking should not be exaggerated. At its more elementary levels of abstraction it is different only in degree from the mental processes of the higher animals.
5. Lenin, *Cahiers philosophiques* (Editions Sociales, 1955), p. 125.
6. Thompson here—though he may not be aware of this—is not breaking new ground; his attack on the Marxist-Leninist theory of reflection was anticipated two years ago by M. Merleau-Ponty, professor at the Collège de France, in a book called *Les Aventures de la Dialectique*, in which he called this theory a "return to naïve realism."
7. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 161.
8. *Ibid.* p. 182.
9. *Ibid.* p. 289.
10. *Ibid.* pp. 150-1.
11. *Ibid.* p. 174. This and the dozens of similar quotations one could take from the *Philosophical Notebooks* seem to me to dispose of the second "fallacy" Thompson finds: "the repeated statement, in an emotive manner, that material reality is 'primary' and 'consciousness, thought, sensation' is 'secondary,' 'derivative.'" Thompson comments: "Partially true; but we must guard against the emotional undertones that therefore thought is less important than material reality." These are the words of a "partial" materialist. The statement that consciousness is secondary and derivative implies nothing about its importance, but only says something about its origin.
12. Here again Thompson is following in the footsteps of...M. Merleau-Ponty, who caricatures historical materialism by writing of "economic determinism," of the "deduction of the whole of culture from the economy," of alleged Marxist demands that the history of culture must always be strictly "parallel to political history" and that art must be judged by "immediate political criteria" and by "the political conformity of the author."
13. Even though "the interaction between social environment and conscious agency...was central to their thought" and though Marx himself saw "the neglect of agency" as "the weakness of mechanical materialism." This apparent paradox Thompson makes no attempt to explain.
14. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 329.
15. *Ibid.* Cf. *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 51; *The German Ideology*, pp. 14, 39;
16. T.B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (1956), p. 77; Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence* (1943 edition), p. 475; Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 105, etc., etc.
17. Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 510-11. Cf. also p. 477: "Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that younger writers sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize this main principle in opposition to our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights."
18. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 309.
19. *Selected Works* (twelve-volume edition), Vol. 11, pp. 681-3.
20. Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 512.
21. George Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (1950), p. 93.
22. Cf. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 30.
23. Lenin, *Selected Works* (twelve-volume edition), Vol. 2, p. 47.
24. *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 191.
25. *Ibid.* pp. 338-9.
26. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 182.
27. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 158.
28. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 126.
29. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 354.
30. Lenin, *Marx, Engels, Marxism* (1951 edition), p. 28.
31. "When the proletariat announces the dissolution of the existing social order, it only declares the secret of its own existence, for it constitutes the effective dissolution of this order"—Marx, quoted Bottomore and Rubel, *op. cit.* pp. 182-3. Cf. also *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1956 edition), p. 140: "In the measure that history moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines...[the communists] have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece."
32. *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 339.
33. *Ibid.* pp. 192-3.
34. *Anti-Dühring*, p. 393.
35. *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, p. 250.
36. After Stalin's death a certain "rehabilitation" of the dialectical categories took place in Soviet philosophical writing. See, e.g., G. Gak, "The Categories of Materialist Dialectics," *Kommunist*, 1954, No. 13, translated into French in *Recherches Soviétiques*, No. 1, pp. 35-57, 1956.
37. These three flaws do not exhaust those to be found in the section

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on dialectics. For instance, the four so-called "principal features of the Marxist dialectical method" are set forth schematically as if they were of equal methodological importance, and the question of the qualitative leap is put crudely and confusingly. For fifteen years this booklet gave millions of people their first—and often their only—account of Marxist philosophy, which is a great pity. Materialist dialectics is much more dialectical than Stalin's refurbishing of a series of newspaper articles written in 1906 makes it out to be.

37. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 90.

38. *Ibid.* p. 91.

39. *Marx, Engels, Marxism*, pp. 332-3.

40. *Ibid.* p. 332.

41. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 76.

42. *Marx, Engels, Marxism*, pp. 334-5.

43. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 110. A "moment" is an active determining factor in a process.

44. *Ibid.* p. 108.

45. *Marx, Engels, Marxism*, p. 25.

46. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 89. "To transcend (aufheben) has this double meaning, that it signifies to keep or to preserve and also to make to cease, to finish."—Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Vol. 1, p. 119.

47. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 185.

48. *Ibid.* p. 79.

49. Hegel, *op. cit.* Vol. 2, pp. 482-3.

50. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 189.

51. *Ibid.* p. 185.

52. *Selected Works* (twelve-volume edition), Vol. 9, p. 66.

53. *Cahiers philosophiques*, pp. 181-2. English translations of these sixteen points appeared in the March 1932 *Labour Monthly*, in H. Levy, etc., *Aspects of Dialectical Materialism* (1934), pp. 14-16, and in David Guest, *A Text Book of Dialectical Materialism* (1939), pp. 47-9.

54. *Cahiers philosophiques*, p. 182.

# Work Among Women...

(continued from page 64)

when the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat was at its height and the betrayals of Stalinism were yet to come. Since that time the working class has suffered many setbacks and defeats, not least the 1991-92 capitalist counter-revolution that destroyed the Soviet Union. Today bourgeois pundits speak of the “death of communism,” but the irreconcilable class struggle continues and with it the need to fight for a communist society in which all forms of exploitation and oppression are things of the past. Several years ago, seeking to study and learn from the crucial lessons of history, we decided to republish the Theses, understanding that the work of the Bolsheviks and the Communist International shows the way for the future generations of Marxist fighters.

In order to reconstruct an authoritative version of the document and its history for a new translation, we conducted extensive research in the Comintern and Bolshevik Party archives of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow; the German Communist Party (KPD) and Comintern files at the Berlin Federal Archives in Berlin-Lichterfelde, Germany; the Hoover Institution library and archives at Stanford University and the libraries of the University of California at Berkeley, as well as our own Prometheus Research Library. Insofar as the surviving documentary record allows, we uncovered how, and by whom, the Theses were written. While much remains unknown, we determined that the original language of the document was Russian. Significant differences exist between the German and Russian texts: For example, the 1921 German text, the version most widely disseminated by the Comintern, does not include two sections on the primary methods of work among non-party women, delegate meetings and non-party women’s conferences, which may be a reflection of the political debates among the leading women cadres. The German text also gives the party a limited role in overseeing the work. Thus we have based our translation on the official Comintern Russian text as reprinted in 1933.

## The Struggle for the Communist International

The founding congress of the Third International took place in 1919. However, Lenin launched the fight for a new international in August 1914, when most parties of the Second International betrayed the proletariat by supporting their own capitalist masters in the bloody imperialist slaughter of World War I.

This betrayal was prepared by years of political degeneration. The Second International had become infused, as Leon Trotsky said of its leading party, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), with “an adaptation to parliamentarism and to the unbroken growth of the organization, the press, and the treasury” that “ended by stifling the revolutionary will of the party” (*The New Course*, 1923). By 1914 evolving differences had resulted in two distinct wings of the social democracy, left and right, as well as a broad centrist current represented by Karl Kautsky. In the main, the social-democratic European party leaderships saw work among women as a subordinate matter. The trailblazing work among women before 1914, including publication of *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), was initiated and carried out by determined and

tenacious women cadres, led by prominent SPDer Clara Zetkin, in the face of the hostility or indifference of the rightist party leadership.

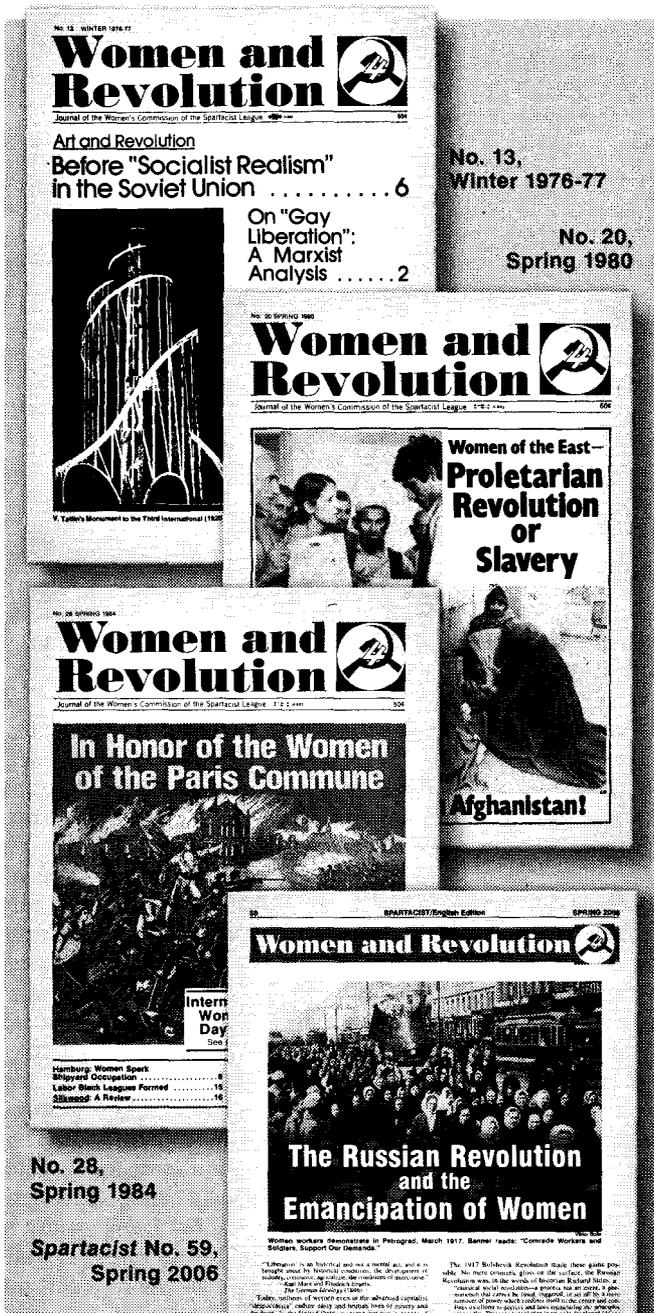
Under the impact of the Russian Revolution, the left wing of the Second International flocked to the Bolshevik banner, bringing in its wake some opportunist carryovers. Forging new, Leninist vanguard parties as sections of a revolutionary international required a series of political fights to break aspiring revolutionaries wholly from social-democratic practice and program and to purge the centrist waverers. As part of this struggle, in 1920 the Second CI Congress adopted the “Conditions of Admission to the Communist International,” known as the “21 Conditions,” which provided an organizational and political form for separating the revolutionaries from the reformists and centrists and carrying forward the fight against “indirect agents of the bourgeoisie within the working-class movement,” as Lenin put it (“A Letter to the German Communists,” August 1921).

## The Bolshevik Fight for the Women Toilers

In 1919 the Communist International affirmed the necessity for work among women at its founding congress with a brief “Resolution on the Need to Draw Women Workers into the Struggle for Socialism.” The same year, the Russian Communist Party established a special department of the Central Committee for work among women, the Zhenotdel, and appointed Bolshevik leader Inessa Armand as its first head. From Lenin and Trotsky to Yakov Sverdlov and Nadezhda Krupskaya, virtually every leading Bolshevik was concerned with this work. The Bolsheviks recognized two leading principles: Because of women’s special oppression, their relative political backwardness and, for those who did not work, social isolation in the home, *special work among women was necessary* to rally them behind the Communist banner. Second, this work *must take place under the leadership of the party* as the work of the whole party.

Drawing on their work in publishing the journal *Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker) beginning in 1914, the Bolsheviks advocated special methods of work by which non-party women would be mobilized, educated and drawn into political work through the press and by organizing conferences, discussion and reading groups and clubs, as appropriate, for women whose social and political isolation otherwise put them beyond the party’s reach. (See “How the Bolsheviks Organized Working Women—History of the Journal *Rabotnitsa*,” *W&R* No. 4, Fall 1973.) Two key methods were delegate meetings and non-party women’s conferences, both explained in detail in the Theses. The party advocated a division of labor within all leading party bodies, from the Central Committee to local trade-union fractions, to establish commissions whose special task was to oversee the work among the masses of toiling women.

The Bolsheviks began with the Marxist premise that the oppression of women, the oldest social inequality in human history, goes back to the beginning of private property and cannot be eradicated short of the abolition of class-divided society, requiring abundant resources on an international scale. The fundamental social institution oppressing women is the family. Its function of raising the next generation must be superseded: women’s household labor and childcare will be replaced by collective institutions in a socialist society. After taking power in 1917, insofar as they were



**Women and Revolution, now incorporated into Spartacist, covers a wide range of historical and social issues, drawing on our communist heritage.**

able under the conditions of extreme economic and social backwardness, civil war and imperialist invasion, the Bolsheviks mobilized toiling women as the advance guard to begin constructing collectivized childcare centers, communal kitchens and laundries to replace the individual household economy. (For a history of work among women in early Soviet society, see “The Russian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women,” *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 59, Spring 2006.) As written in a summary report of a speech by Inessa Armand:

“The struggle for the liberation of women is an inseparable part of the general struggle for the dictatorship of the working class and must give to the final fight millions of reserves from the most backward, most forgotten and oppressed, most

humiliated layers of the working class and the toiling poor from the women’s army of labor.”

—*Otchet o Pervoi mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii kommunistok* (Report on the First International Conference of Communist Women) (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1921) (our translation)

By early 1924, a bureaucratic caste under Stalin usurped political power from the working class in a political counterrevolution. The consolidation of the Stalinist bureaucracy over a number of years went hand in hand with the abandonment of the fight for international revolution, and of the cause of women’s emancipation. The Stalinists had so besmirched the great ideals of communism with bureaucratic distortions and lies that, in the end in 1991–92, the working class did not fight against the revolution’s final undoing and the restoration of capitalism under Boris Yeltsin.

**The First International Conference of Communist Women**

The Theses on Work Among Women as voted by the Comintern came out of a year-long debate in the CI in 1920–21 between the Soviet comrades on the one hand and leading West and Central European comrades on the other. The First International Conference of Communist Women, which met in Moscow from 30 July to 2 August 1920, was initiated and organized by Inessa Armand, whose tragic death from cholera shortly thereafter deprived the CI of one of its leading cadre. Motivating draft theses submitted by Soviet comrades, Armand addressed controversies that continued to be debated throughout the following year. Her report severely criticized the Second International for being a “brake on the revolutionary proletarian movement” and “an opponent of the liberation of all toiling women”:

“Besides its general incapacity for revolutionary struggle for socialism, the leading elements of the Second International themselves were to their core suffused with philistine prejudices on the woman question, and because of that, in addition to its general betrayal of the proletariat in its fight for power, the Second International is responsible for a number of shameful betrayals of toiling women in the area of the most elementary general democratic demands. For instance concerning the question of universal women’s suffrage—the representatives of the Second International either did nothing at all (France, Belgium), or sabotaged it (Austria) or distorted it (England), etc.”

—*Ibid.*

This critique encountered stubborn opposition from the West and Central European delegates, including the Austrian and German comrades, who objected to polemics in the theses and argued that the theses expressed insufficient appreciation of Clara Zetkin’s work.

A second area of debate centered on the Russian comrades’ insistence on establishing detailed, firm organizational guidelines for the work so that the Theses did not remain mere paper platitudes, as had been the case in the Second International. The third major area of difference was the applicability and adaptation of the delegate system and non-party women’s conferences to advanced capitalist countries, particularly in Europe, which remained a contentious issue for some time. Perhaps reflecting these differences, delegates from the First International Conference of Communist Women submitted two sets of draft theses to the Second CI Congress. Time pressures led the Congress to refer the debate to the CI Executive (ECCI).

After Clara Zetkin arrived in Moscow for the first time in



Congress was to recognize the ebb in the class struggle and to turn the International to the task of winning the masses. While the Theses do not explicitly acknowledge this key turn, the document lays out in detail a method to find the road to the masses of toiling women. At the same time, references to the “imminence” of the proletarian revolution reflect the outlook of the prior period.

On 8 July 1921 Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai addressed the delegates of the Third Congress to motivate the adoption of the Theses on Work Among Women. According to the official proceedings of the Third Congress, two resolutions and two sets of theses were adopted by the Congress, all referred by the Second International Conference of Communist Women. We have not been able to identify any second set of theses on the woman question. Of the two resolutions adopted, one addressed the forms and methods of work among women; the second sought to strengthen the international connections between the sections and with the International Women’s Secretariat, a body subordinate to the ECCI.

Several points in the final Theses are worthy of special comment. Of particular note is the attention the Theses give to the question of the liberation of the deeply oppressed women of the East, for the first time raised as a crucial task of the revolutionary workers movement. On another point, the Theses rejects “any collaboration or agreements whatsoever with bourgeois feminists.” Today, the International Communist League does not rule out, and in fact has participated in, joint actions with bourgeois feminists to defend abortion clinics, for example.

The “sorry role” played by the mass of women in the Hungarian Revolution of 1919 refers to the mass reactionary working-class demonstrations against the short-lived Soviet government headed by Béla Kun. The counterrevolution was able to mobilize toiling women in part because of the party’s failure to address their special needs.

**About the New Translation**

Our goal was to provide a text of the Theses that is as complete as possible and that represents early Comintern work among women as accurately as possible. In translating the document from the Russian, we discovered difficulties with the text itself. As Witold S. Sworakowski noted in *The Communist International and its Front Organizations* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution, 1965):

“The user of Comintern publications must be aware of the fact that the same item when published in Russian, English, German, French, or any other language, although seemingly identical with its counterparts, is not necessarily so in its content.... In most cases it is practically impossible to establish which item is in the original language and which is a translation. Texts of the same item, e.g., of the same speech, report, or resolution, may differ in editions in different languages.”

The 1921 English translation that we reprinted in 1971-72 includes the entirety of the Russian version, but suffers from poor English and intermittent omissions of phrases and sentences. We found other, subsequent English translations to be seriously defective.

We have used as a basis for our translation the Russian edition published in 1933 in *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional v dokumentakh; Resheniia, tezisy i vozzvaniia kongressov Komintern a i plenumov IKKI 1919-1932* (The Communist International in Documents; Decisions, Theses and Declarations of Comintern Congresses and ECCI Plenums,

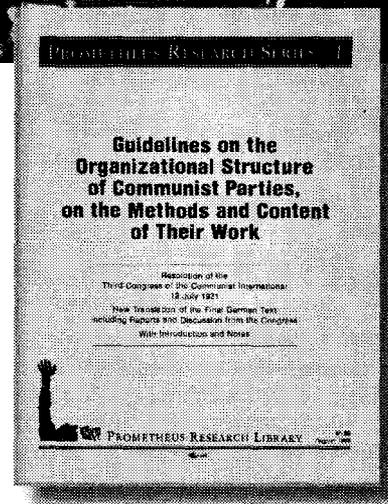
1919-1932) (Moscow: Partizdat, 1933) edited by Béla Kun. We compared the 1933 text to the Russian Preliminary Theses, as well as to the Russian text of the Theses distributed by the Comintern Press Bureau to the Third Congress delegates for voting. In addition we considered the German text of the Theses published in 1921 by the Comintern and distributed in Germany by Carl Hoym (Hamburg), and *V.I. Lenin i Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* (V.I. Lenin and the Communist International) (Moscow: Politizdat, 1970), translated from the German, edited by Kirill Kirillovich Shirinia, a scholar of Comintern history. We found that the Press Bureau Theses introduced typographical errors and omissions in retyping from the Preliminary Theses that in a few cases rendered the Russian text ambiguous or even nonsensical. Unfortunately, these errors and small omissions were carried forward in the 1933 edition of the Theses. In these obvious cases we have restored the original text from the Preliminary Theses. In two cases we included short paragraphs that appeared in the 1933 Moscow edition that do not appear in either the Preliminary or Press Bureau Theses.

Our research deepened our own understanding of the importance of the Theses. In the past, working with the historical resources we had at the time, *Women and Revolution* incorrectly presented the history of the “proletarian women’s movement” as if there were a direct continuity from the work among women of the Second to the Third International. For example, in “The Russian Revolution and the Emancipation of Women,” we wrote, “Before World War I the Social Democrats in Germany pioneered in building a women’s



A. I. Savelyev

**V. I. Lenin addressing CI Third Congress in Moscow, 1921. Lenin considered the Organizational Guidelines critical to forging the Third International. Right: New translation published in Prometheus Research Library bulletin, 1988.**



'transitional organization'—a special body, linked to the party through its most conscious cadre." In fact, the idea of a special party apparatus to conduct work among women was pioneered by the Bolsheviks in their endeavor to draw the masses of toiling women to the side of the vanguard party and can be undertaken only by a programmatically hard Leninist party.

The Bolshevik Revolution was a beacon of hope to the world's oppressed, not least to those slaves of slaves, the oppressed women workers and peasants, who at last were to take their place in history through the transformation of

class society, looking toward a new, socialist world. As the report of Inessa Armand's speech at the First International Conference of Communist Women said:

"Soviet power cannot defend the dictatorship of the proletariat against the attacks of the imperialists without the recruitment of the broadest masses of women workers and peasants to participation in the civil war, without the education and involvement, to speak in comrade Lenin's words, of the last woman cook in the task of governing the state."

—"Report of First International Conference of Communist Women" (our translation)

## Theses on Methods and Forms of Work of the Communist Parties Among Women

### Basic Principles

1. The Third Congress of the Communist International, together with the Second International Conference of Communist Women, reaffirms once again the decision of the First and Second Congresses on the necessity of strengthening the work of all the Communist Parties of the West and the East among the female proletariat, educating the broad masses of women workers in the spirit of communism and drawing them into the struggle for Soviet power or for constructing the Soviet toilers republic.

Throughout the entire world the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat has been squarely posed before the working class, and thus before women workers as well.<sup>1</sup>

The capitalist economic system has reached a dead end: there is no room for the further development of the productive forces within the framework of capitalism. The universal immiseration of working people, the inability of the bourgeoisie to revive production, burgeoning speculation, decaying production, unemployment, fluctuating prices out of step with wages—all lead to the inevitable intensification of the class struggle in all countries. In this struggle the question will be decided: by whom and under what system will production be led, directed and organized—by a handful of capitalists or by the working class on a communist basis.

The new, rising proletarian class, in accordance with the laws of economic development, must take the productive apparatus into its own hands and create new economic forms. Only this will create the necessary impetus for the maximum development of the productive forces, hitherto held back by the anarchy of capitalist production.

As long as power is in the hands of the bourgeois class, the proletariat will be powerless to revive production. As long as power is in the hands of the bourgeoisie, no reforms, no measures carried out by democratic or socialist governments of the bourgeois countries can save the situation and alleviate the heavy, unbearable torments suffered by female and male workers—torments born in the collapse of the capitalist economic system. Only the seizure of power by the proletariat will make it possible for the class of producers to take hold of the means of production and thus enable them to direct economic development in the interests of the working people.

To hasten the inevitable hour of the decisive clash of the proletariat with the moribund bourgeois world, the working

class must uphold the firm and resolute tactics outlined by the Third International. The dictatorship of the proletariat—the basic immediate goal—determines the methods of work and the battle line for the proletariat of both sexes.

The struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat is imminent for the proletariat of all capitalist states and the construction of communism is the immediate task of those countries where the dictatorship is in the hands of the workers. Therefore, the Third Congress of the Communist International affirms that both the conquest of power by the proletariat and the achievement of communism in a country which has already thrown off the yoke of the bourgeoisie cannot be realized without the active participation of the mass of the female proletariat and semi-proletariat.

On the other hand, the Congress once again directs the attention of all women to the fact that without the support of the Communist Parties in all the tasks and undertakings promoting the liberation and emancipation of women, a woman's full personal rights and her actual emancipation are impossible to achieve in real life.

2. At the same rate as the worldwide economic devastation becomes ever more acute and unbearable for all urban and rural poor, the interests of the working class, especially in the present period, require bringing women into the organized ranks of the proletariat that is fighting for communism.

As a result, the question of social revolution is inescapably posed before the working class of the bourgeois-capitalist countries, just as the task of rebuilding the economy on new communist foundations arises before the working people of Soviet Russia. The more actively, consciously and resolutely women take part in both these tasks, the more easily they will be accomplished.

Wherever the question of the conquest of power is squarely posed, the Communist Parties must take into account the great danger posed to the revolution by the inert masses of women workers, housewives, office workers and peasant women who are not freed from the influence of the bourgeois worldview, the church and superstitions, and who are not in one way or another connected to the great liberating movement for communism. Unless the masses of women in the West and the East are recruited to the movement, they inevitably become a bulwark for the bourgeoisie, a target for counterrevolutionary propaganda. The experience of the

Hungarian Revolution, where the lack of consciousness of the mass of women played such a sorry role, should serve in this sense as a warning to the proletarians of all other countries setting out on the path of social revolution.

Conversely, the policies pursued by the Soviet Republic showed in concrete experience the importance of the participation of women workers and peasants—in the Civil War, in the defense of the republic and in all spheres of Soviet construction. The facts prove the importance of the role already played by women workers and peasants in the Soviet Republic in organizing defense, strengthening the rear, in the struggle against desertion, and in the battle against every sort of counterrevolution, sabotage, etc. The experience of the toilers republic must be learned and put to use in other countries.

From this derives the task of each Communist Party to spread its influence to the broadest layers of the female population of its country by means of organizing special, internal party apparatuses and establishing special methods of approaching women to free them from the influence of the bourgeois worldview or the influence of the compromiser parties, and to develop among them resolute fighters for communism and hence fighters for the all-sided education of womankind.

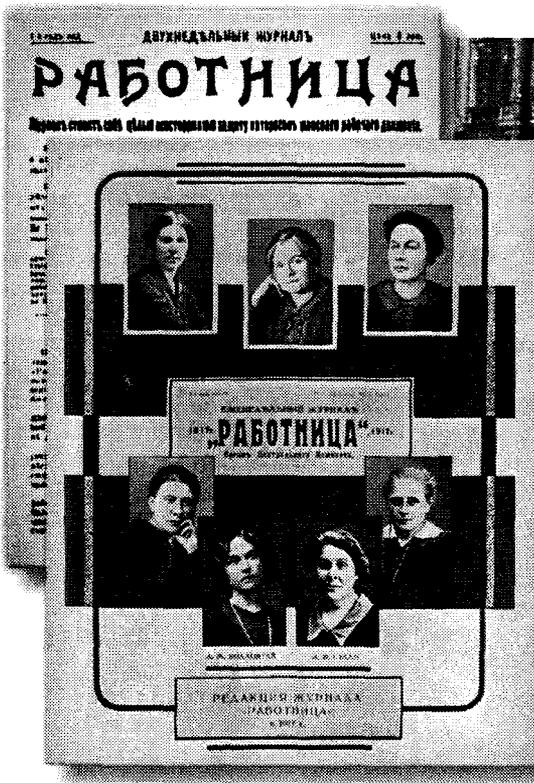
3. By placing before the Communist Parties of the West and the East the immediate task of strengthening the work of the party among the female proletariat, the Third Congress of the Communist International at the same time points out to the women workers of the whole world that their liberation from age-old injustice, enslavement and inequality can be realized *only through the victory of communism*. What communism gives to women can by no means be provided by the bourgeois women's movement. As long as the rule of capital and private property exists in the capitalist countries, the liberation of woman from dependency on her husband can go no further than the right to dispose of her own prop-

erty, her own earnings, and the right to decide equally with her husband the fate of their children.

The most decisive efforts of the feminists—the extension of women's suffrage under the rule of bourgeois parliamentarism—do not solve the problem of the actual equality of women, especially of the non-propertied classes. This can be seen in the experience of women workers in all capitalist countries where in recent years the bourgeoisie has granted the formal equality of the sexes. Suffrage does not eliminate the primary cause of women's enslavement in the family and society. Given the economic dependence of the proletarian woman on her capitalist master and her breadwinner husband, and in the absence of broad protection in making provision for mother and child and socialized education and care of children, replacing indissoluble marriage with civil marriage in capitalist states does not make the woman equal in marital relations and does not provide a key to resolving the problem of the relation between the sexes.

Not formal, superficial, but actual equality of women can be realized only under communism when women, together with all members of the laboring class, become the co-owners of the means of production and distribution, participate in managing them and bear their work responsibilities on the same basis as all members of toiling society. In other words, it is possible only by overthrowing the system of the exploitation of man's labor by man under capitalist production and by organizing the communist form of economy.

Only communism will create the conditions under which the natural function of women—motherhood—will not come into conflict with their social responsibilities and interfere with their creative work for the benefit of the collective. On the contrary, communism will enable the development of a well-rounded, healthy and harmonious individual, closely and inseparably bonded with the tasks and life of the toilers collective. Communism must be the goal of all women who



Left: Editorial board of Bolshevik journal *Rabotnitsa* (Working Woman) in 1917: (clockwise from top left) Klavdiia Nikolaeva, Praskoviia Kudelli, Konkordiia Samoilova, Anna Bonch-Bruевич, Lyudmila Stal', Alexandra Kollontai and Anna Elizarova. Above: International Women's Day demonstration in Petrograd, 1917, touched off February Revolution. Banner demands increased rations for soldiers' families.

VAAP

fight for the liberation of women and the recognition of all their rights.

However, communism is also the ultimate goal of the entire proletariat. Therefore, the struggle of working women for this common goal must, in the interest of both sides, be waged jointly and inseparably.

4. The Third Congress of the Communist International affirms the fundamental proposition of revolutionary Marxism that there is no "special woman question," no special women's movement. Any kind of unity of working women with bourgeois feminism, just like the support by women workers of the halfway or openly treacherous tactics of the social compromisers—the opportunists—leads to the weakening of the proletariat's strength. This postpones the social revolution and the advent of communism—and thus the great hour of the all-around emancipation of women.

Communism is achieved not through the united efforts of women of different classes, but through the united struggle of all the exploited.

In their own interests the masses of proletarian women are duty-bound to support the revolutionary tactics of the Communist Party and to participate most actively and directly in mass actions and in all aspects and forms of the civil war that arise on a national and international scale.

5. The struggle of women against their double oppression (by capitalism and by domestic family subservience) in the highest stage of its development must take on an international character, transforming itself into the fight of the proletariat of both sexes for the dictatorship and for the Soviet system under the banner of the Third International.

6. Warning women workers against any collaboration or agreements whatsoever with bourgeois feminists, the Third Congress of the Communist International also points out to women workers of all countries that any illusions in the idea that proletarian women can, without damage to the cause of women's liberation, support the Second International or opportunistically inclined elements close to it will inflict colossal harm to the liberation struggle of the proletariat. Women must firmly remember: all the roots of women's enslavement grow out of the bourgeois system. In order to put an end to the enslavement of women, it is necessary to pass over to the new communist mode of society.

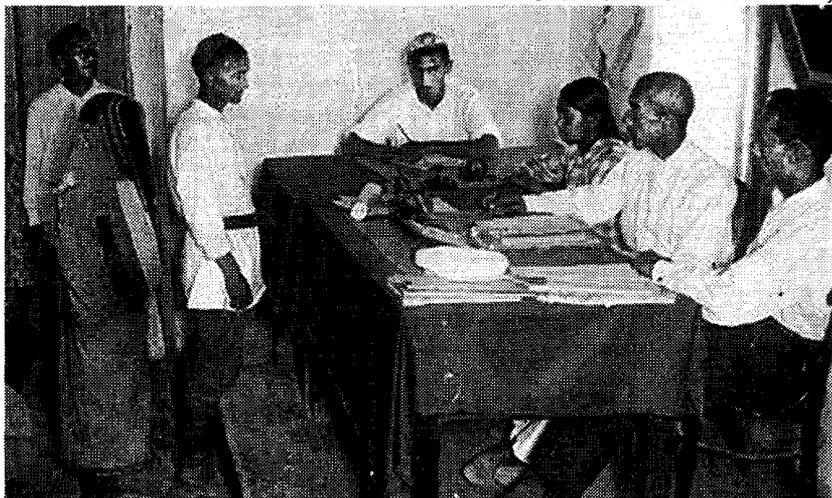
Support by women workers to the groups and parties of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals puts a brake on the social revolution, delaying the coming of the new order. The more decisively and irreversibly the broad masses of women turn away from the Second and the Two-and-a-Half Internationals, the more certain will be the victory of the social revolution. It is the duty of women Communists to condemn all who fear the revolutionary tactics of the Communist International, and to stand firmly for the expulsion of the lat-



Hulton-Deutsch

**Above: Women receive political instruction on the Soviet system of government in Azerbaijan. Below: Photo published in 1926 shows female judge in Tajikistan, Soviet Central Asia, presiding at trial where veiled woman accuses her husband of abuse.**

International Institute of Social History



ter from the exclusive ranks of the Communist International.

Women must remember that the Second International did not create and did not attempt to create a body whose task would have been to bring about a struggle for the all-sided emancipation of women. The beginning of the international association of women socialists was outside the framework of the Second International on the initiative of women workers themselves. Women socialists who carried out special work among women had neither a place, nor representation, nor a decisive vote in the Second International.

Already at its First Congress in 1919 the Third International clearly formulated its attitude on the question of recruiting women to the struggle for the dictatorship. For this purpose a conference of Communist women was convened by the First Congress. In 1920 the International Secretariat for Work Among Women was founded, with permanent representation on the Executive Committee of the Communist International. It is the duty of conscious women workers of all countries to irrevocably break with the Second and the Two-and-a-Half Internationals and firmly support the revolutionary line of the Communist International.

7. Support to the Communist International by women workers, peasants and office workers must be demonstrated by their joining the ranks of the Communist Party of their respective country. In those countries and parties in which the struggle between the Second and the Third International has not yet been consummated, it is the duty of women workers to support with all their strength that party or group that stands for the Communist International and to wage a ruthless struggle against all vacillating or openly traitorous elements, irrespective of their authority. Conscious proletarian women who are striving for their liberation cannot remain in parties that stand outside the Communist International.

Whoever opposes the Third International is an enemy of the emancipation of women.

The place of conscious women workers of the West and East is under the banner of the Communist International—in the ranks of the Communist Parties of their countries. Any vacillation on the part of women workers, any fear of breaking with traditional compromiser parties, any fear of breaking with recognized authority figures—all these have a ruinous impact on the successes of the great struggle of the proletariat that is taking on the character of an open and merciless civil war on an international scale.<sup>2</sup>

### Methods and Forms of Work Among Women

Proceeding from the aforementioned propositions, the Third Congress of the Communist International establishes that the Communist Parties of all countries must conduct their work among proletarian women on the following bases:

1) The inclusion of women as party members with equal rights and responsibilities in all fighting class organizations—the Party, trade unions, cooperatives, factory shop steward committees, etc.

2) The recognition of the importance of involving women in all areas of active struggle by the proletariat (including the military self-defense of the proletariat), the construction of the new foundations of society and the organization of production and everyday life on a communist basis.

3) The recognition of the function of motherhood as a social function and the implementation or safeguarding of measures that will defend and protect womankind as the bearer of the human race.

While most decisively opposing any segregated, separate women's associations within the Party, the trade unions or special women's organizations, the Third Congress of the Communist International recognizes the necessity of adopting special methods of work among women and affirms the effectiveness of forming special apparatuses within all Communist Parties for carrying out this work. In light of the above, the Congress draws attention to the following:

a) The everyday enslavement of women, not only in bourgeois-capitalist countries, but also in countries that are going through the transition from capitalism to communism under the Soviet system;

b) The great passivity and political backwardness of the mass of women, explained by their age-old exclusion from social life and by their age-old enslavement in the family;

c) The special functions that nature itself has placed upon women—childbearing—and the resulting special needs of women for greater protection of their strength and health in the interest of the whole collective.

Therefore, the Third Congress of the Communist Interna-

tional recognizes the importance of creating special bodies for carrying out work among women. Such Party apparatuses must be Departments or Commissions organized in all Party Committees, from the CC [Central Committee] of the Party to the City District or County Party Committees. This decision is binding on all Parties belonging to the Communist International.

The Third Congress of the Communist International decrees that the tasks the Communist Parties carry out through the Departments will include:

1) developing the masses of women in the spirit of communism, drawing them into the ranks of the Party;

2) waging a struggle against anti-woman prejudices among the mass of the male proletariat, strengthening the consciousness among male and female proletarians of their common interests;

3) steeling the will of women workers by involving them in all forms and aspects of civil war, awakening their activism through participation in the struggle against capitalist exploitation in bourgeois countries using mass mobilizations against high prices, housing shortages, unemployment and other revolutionary issues of civil war; by the participation of women workers in communist construction of society and of everyday life in the Soviet Republics;

4) placing tasks on the Party's agenda and introducing into legislation questions that serve to directly liberate women, asserting their equal rights and defending their interests as the bearer of the human race;

5) waging a systematic struggle against the power of tradition, bourgeois habits and religion, thus clearing the way for healthier and more harmonious relations between the sexes, and providing for the physical and moral vitality of toiling humanity.

All work of the Departments and Commissions must be carried out under the direct leadership and responsibility of Party Committees. At the head of a Commission or Department must stand a member of the Committee. To the extent possible, comrade-Communists must also enter into the Commission or Department.

All the measures and tasks before Commissions or Departments of women workers must be carried out by them not independently, but rather, in Soviet countries, through respective economic or political bodies (Departments of the Soviet, Commissions, trade unions), and in capitalist countries, with the support of corresponding bodies of the proletariat: parties, unions, soviets, etc.

Wherever Communist Parties exist underground or semi-legally they are required to create an underground apparatus for work among women. This apparatus must be subordinated and adapted to the Party-wide underground apparatus. As with legal, so with underground organizations, all Local, Regional and Central Committees must include a female comrade who is responsible for directing underground propaganda work among women. The main bases for the Communist Parties' work among women must in the current period be the *trade* and *industrial* unions and cooperatives, both in the countries where the struggle for the overthrow of the yoke of capital is still being waged and in the toilers Soviet Republics.

Work among women must be imbued with a spirit of the common purpose of the party movement, of a united organization, of independent initiative and striving for the rapid and full emancipation of women by the Party, independent of the

Commissions or Sections. Therefore, the goal should be not parallelism in work, but assisting the work of the Party through the self-development and initiatives of working women.<sup>3</sup>

### The Work of the Party Among Women in Soviet Countries

The task of the Departments in a toilers Soviet Republic is to educate the mass of women in the spirit of communism, recruiting them into the ranks of the Communist Party, to awaken and develop activism and initiative among women, drawing them into the building of communism and developing among them stalwart women defenders of the Communist International.

The Departments must attract women to all areas of Soviet construction, from matters of defense to highly complex economic plans of the republic.

In the Soviet Republic the Departments must see to the fulfillment of the resolutions of the Eighth Congress of Soviets on drawing women workers and peasants into the building and organizing of the economy and on their participation in all the bodies that are leading, directing, controlling and organizing production. The Women's Departments, via their representatives and Party bodies, must participate in drafting new statutes and must bring their influence to bear on changing those laws that require alteration for the sake of women's actual emancipation. The Departments must take special initiative in developing laws protecting the labor of women and minors.

The Departments must involve as many women workers and peasants as possible in the election campaign for the Soviets and must also make it their concern that women workers or peasants are elected as members of the Soviets and Executive Committees.

The Departments must promote the success of all political or economic campaigns carried out by the Party.

It is the task of the Departments to promote the advance of women's skilled labor by increasing the technical education of women and by taking action so that women peasants and workers have access to the necessary educational facilities.

The Departments must see to both the entrance of women into the Commissions for the Protection of Labor in enterprises and the strengthening of the activity of the Commissions for the Protection of Mother and Infant.

The Departments must promote the development of the entire network of social institutions such as: communal dining halls, laundries, repair shops, social service institutions, communal housing, etc., which, by reshaping everyday life on a new communist basis, will ease the burden on women during the transitional period, assisting in their emancipation in everyday life and transforming the household and family slave into a free participant, a great master of society and a creator of new modes of living.

The Departments must promote the education of women trade-union members in the spirit of communism with the aid of organizations for work among women set up by the Communist fractions in the trade unions.

The Departments must see to it that women workers duly attend the plant-wide and factory-wide assemblies of delegates.

The Departments are obliged to carry out systematic allocation of women delegate-trainees for Soviet, economic and trade-union work.

In their work, the Zhenotdels [Women's Departments] of



International Newsreel

**Trotsky with graduates—men and women—at a Red Army commander school, 1924.**

**Women in top row: A. N. Ourantsova (at left), M. O. Bulle, a commissar in the Caucasus (right). An early Civil War poster demands, "Women workers, take up your rifles!"**



the Party must above all else sink firm roots among women workers, further developing their already existing work among housewives, office workers and poor peasants.<sup>4</sup>

For the purpose of establishing a firm link of the Party with the masses, of extending the influence of the Party over the non-Party masses and of implementing the method of educating the women masses in the spirit of communism by way of initiative and participation in practical work, the Departments convene and organize delegate meetings of women workers.

Delegate meetings are the best means of educating women workers and peasants and of extending the influence of the Party over the non-Party and backward masses of women workers and peasants.

Delegate meetings are formed from factory and plant representatives of a given City District or City, a given Rural District [*Volost*] (in the case of delegate meetings of women peasants) or by neighborhood (in the case of delegate elections among housewives). In Soviet Russia the women del-

legates are drawn into all manner of political and economic campaigns, are sent into various Commissions in enterprises, are brought into positions of control in Soviet institutions and, finally, into regular work in the Departments of Soviets as trainees for two months (law of 1921).<sup>5</sup>

Delegates should be elected in shop-wide meetings, in rallies of housewives or office workers, according to a norm established by the Party. The Departments must carry out propagandistic-agitational work among the women delegates, for which purpose the Departments convene meetings at least twice a month. The women delegates are obliged to report to their shops or to neighborhood meetings about their activities. The women delegates are elected for three months.

The second form of agitation among the female masses is to call non-Party conferences of women workers and peasants. The women representatives at these conferences are elected at meetings of women workers by enterprise and women peasants by village.

The Departments of women workers are assigned to convene and lead these conferences.

In order to consolidate the experience that women workers gain in the practical work of the Party or in its mobilizations, the Departments or Commissions carry out systematic oral and printed propaganda. The Departments hold rallies, discussions, meetings of women workers by enterprise, of housewives by neighborhood, and lead delegate meetings and carry out door-to-door agitation.

Programs for work among women must be established in Soviet schools, both in the center and regions, for the training of activist women cadre and for the deepening of their communist consciousness.

### **In Capitalist Countries**

The immediate tasks of the Commission for work among women are dictated by the objective situation. On the one hand, there are the collapse of the world economy; the monstrous growth of unemployment, especially reflected in the slackening demand for women's labor which feeds the growth of prostitution; rising prices; the acute housing shortage; and the threat of new imperialist wars. On the other hand, there are unceasing economic strikes by workers in all countries and repeated attempts at civil war on a world scale—all this is a prologue to world social revolution.

The Commissions of women workers are obliged to put forward the battle tasks of the proletariat; they must carry out the struggle for the unabridged slogans of the Communist Party and must attract women into participating in the revolutionary mobilizations of Communists against the bourgeoisie and the social compromisers.

In carrying on a struggle against all forms of segregating or weakening women workers, the Commissions must see to it that women are not only included as members with equal rights and responsibilities in the Party, the trade unions and other class organizations, but also that women workers attain positions on the leading bodies of Parties, unions and cooperatives on an equal basis with male workers.

The Commissions must act so that the widest layers of women proletarians and peasants exercise their rights to support the Communist Party in elections to parliament and all public institutions. At the same time, the Commissions must explain the limited character of these rights as a means of weakening capitalist exploitation and emancipating women,

counterposing the Soviet system to parliamentarism.

The Commissions must also ensure that women workers, office workers and peasants take a most active part in the election of revolutionary, economic and political Soviets of workers deputies, drawing in housewives so as to awaken their political activity and propagating the idea of Soviets among peasant women. A special task of the Commissions must be the realization of the principle of equal pay for equal work. It is the task of the Commissions to initiate a campaign, drawing in men and women workers, for free and universally accessible vocational education, enabling women workers to attain high-level skills.

The Commissions must see to it that Communist women participate in municipal and legislative bodies wherever women have access on the basis of their electoral rights, and conduct within them the revolutionary tactics of their party. But, in participating in the legislative, municipal and other bodies of bourgeois states, women Communists must resolutely defend the Party's basic principles and tactics, not concerning themselves as much with the practical realization of reform within the framework of the bourgeois order as with using each living, burning question or demand of women workers as a revolutionary slogan, so as to attract them to active struggle for the realization of those demands through the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>6</sup>

The Commissions must be in close contact with the parliamentary and municipal fractions and jointly discuss all questions concerning women.

The Commissions must explain to women the backwardness and inefficiency of the individual household system and the defects of the bourgeois system of child raising, by focusing the attention of women workers on questions put forward or supported by the Party concerning the practical improvement of the everyday life of the working class.

The Commissions must promote the recruitment of women workers, members of trade unions, to the Communist Parties, a task for which the trade-union fractions assign women organizers who work among women under the leadership of the Party or local Departments of the Party.

Women's Agitation Commissions must likewise direct their propaganda so that women workers in cooperatives strive to spread the ideas of communism and take on a leading role in the cooperatives, since these organizations, as distribution bodies, have an enormous role to play during and after the revolution.<sup>7</sup>

All the work of the Commissions must have as a goal the development of the revolutionary activism of the masses, thus hastening the social revolution.

### **In the Economically Backward Countries (the East)**

In countries with weakly developed industry, the Communist Parties, together with the Departments of women workers, must win the recognition of the equal rights and responsibilities of women in the Party, the unions and other organizations of the toiling class.

The Departments or Commissions, together with the Party, must wage a struggle against all prejudices, morals and religious customs oppressive to women, conducting this agitation likewise among men.

The Communist Parties and their Departments or Commissions must implement the principle of women's equality

in matters of rearing children, family relations and public life.

The Departments must seek support for their work first of all among the broad layers of women workers exploited by capital in the home industries (handicrafts) and women workers on rice, cotton and other plantations. In Soviet countries, the Departments must promote the establishment of artisan workshops. In countries of the bourgeois order, work must be centered on the organization of women plantation workers, enrolling them in common unions with male workers.

Raising the general cultural level of the populace is the best way to fight the stagnation of the country and the religious prejudices among the peoples of the East who live in countries of the Soviet order. The Departments must facilitate the development of schools for adults, which must be freely accessible to women. In bourgeois countries the Commissions must directly wage a struggle against the bourgeois influence of the schools.

Wherever possible, the Departments or Commissions must carry out agitation in the home. The Departments must organize clubs of women workers, drawing in the most backward women elements. The clubs must be centers of cultural enlightenment—institutions that demonstrate through experience what women can achieve through their own initiative for their emancipation (the organization of nurseries, kindergartens, literacy schools under the auspices of the clubs, etc.).

Among nomadic peoples the Departments will organize mobile clubs.

In countries of the Soviet order, the Departments must assist the respective Soviet bodies in the work of transition from precapitalist forms of economy to socialized production, convincing women workers through their own experience that individual housekeeping and the old form of the family hinder their emancipation, whereas socialized labor liberates them.

Among the peoples of the East living in Soviet Russia, the Departments must see to it that Soviet legislation, which recognizes equal rights of women with men and which protects the interests of women, is being implemented in reality. Toward this end, the Departments must promote the recruitment of women as judges and jurors in the people's courts.

The Departments must also involve women in elections to the Soviets and make it their concern that women work-

ers and peasants are elected as members of the Soviets and their Executive Committees. Work among the proletarian women of the East must be carried out on a class basis. It is the task of the Departments to expose the powerlessness of feminists to resolve the question of women's emancipation. In the Soviet countries of the East, women in the intelligentsia (e.g., teachers) who sympathize with Communism should be used to advance enlightenment. While avoiding tactless and crude attacks on religious beliefs or national traditions, the Departments or Commissions working among women of the East must definitely struggle against nationalism and the hold of religion over women's minds.

All organizing of women workers in the East, just as in the West, must be built not along lines of defending national interests but on the plane of uniting the international proletariat of both sexes around unified class tasks.

**Note:** In view of the importance and urgency of strengthening the work among the women of the East and the newness of the task posed, the Theses are supplemented with special instructions, applying the basic methods of the work of the Communist Parties among women in accordance with the particulars of everyday life of the peoples of the East.<sup>8</sup>

### Methods of Agitation and Propaganda

In order to fulfill the main tasks of the Departments—the communist education of the female masses of the proletariat and the strengthening of these fighter-cadres for communism—it is necessary for all Communist Parties of the West and East to master the basic principle of work among women, namely: "agitation and propaganda by deed."

Agitation by deed means above all the ability to awaken women workers to independent activity, to shatter their doubts about their own power and, by involving them in practical work in the spheres of construction or struggle, to teach them by practical experience to recognize that every conquest of the Communist Party, every action directed against exploitation by capital constitutes a step toward improving the condition of women. From practice and action to the recognition of the ideals of communism and its theoretical principles and, conversely, from theory to practice and action—such is the method by which Communist Parties

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and their Departments of women workers must approach the masses of women workers.

In order that the Departments be not merely bodies of propaganda of the word, but bodies of action, they must rely upon Communist cells in the enterprises and workshops, seeing to it that every Communist cell designates one organizer for work among women of the given enterprise.

The Departments must be connected to the trade unions through their representatives or organizers who are designated by the [Party] trade-union fractions and who carry out their work under the leadership of the Departments.

In the Soviet countries propaganda of the ideas of communism by deed means attracting women workers, peasants, housewives and office workers into all fields of Soviet construction, beginning with the army and militia and ending with all spheres of women's emancipation: the organization of socialized dining, networks of institutions for socialized child rearing, the protection of motherhood, etc. Particularly important at the present moment is attracting women workers to all aspects of the work of rebuilding the national economy.

Propaganda by deed in capitalist countries signifies above all recruiting women workers to participate in strikes, demonstrations and all aspects of struggle that steel and strengthen revolutionary will and consciousness; drawing women workers into all aspects of Party work, using women for underground work (especially in the field of communication services), the Party organization of *subbotniks* or *voskresniks* [voluntary Saturday or Sunday work sessions], at which women workers sympathetic to Communism, workers' wives and women office workers serve the Party with voluntary labor, organizing the mending and sewing of children's clothes, etc.

The aims of propaganda by deed are also served by the principle of attracting women to all political, economic or cultural enlightenment campaigns conducted by the Communist Parties.

The Departments of women workers of the Communist Parties must spread their activities and influence to the broadest circles of proletarian women enslaved and oppressed in the capitalist countries. In the Soviet countries they carry out their work among the masses of proletarian and semi-proletarian women who are fettered by everyday conditions and prejudices.

The Commissions must carry out their work among women workers, housewives, peasant women and women engaged in intellectual labor.

For the purpose of propaganda and agitation, the Commissions organize mass demonstrations, rallies by particular enterprise, rallies of women workers and office workers, either by workplace or by city district, general women's demonstrations, rallies of housewives, etc.

The Commissions see to it that the fractions of the Communist Parties in the trade unions, cooperatives and factory and plant councils designate an organizer for work among women. In other words, they would have representatives in all bodies dedicated to promoting the development of the revolutionary activity of the proletariat in capitalist countries for the purpose of seizing power. In the Soviet countries they assist in the election of women workers and peasants to all Soviet bodies for leadership, management and oversight, serving as a bulwark of the proletarian dictatorship and enabling the realization of communism.

The Commissions must send responsible women-worker Communists to work as shopfloor or office workers in enterprises employing large numbers of women; the Commissions must send such women workers to major proletarian districts and centers, as is successfully practiced in Soviet Russia.

The Commissions for work among women must make the utmost use of the successful experience of the Zhenotdel of the RCP [Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)] for the purpose of organizing delegate meetings and non-Party conferences of women workers and peasants. They must organize meetings of women workers and office workers from various fields, peasant women and housewives, in which specific demands and needs are raised for discussion and Commissions are elected. These Commissions must stay in close contact with their women electors and with the Commissions for work among women. The Commissions must send their agitators to participate in discussions at meetings of parties that are hostile to Communism. Propaganda and agitation through demonstrations and similar rallies must be complemented by systematically organized door-to-door agitation. Every woman Communist commissioned for this work must have no more than ten apartments in her assigned area and must pay visits to them for the purpose of agitation among housewives not less than once a week, visiting more often when the Communist Party conducts a campaign or announces a mobilization.

In order to carry out their agitational, organizational and educational work by way of the printed word, the Commissions are delegated to:

- 1) facilitate the publication of a central organ for work among women in every country;
- 2) ensure the publication in the Party press of "Women Workers Pages" or special supplements, as well as the inclusion of articles on questions of work among women in the general Party and trade-union press; the Commissions must concern themselves with the appointment of editors of the aforementioned publications and train other women contributors from among women laborers and women Party activists.

The Commissions must see to the publication of popular agitational literature, and along with it, educational literature in the form of leaflets and pamphlets, and provide for distribution.

The Commissions must promote the optimal use of all political educational facilities of the Party by women Communists.

The Commissions must concern themselves with deepening the class consciousness and strengthening the will of the young Communist women by drawing them into Party-wide education courses and discussion evenings and, only where it proves necessary and appropriate, organizing special evenings for reading or discussion or a series of lectures especially for women workers.

For the purpose of strengthening the spirit of camaraderie between women and men workers, it is not desirable to establish separate courses and schools for women Communists. However, all Party-wide schools must conduct a course on methods of work among women. The Departments must have the right to delegate a given number of their women representatives to Party-wide courses.

### The Structure of the Departments

Departments and Commissions for work among women are established under every local Party Committee, under

Region [*Okrug*] or Province [*Oblast*] Party Committees and under the Party CC.<sup>9</sup> The number of members chosen for these Commissions is set in accordance with the needs of each country. Likewise, the number of paid members of these Commissions is determined by the Party in keeping with its means.

The head of a Women's Agitational Department or the Chairman of a Commission must at the same time also be a member of the local Party Committee. Where this is not the case, the head of the Department attends all sessions of the Committee with the right to a decisive vote on all questions of the Zhenotdel and a consultative vote on all other questions.

Along with the above-enumerated general tasks, the following additional functions are included in the duties of the Regional and Provincial [*Gubernia*] Departments or Commissions:

- supporting communications between the Departments of the given area and with the Party Organization;
- compiling data on the activity of the Departments or Commissions of their given Region or Province;
- enabling the exchange of materials between local Departments;
- providing their Region or Province with literature;
- allocating agitational forces throughout their Regions or Provinces;
- mobilizing Party forces for work among women;
- convening Regional or Provincial conferences of women Communist representatives of the Departments at least twice a year, with a delegation of one or two from each Department; and
- conducting non-Party conferences of women workers, peasants and housewives of the given Region or Province.

Members of the Department or Commission collectives are confirmed by the County or Province [Party] Committees upon the recommendation of the head of the Department. This head is elected, just as are other members of the County and Provincial Party Committees, at County or Provincial Party Conferences.

Members of the Local, Regional and Provincial Departments or Commissions are elected at a City, County, Regional or Provincial Conference, or are appointed by their corresponding Departments, in connection with the Party Committees.

If the head of the Zhenotdel is not a member of the Regional or Provincial Party Committee, then the Zhenotdel head has the right to attend all sessions of the Party Committee with a decisive vote on questions of the Department and a consultative vote on all other questions.

Apart from all the functions listed above for the Regional

and Provincial Departments, the P.O. [Party Organization] fulfills the following functions as well:

- instructing the Women's Agitational Department in questions of Party work;
- supervising the work of the Departments;
- in conjunction with respective Party bodies, allocating forces for carrying out work among women;
- monitoring the conditions and development of women's labor, keeping in mind changes in the legal and economic position of women;
- participating, via representatives or mandated deputies, in special Commissions that deal with questions of betterment or change in the everyday life of the working class, the protection of labor, providing for the needs of childhood and so forth;
- publishing "Central Women's Pages";
- editing a periodical journal for women workers;
- convening an assembly of women representatives from all Regional or Provincial Departments not less than once per year;
- organizing countrywide agitational tours by instructors of work among women;
- supervising the enlistment of women workers and the involvement of all Departments, in all manner of Party political and economic campaigns and mobilizations;
- delegating a representative to the International Women's Secretariat; and
- organizing annual International Women Workers Days.

If the head of the Zhenotdel of the CC is not a member of the CC, the head has the right to attend all sessions of the CC with a decisive vote on all questions concerning the Departments, and a consultative vote on all other questions. The head of the Zhenotdel, or the chairman of the Commission is appointed by the CC of the Party or is elected at a general Party Congress. The decisions and decrees of all Departments or Commissions are subject to final approval by their respective Party Committees. The number of members in the Central Department and the number of these who have a decisive vote is established by the Party CC.

### On Work on the International Level

The leadership of the work of the Communist Parties of all countries, uniting the forces of women workers around tasks advanced by the Communist International and recruiting women of all countries and peoples to the revolutionary struggle for Soviet power and the dictatorship of the working class on a world scale, is the responsibility of the International Women's Secretariat of the Communist International. ■

## Notes

1. This and the following four paragraphs were submitted as amendments to the Preliminary Theses.
2. This paragraph was the second amendment to the Preliminary Theses.
3. This is one of three paragraphs not in the Preliminary or Press Bureau versions. We were unable to determine when this amendment was added.
4. This and the following eight paragraphs, i.e., to the end of the section "The Work of the Party Among Women in Soviet Countries," were omitted from the official CI text in German published in 1921 by Carl Hoym. In the Preliminary Theses these paragraphs appear in the section "Methods of Agitation and Propaganda"; they were moved here in the final version.
5. This refers to the Decree of the Soviet of People's Commissars "On the Recruitment of Women Workers and Peasants to Serve in Soviet Institutions," 11 April 1921, that established the legal framework for the delegate system.
6. This paragraph was the final amendment to the Preliminary Theses.
7. This and the next paragraph are the other two paragraphs not in the Preliminary or Press Bureau versions. We were unable to determine when this amendment was added.
8. In the 1921 English version published by the Comintern, this paragraph appears at the beginning of this section.
9. The administrative areas of the Soviet Republics and the terminology used for these were changing in this period. The term *Okrug* here refers to a Region, an area smaller than a Province (in this document referred to as both *Oblast* and *Gubernia*) and larger than a County (*Uyezd*) or City.

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# Women and Revolution



## A New Translation Communist International Theses on Work Among Women



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**Second International Conference of Communist Women, Moscow, 1921. Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai seated at center.**

*Spartacist* is proud to publish a new English translation from the Russian-language text of the "Theses on Methods and Forms of Work of the Communist Parties Among Women," passed by the Second International Conference of Communist Women and adopted by the Third World Congress of the Third (Communist) International (CI, or Comintern) in 1921. The Theses are a key document of the early, revolutionary years of the CI under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks, inspired by the world-historic overthrow of the capitalist order in Russia in the October Revolution of 1917. Drawn from hard-fought lessons, the document is a systematic exposition of how communists carry out work among women, based on decades of experience in the international revolutionary movement. This new translation by the International Communist League, based on archival research into the political origins of the document, underlines our commitment to the fight for the emancipation of women as a crucial part of our struggle for international proletarian revolution.

In 1971 and 1972 *Women and Revolution* printed the Comintern's official 1921 English translation of the Theses as a tool of intervention into the radical feminist milieu that emerged out of the New Left in the United States (*W&R* Nos. 2 and 3, September-October 1971 and May 1972; excerpts from the Theses appear in *W&R* No. 22, Spring 1981). As against the feminists, who promoted the notion of separate, male-exclusionist organizations for women, we argued that the line that must be drawn is not one of sex but of class. As revolutionary Trotskyists, we sought to win over subjectively revolutionary women to the communist worldview and to the necessity of destroying the capitalist system as a prerequisite to the emancipation of women. In 1972, *W&R* became the journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League/U.S. Central Committee. After 25 years as a Marxist journal of women's liberation, in 1997 *Women and Revolution* was incorporated into quadrilingual *Spartacist* and articles also appear occasionally under the *W&R* masthead in the ICL sectional presses.

We stand on the shoulders of our forebears of the Communist International during the period of its first four congresses,  
*continued on page 50*

