

1917

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

JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOLSHEVIK TENDENCY

No. 14



1994



FORREST ANDERSON

China: the Gathering Storm

The disastrous collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet bloc should not obscure the fact that the world's most populous nation and third largest economy—the People's Republic of China—remains a deformed workers' state. Yet the fate of the Chinese Revolution was always closely bound up with the USSR—from the formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921, until the early 1960s, when the rival bureaucrats in Moscow and Beijing

had their celebrated falling out. So long as imperialism regarded the USSR as its main international rival, the Chinese bureaucracy had considerable room for maneuver between the "superpowers." In 1972 the ruling Communist Party, under the leadership of its "Great Helmsman," Mao Zedong, cemented an anti-Soviet alliance with Washington.

But times have changed. Now that imperialism no



DER SPIEGEL

Deng Xiaoping: CCP strongman

longer needs to play the China card against the USSR, the foreign ministries, boardrooms and think-tanks of Western capitals are abuzz with debate over how best to reconquer this Asian colossus, lost to imperialism with the triumph of Mao's armies over Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. Chinese collusion with U.S. imperialism—from supporting Jonas Savimbi's UNITA cutthroats in Angola, to the 1979 invasion of Vietnam, to aiding the Afghan mujahedeen in the 1980s—contributed to the USSR's undoing. Today the bureaucrats in Beijing are reaping, in the form of mounting economic and political pressure from the West, the bitter fruits of their own shameless opportunism.

But taking back China will not be easy. Its rulers seem determined not to go the way of their Soviet counterparts. Clinton's Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, was sharply reminded of this fact during an official visit to Beijing in March. When he repeated American threats to impose trade sanctions unless China showed greater progress on "human rights," the country's leaders told the White House to mind its own business. During Christopher's visit, leading liberal dissidents were imprisoned or placed under house arrest to underline the point. Prime Minister Li Peng told Christopher that "China will never accept the U.S. human rights concept" (*New York Times*, 13 March).

Asia Watch estimates that there are approximately 1700 political prisoners in China (*Le Monde*, 24 February). The Chinese dissidents who receive most attention in the Western media—like Wei Jingsheng and the exiled Fang Lizhi—oppose the regime in the name of "democracy" and "free speech," and also, not coincidentally, have little aversion to "free enterprise." But the regime does not hesitate to persecute pro-socialist opponents, and has been particularly harsh on working-class militants. Trotskyists do not shrink from defending the Stalinists when they suppress active counterrevolutionaries or those colluding with imperialist agencies, but in general we oppose the Stalinist practice of repressing

political opponents by police-state methods.

Yet Western "human rights" rhetoric is at bottom an ideological weapon used by the imperialists to bully recalcitrant "third world" regimes, in particular the surviving workers' states. Sidney Shapiro, a Chinese government employee, hit the mark in a letter that appeared in the 20 March *New York Times* concerning the Christopher flap:

"the Chinese are well aware of America's military incursions into little countries abroad and its miserable civil rights record at home. They witnessed the beating of Rodney King on their television news. They read in their newspapers about American jails overflowing with prisoners—mostly black. Their daily press gives wide coverage to United States crime, drugs, poverty, homelessness, graft and corruption. Such a country, the Chinese maintain, is not fit to talk about violations of citizen rights in other lands."

China may succeed in calling Washington's bluff. At a time when the U.S. is feeling growing pressure from other capitalist competitors, profitable investment opportunities and access to China's huge domestic market are far more important to the American ruling class than "human rights." Clinton is already backing away from his campaign promise to make China's "most-favored-nation" trading status contingent upon its willingness to take orders from the White House. James Lilley, ambassador to Beijing under George Bush, probably spoke for the majority of the U.S. ruling class when he gave the following answer to Congressional Democrats who would restrict Chinese trade in the name of "democracy":

"Through encouraging broadened American involvement in China's economy, the United States fosters democratic forces and enhances human rights. Rapid economic growth and joint ventures have done more to improve the human rights situation in South China than innumerable threats, démarches, and unilaterally imposed conditions."

—*Foreign Policy*, Spring 1994

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Russian 'Shock Therapy' On the Skids Bonapartist Burlesque

Boris Yeltsin may have hoped that by dissolving the Russian parliament in September 1993 he was clearing the tracks for a rapid transition to a functioning market economy. Today everyone knows better. In the weeks following the storming of the Russian White House, Yeltsin issued a barrage of presidential decrees intended to consolidate his position and accelerate the pace of capitalist restoration. Everything appeared to be going according to his wishes until the December elections for a new parliament (Duma), when the voters delivered a stunning rebuke to the would-be Russian strongman. Candidates identified with Yeltsin's program were overwhelmed by a huge protest vote, the bulk of which was divided between two ex-Stalinist formations and the ultra-rightist Liberal Democratic Party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

In February the newly elected Duma amnestied Alexander Rutskoi, Ruslan Khasbulatov and other imprisoned leaders of the old parliament. Yeltsin tried desperately to block their release, and when that failed, attempted to put a face-saving spin on the whole humiliating episode, with lame assertions that accepting an amnesty meant admitting guilt. Khasbulatov's response, delivered in an interview with *Sovietskaya Rossiya*, sounded anything but contrite. His prognosis for Yeltsin was:

"He is doomed. He will bear responsibility for (Defence Minister Pavel) Grachev with tanks ... Their trial is still ahead.' He added defiantly, 'Remember the president has staged a *coup d'état*' and mocked Mr. Yeltsin for adopting many of the nationalist and conservative themes raised by the old parliament. 'Ninety per cent of his speech [to the new parliament in February] consists of what I had said at Congresses of People's Deputies.'" —*Independent* [London], 2 March

Yeltsin's speeches do indeed sound a lot like Khasbulatov's used to. The reason that many of the most prominent Yeltsinite "reformers" (e.g., Yegor Gaidar, Anatoly Chubais and Boris Fyodorov) have been dumped is simple. While the major imperialist powers have been generous with praise and photo opportunities, they have refused to provide any serious economic assistance. While prepared to buy up certain lucrative properties (for example, oil and natural gas resources in Kazakhstan), the capitalist multinationals have no intention of underwriting the cost of reconstructing the Russian economy.

Capitalist restoration has been a disaster. Since 1989 gross national product has declined by *half!* Corruption is rampant, violent crime is mushrooming, medical services are collapsing, food and fuel are increasingly scarce, and life expectancy is falling. Life is bad and getting worse for all but a tiny handful of parasites and speculators, and the future is bleak. All the government has been able to provide is a series of broken promises.

Yeltsin's biggest political asset has always been his close relationship to the Western imperialists, particu-



DER SPIEGEL

Yeltsin: would-be bonaparte

larly the U.S.; but his inability to gain any tangible benefits from this connection has left him open to charges of being a tool of foreign interests.

"Since neither Mr. Yeltsin nor the West delivered, the managers of the bloated enterprises—what Andrei Shleifer of Harvard University calls 'state dinosaurs'—were able to hold their own with help from Prime Minister Viktor S. Chernomyrdin and the central bank's printing presses.

"The political dance that occupied much of 1992 and 1993 amounted to two steps forward and two back—or as Jeffrey Sachs, also of Harvard, puts it, 'We pretended to help them and they pretended to reform.'" —*New York Times*, 17 February

The tide is running so strongly that Yeltsin has been forced to embrace the nationalist/corporatist rhetoric of his erstwhile opponents. In turn, the "free world" is swiftly hedging bets on the future of the former superpower. When former U.S. president Richard Nixon made his last trip to Moscow in March, he ignored Yeltsin's objections and held a high-profile consultation with Rutskoi. Tricky Dick reported that:

"The Russia I saw on this trip is a very different nation from the one I visited just one year ago. Optimism about the future is being replaced by pessimism. A strongly pro-American attitude has in many cases become disturbingly anti-American...."



Rutskoi's fascist allies helped disperse Yeltsin's cops

"Contrary to some reports in the Western media, the departure of some prominent reformers from the Government does not mean the abandonment of reform. Prime Minister Chernomyrdin will continue to implement free-market reforms. Though the program would be more gradual, Government leaders say, it would also be more comprehensive and not limited to a tight monetary policy."

"All the key opposition figures—and I met with them all, including the Communist leader Gennadi Zyuganov; the Liberal Democratic Party chairman, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, and former Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi—stated categorically that there can be no return to the Soviet past."

—*New York Times*, 25 March

The reason there can be "no return" is because the degenerated workers' state was destroyed in 1991—the entire administrative mechanism was smashed, the central economic bodies dismantled, and the upper levels of the repressive apparatus were purged. A return to a collectivized, planned economy would require a new social revolution, something that Rutskoi and the rest of Yeltsin's rivals (who were in his camp in August 1991) are profoundly opposed to.

Yeltsin's inability to impose his will on a fractious and chaotic Duma, and the incapacity of the latter to put forward any sort of credible political alternative, reflects at bottom the impasse of the counterrevolutionary bloc that triumphed over the sclerotic Stalinist bureaucracy in August 1991. The shoot-out at the Russian White House last October settled nothing. There remains plenty of potential for future conflicts as the different layers press for their right to impose their own framework on the process of capitalist restoration.

The capitalist restorationists represent a real potpourri of ex-bureaucrats, factory managers, hoodlums, hucksters and outright bandits, each with their own schemes for undertaking a little "primitive accumulation":

"The new breed is short on charm, but their gall is staggering. Their scams range from the petty to the bold, from multimillion-dollar deals to run-of-the-mill embezzlement and fraud. There have been fake lotteries and phony investment schemes. Fake companies have run

ads selling nonexistent services. Employment services collect application fees for high-paying but fictitious jobs. Real estate brokers terrorize owners into selling their apartments for next to nothing, and trick buyers into paying for apartments that are not for sale."

—*New York Times*, 17 March

A Russian Bonaparte?

Yeltsin wants to be a bonaparte. Russian capitalism *requires* a bonaparte, but is as yet so undeveloped and anarchic that it is unable to sustain one. Yeltsin managed to push through a new constitution last December giving the president virtually unlimited authority to issue decrees. But without the means to enforce them, they are just so many pieces of paper. Yeltsin has neither a popular base nor the backing of a powerful indigenous capitalist class. He was backed by the military last October, but only grudgingly, and at the eleventh hour. No element in the governmental apparatus has effective control over the demoralized and restive officer corps inherited from the degenerated workers' state.

The nascent Russian bourgeoisie today is a lumpen petty-bourgeois social layer that lacks the social cohesion, political self-confidence and, above all, the capital, to function as a ruling class. Their heterogeneity lies at the root of the "democratic" requirements of bourgeois rule in Russia today. The welter of conflicting local and sectional interests of the atomized bourgeois aspirants require some forum for mediation. Without a reliable apparatus of repression, or any serious social roots, the political representatives of the would-be exploiters can only rule by zig-zags, and by playing off some elements against others.

Yeltsin's recent reverses make it clear that the shoot-out at the Russian White House last October was not the turning point which many took it to be, but only a dramatic episode in a continuing wrangle within the capitalist-restorationist camp. What was quite clear at the time, however, was that this conflict was one in which the working class had no vital interest. The parliament posed no obstacle to capitalist restoration. It was, after all, the rallying point for the counterrevolution in August 1991. Conversely, Yeltsin's attempts to extend his authority with a series of dictates in the aftermath of his October 1993 victory did not change the fact that Rutskoi/Khasbulatov and their red/brown coalition would also have attempted to consolidate their victory by anti-democratic means.

Pseudo-Trotskyists Side with Rutskoi

If two gangs of counterrevolutionaries come to blows, the workers' movement does not always have a side. When Eden Pastora, a former Sandinista who had joined the counterrevolution, denounced the rest of the contras as excessively dependent on the CIA, it was perfectly clear to every leftist that this turncoat did not deserve any support.

But last October, when the Russian "contras" fell out, much of the left sided with Rutskoi/Khasbulatov, despite their misgivings about the manifestly reactionary character of much of the parliamentary camp. Two of the more significant centrist currents that sided with Rutskoi against Yeltsin (the British Workers Power group



DER SPIEGEL

Russian textile factory in Sobinka: no future under capitalism

and the Spartacist League/U.S.) have both been uncharacteristically reticent about motivating their positions. In both cases their propaganda is full of ringing denunciations of Yeltsin's bonapartist appetites and imperialist connections, while carefully avoiding coming out and stating that a victory by the parliamentarians and the red/brown coalition would have safeguarded democratic rights, defended plebeian living standards, or offered any other tangible benefits to the working class. So why take sides?

It is interesting that both Workers Power (and its co-thinkers in the League for a Revolutionary Communist International—LRCI) and the Spartacist League refused to bloc militarily with the Stalinists against Yeltsin/Rutskoi and the rest of the counterrevolutionaries in August 1991. In fact, the LRCI supported Yeltsin on the grounds that he was more "democratic" than the Stalinists. Perhaps they hoped to redress that error by opposing him in 1993, despite their recognition that this was a falling out over "the method and the tempo of the restoration process."

Yeltsin vs. Rutskoi: No Lesser Evil

The unappetizing mix of Stalinists without a state, fascists and monarchists (who comprised the old parliament's main base of support) did not suddenly develop a commitment to the democratic rights of the working class. Many of them did not even pretend to be democrats. Certainly the democratic credentials of the ex-Stalinist parliamentary deputies were dubious. They were elected in 1990 to a relatively powerless subordinate national assembly within the USSR at a time when the Communist Party (CPSU) was still enshrined in the constitution as the leading force in society and when even Boris Yeltsin considered it prudent to hang on to his party card. The CPSU wrote the rules for the election, and although the party apparatus was deeply fractured it still managed to arrange things so that it was the only party to field candidates. But, for the first time, various

dissident non-party candidates were permitted to run.

The results stunned the CPSU bureaucrats, whose candidates lost almost every contested seat in the major urban centers. In the smaller towns and more remote regions, where the party machine remained relatively intact, and few oppositionists appeared on the ballot, the official candidates fared much better. These were the "democrats" who ultimately formed the parliamentary opposition to Yeltsin. In August 1991, however, Yeltsin and his two hand-picked lieutenants, Rutskoi and Khasbulatov, stood together with the Russian parliament as the rallying point for counterrevolution against the last desperate gamble of the Stalinists.

Throughout 1992 relations worsened between the parliamentary majority and the president. In March 1993 Yeltsin's parliamentary supporters (about a third of the total) walked out, thereby creating a constitutional crisis. In an attempt to break the deadlock, Yeltsin called an April 1993 referendum on his leadership, which he won despite vigorous opposition from Rutskoi, Khasbulatov et al. But nothing changed.

The parliamentary deputies were neither members of a great democratic institution, nor could they credibly claim to represent the popular will. Despite his best efforts, Yeltsin was not backed by the bulk of either the Russian officer corps or the fledgling bourgeoisie. Both the parliament and the president appealed to the popular masses for support, and both were ignored. The conflict between Yeltsin and the old parliament can therefore hardly be characterized as a classical confrontation between bourgeois democracy and reactionary bonapartism.

The other argument (besides democracy) advanced by Rutskoi's leftist defenders is that the ex-Stalinist holdovers and their allies posed an objective barrier to the ravages of the market economy. This is simply not the case. One need only compare the results of Leonid Kravchuk's nationalist/autarkic program in the Ukraine to Lech Walesa's fire-sale privatizations in Poland to see that both the "fast-track" and the "conserva-

“paths to capitalist restoration spell starvation, disease, and destitution for tens of millions of Russian workers. Neither wing of the counterrevolution is a lesser evil.

The LRCI pretends to believe that Russia is still some kind of workers’ state. This posture absolves them of responsibility for siding with the counterrevolution in the decisive 1991 confrontation, but, beyond that, does not appear to enter into their calculations. Presumably they realize that this position is slightly ridiculous, but find it inconvenient to abandon it, at least just yet. For the LRCI the Russian workers’ state has always been something to be defended in the abstract—but never in the concrete.

Defeat the Counterrevolution— Workers to Power!

The current political situation in Russia (and throughout the rest of the former Soviet Union) is highly unstable. The working class has been profoundly disoriented by the identification of socialism with life under the corrupt Stalinist bureaucracy. Yet they have not suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of their class enemies. The budding bourgeoisies, on the other hand, are still too atomized to consolidate their rule. The illusions of three years ago are gone. In Russia, as in most of the rest of the

former Soviet territories, the masses are seething with desperate anger, fear, bitterness and frustration.

This volatility can be channelled in many directions. So far one of the main beneficiaries of the popular revolution with capitalist restoration has been Vladimir Zhirinovsky. The current profound crisis in Russian society can only be resolved in favor of the working class through determined opposition to *all* the capitalist factions in the USSR. A leadership which aspires to mobilize the working class for revolutionary struggle must possess the political capacity to call things by their proper names and to differentiate between struggles in which the working class has a vital interest (August 1991) and those in which it does not (October 1993).

The current impasse of the capitalist restorationists can only be a transitory phase. But it presents an important opening for independent political intervention by the working class to reverse the expropriation of collectivized property, to smash the budding fascist organizations, and to dislodge the slender tendrils of the infant bourgeois social order before the new ruling class is able to consolidate its rule. The key to successful proletarian struggle against reaction is the forging of a political leadership, rooted in the working class and committed to the internationalist program of the world’s first victorious proletarian revolution—the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917. ■

China...

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If we bear in mind that “democracy” and “human rights” are code-words for capitalist exploitation, Lilley’s strategy—political reconquest through economic penetration—has much to recommend it to the imperialists. Ever since the late 1970s, when Deng Xiaoping came to power in a country brought to the verge of economic collapse by the Cultural Revolution, the ruling regime, with some zigzags and retreats, has moved far to the right in the economic field. In 1978 the government launched a series of “market reforms” not unlike those undertaken by Gorbachev several years later. Central controls on industry were loosened, and land belonging to collective farms was broken up into small “noodle-strip” plots and leased to peasant families on a long-term basis. Small decentralized manufacturing units, termed rural enterprises, mushroomed throughout the countryside.

Deng Xiaoping went further than Gorbachev. Part of his reform program consisted in the creation of special economic zones (SEZs), in which private ownership of the means of production is not only tolerated but encouraged, and where foreign capital has a virtually free hand. In response to the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, Beijing’s rulers attempted to allay mass discontent by giving the SEZs even more latitude.

The largest and most successful of these zones are in the southern province of Guangdong. The Pearl River Delta, with a population of 20 million, is now enjoying an unprecedented economic boom fueled by foreign in-

vestment, much of it from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Guangdong now leads the country in industrial production and retail sales, and has the world’s highest annual growth rate of 20 percent. This expansion, driven by cheap-labor export industries, has made the province a magnet for millions of unemployed peasant youth from the rest of the country, and spilled over into other regions. As blue jeans, Big Macs and brothels proliferate in Canton and Shanghai, the Western media celebrate the “South China Miracle” as capitalism’s latest third-world rags-to-riches story, and proclaim the region Asia’s “fifth dragon,” along with Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore.

The gerontocrats who run the country from Beijing’s thickly walled Zhongnanhai compound in the Forbidden City are no doubt more ambivalent. The official government slogan, “Two Systems, One Country,” expresses their intention to harness the “dragon” of free enterprise to contribute, alongside the state sector, to making China a wealthy and powerful society. And there are, for the moment, certain benefits for the regime. Tax revenues from southern capitalists help reduce government debt and subsidize the faltering state economy; Guangdong also serves to soak up a portion of China’s multi-millioned rural unemployed. It was for the sake of these short-term advantages that the regime permitted the special economic zones in the first place, and continues to let them thrive despite misgivings.

But Guangdong is a Pandora’s Box for the rulers of the Chinese deformed workers’ state. Neither Deng Xiaoping nor his superannuated cronies can be entirely oblivious to the fact that Guangdong’s bureaucrats, growing fat on bribes, extortion and kickbacks from the capitalist enterprises, are increasingly asserting their in-

dependence from Beijing in the best tradition of regional warlords. Or that Guangdong now bears a much closer resemblance to Taiwan and Hong Kong (to which it has recently become connected by a six-lane superhighway) than to the impoverished Chinese interior. Deng and company have also been forced to pay some attention to the peasant revolts that swept across the hinterland during the spring and summer of 1993.

The state-owned and private sectors of the Chinese economy are, in short, on a collision course. In anticipation of the gathering storm, the regime is tightening the screws of political repression. Communist Party leaders now speak admiringly of the governments of Singapore and South Korea, which have supposedly succeeded in combining capitalism with authoritarian rule. Can the state created by the triumph of the People's Liberation Army survive the coming collision? Can it transform itself from a deformed workers' state into a capitalist state? Does Guangdong province show the rest of China the image of its future, as bourgeois ideologues contend? These are the urgent questions posed by the recent evolution of the People's Republic of China.

Some 'Incorrect Ideas'

The growth of the capitalist market in China has given rise to several fundamental misconceptions. First, there is the notion that the market can somehow be made to serve "socialism," i.e., used to enrich the state-owned sector on a long-term basis. This was the guiding conception of the Communist Party leadership when the reforms were introduced. In 1984, Deng Xiaoping wrote an article for a Thai newspaper that explained:

"We should like to expand the role of the market economy, as we develop further. This had led some to question whether China is moving in the direction of capitalism. We are not. It is not correct to assume that a market economy can only exist under capitalism. Under the socialist system, a market economy can exist side by side with a planned production economy—and they can be coordinated...."

"Under socialism, the market economy operates in the context of a two-sector system. Some means of production are owned by the nation as a whole, others are owned by collectives. Relations between the two sectors can be regulated by the market—but the common basis is still socialist ownership. By its nature a socialist society is designed to enrich the whole population. In a socialist society an exploiting class will never arise."

"Of course, if an enterprise in China is established with foreign capital, a new element is injected. Naturally, the owners will be capitalists. But in other sectors of the economy, public ownership will predominate."

—*The People's Republic of China 1979-84*, Vol. 2

There has been no indication that the ruling faction of the Chinese Communist Party has reevaluated its notions about "market socialism" in light of the experiences in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese government line was dutifully echoed by various leftist China scholars. Occasionally some scribbler in the bourgeois press, or the odd disoriented leftist, will still favorably contrast the "successful" Chinese model of market reform to the failure of perestroika in the ex-Soviet Union, or claim that Deng's reforms represent a "third way" between



GIANNINI-APF

Foreign capitalists exploit cheap labor in SEZs

capitalism and collectivized property. In an article published just after the failure of the 1991 Moscow coup, Robin Blackburn, the British New Left *enfant terrible* turned social democrat, suggested:

"If the economies of Russia and other former Soviet republics are to be revived it is far more likely to be done by encouraging autonomous municipal and republican collective enterprise, on the Chinese model, than by the ruinous dogmas of Chicago economics."

—"Russia Should Be Looking East, Not West,"
New Left Review, September-October, 1991

Another misconception—shared by old-time Maoists and some bourgeois ideologues—is that the ruling bureaucracy can successfully lead a seamless transition from a system of collectivized property to capitalism, without losing its grip on power. William Hinton, author of *Fanshen*, the famous chronicle of collectivization in Long Bow Village, and diehard Maoist to this day, accuses Deng et al. of having shown themselves to be the "capitalist roaders" Mao branded them during the Cultural Revolution. Hinton's latest book, *The Great Reversal*, argues that:

"[The leaders in Beijing] are newly constituted bureaucratic capitalists, busy carving the economy into gigantic family fiefs, ready, in true comprador style, to sell China out to the highest bidder."

This is wholly consistent with the Maoist belief in the omnipotence of leaders. Just as the transition from capitalism to socialism depends upon the will and determination of a Great Helmsman and his faithful disciples, so the entire social and economic character of a nation can be transformed by the ideological impurities of a handful of bad bureaucrats. Thus the Soviet Union, which was touted by Mao as a model socialist society under Stalin, is said to have turned capitalist in 1956 as a result of Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing his former boss.

An article entitled "The Chinese Road to Capitalism" (*New Left Review*, May-June 1993) by Richard Smith, effectively demolishes most of the above misconceptions



DER SPIEGEL

Homeless peasants in Shenzhen SEZ

(although the article is marred by a spurious Shachtmanite framework in which the Chinese bureaucracy is seen as a "ruling class"). Smith distinguishes between two things that are frequently lumped together: on the one hand, the Deng regime's attempt to employ perestroika-type market mechanisms within the state-owned sector of the economy, and, on the other, the creation of a growing private sector virtually free from state control. The failure of the former experiment has led the regime to rely more heavily upon the dynamic private sector of China's southern littoral. Yet the burgeoning private sector must inevitably exercise a disintegrative effect on the state-owned economy, from which the power of the central bureaucracy is ultimately derived.

Chinese Perestroika Unravels

Deng's experiment with perestroika has run aground for the same reasons that Gorbachev's did. As we wrote five years ago:

"The market is not a neutral instrument that can be harnessed in the service of a collectivized economy. While the market mechanism can be used in a planned economy for the rational allocation of consumer goods, its logic is ultimately antagonistic to a society where production is planned on the basis of human need. Where a collectivized economy governed by the producers fosters in individuals a sense of mutual social responsibility, the market engenders a narrow-minded materialistic egotism, the war of all against all. It is indeed possible, either in the transition period from capitalism to socialism or in the initial stages of capitalist restoration, for market and plan to coexist within the same society, just as it is possible for healthy and cancerous cells to exist for a time within the living organism. This coexistence, however, can never be a peaceful one. In the end, one or the other must prevail."

—1917 No. 6, Summer 1989

Deng initially attempted to turn to the market to increase production and boost exports in order to earn the hard currency necessary to purchase foreign technology for modernization. Although the reforms initially increased output in industry and agriculture, efforts in

both spheres ultimately foundered because market and plan, far from complementing one another, tended to prevent each other from operating consistently.

Beginning in 1978, the collective farm system, through which the state had run agriculture directly, was abandoned. But while collectives were supplanted by private plots, and peasants granted greater liberty to decide what and how much to produce, peasant families entered into contracts obliging them to sell the lion's share of their crops to the state. In theory these contracts were voluntary, but peasants were often pressured by local officials. The state also indirectly controlled agriculture through the pricing of key inputs (fertilizers, machinery, etc.).

The new system dramatically increased agricultural production from 1979-84, but not because of the inherent superiority of private plots over collective farms, as the Western media constantly alleged. The initial success was rather due to the fact that the state was matching free-market prices, and the contracts guaranteed the peasants a buyer. This policy resulted in a massive transfer of wealth to the peasantry.

As soon as state procurement prices fell behind inflation, however, the peasants immediately cut back on their sowing, and concentrated their energies on more profitable meat and poultry. Many hundreds of thousands of peasants also left the fields for the cities or took jobs in rural industries. In 1985 agricultural output dropped faster than at any point since the disastrous "Great Leap Forward" of the 1950s. Although output has climbed since, 1979-84 levels have never been regained.

The contradictions of China's perestroika are even starker in industry. The regime sought to increase productivity by allowing managers more control over production, and permitting firms to retain a greater portion of their profits. This was intended as an incentive to produce more efficiently. Yet the market cannot act as a spur to productivity unless its competitive logic is consistently applied. There must not only be rewards for success, but also penalties for failure. Workers who fall behind must be fired, and relatively inefficient firms allowed to fail. The existence of a mass of unemployed workers presents no problem for a capitalist; they are not his responsibility. In fact their very presence helps hold down the price of labor.

But because China remains a workers' state, where the major means of production have historically been publicly owned and centrally controlled, the Chinese Stalinists have always hesitated to carry market competition to its logical conclusion. If the state is responsible for maintaining the livelihood of unemployed workers as well as employed, far better to have workers employed even if their productivity is low, than to have them unemployed, as a totally unproductive drain upon state resources. Moreover, attacks on the Chinese workers' famous "iron rice bowl" could have unpredictable political results. It is therefore not hard to see why the regime, despite much talk, and even legislation that theoretically allowed managers to hire and fire as they saw fit, was reluctant to permit mass layoffs or factory closings. Contrary to the imperatives of the market, the

state continues to subsidize unprofitable firms, although by 1989 half of them were not self-sustaining. Only recently have there been major layoffs in the state sector.

In the absence of a genuine market, factory managers inevitably sought to attain their goal of maximizing output in the easiest way: by expanding the quantity of raw materials, machinery and labor at their disposal. Deng's "reforms" increased industrial output by over 12 percent annually between 1979 and 1988. But, the total cost of inputs rose even faster. According to Richard Smith:

"investments in fixed assets in new and expanded state-owned units grew by an average of 15.2 per cent per year during the same period.... In 1991, industrial output [grew] by 10 per cent. But this growth in output required a commensurate increase of capital inputs of 21.7 per cent—more than double the rate of growth in output."

Many of these inputs consisted of imported machinery, purchased with foreign loans. In most years since 1978 China has run a trade deficit. Thus, instead of boosting exports and allowing China to purchase the technology required for modernization, the market reforms have left China deeply indebted to imperialist banks and lending agencies. Government borrowing in turn fueled inflation. Partially to offset these effects, the regime has gradually increased its reliance on export revenues generated by the SEZs.

The Working Class and Tiananmen Square

By 1988, with inflation running at 30 percent, the southern capitalist sector ballooning out of control, and official corruption at unprecedented levels, China was headed toward a crisis. Many of the technocratic elite began calling for the wholesale privatization of the economy. The regime began to feel threatened, and took a series of measures aimed at curbing inflation and reasserting central economic control. Loans and subsidies to enterprises were cut back, imports were reduced and price controls reintroduced.

The result was an acute economic contraction, which formed the backdrop to the events of Tiananmen Square in June 1989. The Western media tended to treat the Chinese "democracy movement" as a simple replica of the popular upsurges that swept the Stalinists from power in Eastern Europe. Its goal was said to be a "Western-style" democracy and a "free" economy, i.e., capitalist restoration. The reality was more complex. Many of the students camped in front of the Great Hall of the People were indeed the sons and daughters of a rising technocratic elite that longs to be part of a new Chinese capitalist class. Many leading dissident intellectuals, with their naive worship of all things Western, articulated the aspirations of these emerging elites. These layers are loosely aligned with the most right-wing, pro-capitalist elements of the CCP bureaucracy.

But behind the student protests, far away from the Western TV crews, stood another, mightier force—the Chinese working class. It was their strikes and protests in the previous months that set the scene for Tiananmen. It was their anger—not only at the reassertion of the prerogatives of the corrupt party bureaucrats, but also with daily lives made poorer and more precarious by "market reforms"—that made the regime tremble with fear.



Workers join Tiananmen Square protest

"On May 17 and 18, when over a million people marched in Beijing...workers began to make up the majority of the crowds....workers from the largest state-run factories in the city such as the Capital Steel Corporation and the Yanshan Petrochemical Corporation were most conspicuous. They came into the city on an armada of trucks, buses and all sorts of vehicles, banging drums, gongs and cymbals, and waving red flags."

—"Analyzing the Role of Chinese Workers in the Protest Movement of 1989," Shaoguang Wang in *China: The Crisis of 1989*, Vol. 2

Under the pressure of its base, the bureaucrats of the National Council of Trade Unions donated money to the demonstrators:

"And more remarkably, according to a very reliable source, the National Council of Trade Unions agreed to call out a national general strike on May 20. It was probably because of this threat that Li Peng ordered martial law on the night of May 19.

"But martial law did not intimidate the students or the workers. While official trade unions hung back, workers began to organize autonomous trade unions. In Beijing, a preparation committee for a 'workers' self-governing federation' (*gongren zizhi lianhehui*) came into being on May 25. Workers in the provinces quickly followed the example."

—*Ibid.*

This is why the troops of June 1989 concentrated their fiercest attacks on the working-class neighborhoods surrounding Tiananmen Square rather than on the square itself, and why the harshest repressive measures in the post-Tiananmen mop-up were reserved for workers, not students or intellectuals. The Chinese working class, which was always regarded with contempt by the Maoist bureaucracy, will make its voice heard again—and not in favor of capitalist restoration.

The 'Southern Miracle' of Naked Exploitation

For a couple of years after the Tiananmen massacre the course of the Chinese regime was uncertain, as "hardliners" who favored curbing the capitalist sector seemed at times to gain the upper hand over so-called reformers. However, by the Fourteenth Party Congress in 1992, Deng had essentially outlined the course he has pursued ever since: using economic growth derived from the expansion of the southern capitalist sector to



Mao Zedong: CCP's 'Great Helmsman'

buy popular acceptance, while maintaining the Communist Party's absolute monopoly of political power. In a rare foray beyond the walls of his Beijing compound, Deng prepared for the congress by visiting Shenzhen, the most prosperous of Guangdong's special economic zones, where he extolled the contribution of private production to the power and prestige of China. The congress saw the eclipse of Chen Yun, who had been denounced as a "rightist" during the Cultural Revolution for favoring the Soviet model of economic development, but who was now labelled a "leftist" for being overly critical of the capitalist sector. While attempting to maintain his position as an arbiter among party factions, Deng successfully maneuvered to strengthen the hand of market enthusiasts. The result was full speed ahead for the special economic zones.

Not far from Hong Kong, Guangdong's four SEZs have become the motor force of China's emerging capitalist sector. When first created in 1980, they mainly attracted investments in tourism and real estate. By the mid-1980s, however, foreign investment was shifting toward labor-intensive, export-oriented light manufacturing industries—textiles, toys and clothing. But there has also been growth in other, more sophisticated sectors:

"While China's success owes much to cheap labour costs—textiles and footwear accounted for one third of 1992's \$85 billion in exports—exports of machinery, electronic products and transport equipment [are] the fastest growing areas. High foreign investment in capital intensive areas spawned an increase of about 86 per cent in exports of machinery and transport equipment in the first nine months of 1992, compared with 1991. Trade in these items accounted for 16 per cent of exports last year, compared with just 6 per cent in 1988."

—*Financial Times* (London), 16 February 1993

In recent years China has become a very hot market for foreign investors. Between 1979 and 1991, some \$20 billion was pumped into China. In 1992 alone \$11 billion more flooded in to reap superprofits from China's principal economic resource—a cheap and abundant labor supply. About a quarter of this investment comes from the U.S., Japan and Western Europe, with most of the rest from the other East Asian "dragons."

The SEZs originally restricted the extent of foreign ownership, hiring and firing of workers, and the repatriation of profits. However, in the mid-1980s several major investors threatened to pull out altogether unless the government relaxed the rules. The Deng regime, already on the defensive due to the effects of its failed market reforms, repeatedly gave ground, until Guangdong began to bear an uncomfortable resemblance to the notorious foreign concessions of pre-revolutionary times. Today Guangdong provides the "dragons" with a cheap labor and low-tax haven of the sort that the maquiladora zones of northern Mexico supply to U.S. capitalists. Hong Kong firms employ three million manufacturing workers in Guangdong, but only 680,000 in Hong Kong itself. The 5 August 1991 issue of *Forbes* magazine gushed that Guangdong is a "marriage made in heaven," which "combines the business acumen, technology and capital of Hong Kong industry with the bottomless pool of cheap Chinese labor."

But the capitalist's heaven is the worker's hell. Armed with the right to hire and fire at will, foreign capitalists operating in Guangdong have resurrected all the conditions of the most hideous pre-revolutionary sweatshops. "We're not an iron rice-bowl here," boasted one electronics factory manager. "If a worker doesn't satisfy me, he's out the door." According to Richard Smith:

"No less an authority than *Business Week* reports that the 12,000 workers of a Shekou assembly operation of Kader Enterprises Ltd, Hong Kong's largest toy maker, typically work 14-hour days—often seven days a week—for wages of around US \$21 a month. Most of these employees are women from 17 to 25 years of age, but many are just children, some as young as twelve years old. They sleep six to a room in company dormitories. Says a Kader executive: 'We can work these girls all day and all night, while in Hong Kong it would be impossible. We couldn't get this kind of labour, even if we were willing to meet Hong Kong wage levels.'"

Noam Chomsky quotes a report by Sheila Tefft in the *Christian Science Monitor* of a fire in November 1993 that: "killed 81 women trapped 'behind barred windows and blocked doorways,' and another a few weeks later that killed 60 workers in a Taiwanese-owned textile mill. More than 11,000 Chinese workers were killed in industrial accidents in the first eight months of 1993, double the 1992 rate, the Labor Ministry reported. 'Chinese officials and analysts say the accidents stem from abysmal working conditions, which, combined with long hours, inadequate pay, and even physical beatings, are stirring unprecedented labor unrest among China's booming foreign joint ventures.' 'The tensions reveal the great gap between competitive foreign capitalists lured by cheap Chinese labor and workers weaned on socialist job security and the safety net of cradle-to-grave benefits.'"

—*Lies Of Our Times*, March 1994

In a recent *New York Times* piece, Zhao Haiching and Fang Lizhi (the famous dissident astrophysicist now teaching at the University of Arizona), called for the Clinton administration to pressure the regime on "human rights" while maintaining trade relations: "Mr. Clinton should revoke most-favored-nation status for products made or sold by Government-controlled enterprises, thereby pressing the regime for change. But he should not cancel them for the private sector, which



J.BURKE-LIFE

Victorious PLA troops roll into Beijing: 1949

needs incentives to grow" (*New York Times*, 7 April). Apparently the right not to be worked to death or immolated in a factory does not rank high among the "human rights" championed by the Chinese dissidents embraced by the U.S. Department of State.

Rural Industries: Between Plan and Market

China's "rural industries" (or collectives) were created by the government as part of its reform package in the late 1970s and occupy an intermediate position between private and state economies. They began as mostly small-scale workshops making use of second-hand machinery from the state sector, and geared toward production for the home market—building materials and consumer items—as well as exports. These industries, which now exist in many urban areas, operate outside the centrally planned state economy, and, while most are owned and operated by local governments, a substantial percentage are in private hands. Even among those held by municipalities, some are leased to private producers and others have sold shares to foreign capitalists in various joint ventures.

The municipally owned collectives are much more dependent on the market than state firms. They are generally compelled to rely on the open market to sell their products and to purchase machinery and raw materials, which must be financed from profits. Workers in these

firms mostly earn piece rates. Unlike state enterprises, rural industries seldom provide housing or social services to their workers. But the collectives are not entirely subject to the logic of the market. Local governments often force these firms to retain more workers than they need as a way of alleviating the rural unemployment which has assumed crisis proportions since decollectivization. Profits are also commonly diverted to support local agriculture, while enterprises in danger of going under are frequently subsidized.

Some social democrats, like Robin Blackburn, have depicted the rural industries as some kind of "third way" between private and public ownership. But in fact they face growing competition from the private sector. Rural enterprises boomed until the mid-1980s, but, as Richard Smith explains, have since been losing ground:

"private capitalist firms, though generally far smaller, operating with more primitive technology, and often harassed and arbitrarily taxed by local governments, nevertheless increasingly out-compete community enterprises...because they have lower labour costs, they rely on cheaper female labour, they exploit cheaper migrant labour, they offer few or no benefits, and they can close down and lay off workers when demand falls off and resume when it is profitable.... They can also more easily conceal income, evade taxation and so retain more of their profits...."

"In sum, given the steady and seemingly inexorable



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Chinese shipyard worker

growth of rural marketization, especially in coastal China, it is difficult to see how collectively owned firms with their extra-economic burdens can compete and survive over the long run against lower-cost private producers. Almost certainly, these collectively owned industries will undergo a metamorphosis from minstate enterprises to minstate-capitalist enterprises, or be privatized outright."

Recent tax reforms passed by the National People's Congress have made it much more difficult for public entities to subsidize the collectives. This can only accelerate the tendency for them to go private if they are to survive.

A Dual Economy

Recent Chinese economic evolution, when carefully examined, shows that the country is not heading in the direction of "market socialism." Nor is the bureaucracy consciously embarked on an attempt to turn China into a capitalist country, with the 20 million-odd members of the CCP as a new capitalist class. Those elements of the ruling oligarchy, particularly in the SEZs, who have managed to amass personal fortunes, clearly favor wholesale capitalist restoration. Such sentiments extend into the officer corps of the People's Liberation Army, which has also been deeply involved in the private sector. But the highest echelons of the ruling party remain tied to state property.

China is still governed by a single political authority, but one which is being pulled apart by centrifugal forces. The CCP presides over an economy which is deeply divided between two fundamentally incompatible elements: a state sector on the one hand, and a private sector on the other. Ultimately all attempts to reinvigorate

a collectivized economy through market reform must fail because, to operate properly, the market requires private ownership of the means of production. The bureaucracy, with its new version of the imperialists' "open door" policy, is in the process of ceding portions of China to foreign capital, and is allowing small home-grown capitalist production to put down roots throughout the country.

Deng and his cohorts may fervently wish that the private sector remain in a secondary role, but they will inevitably discover that capital is malignant, not benign. It will attempt to insinuate itself into every pore of the economy and will ultimately demand a state power subservient to itself, i.e., the destruction of the Chinese workers' state, and the bureaucratic regime that now stands at its head.

Ten years ago state-owned firms accounted for more than 80 percent of China's industrial output; today that figure has declined to 50 percent and is still falling. The 28 March issue of the *Asian Wall Street Journal* reported on the problems of the state sector in Chongqing (formerly Chungking):

"Now all these factories are losing out to rivals in richer coastal regions. About 45% of all state factories in Chongqing are unprofitable, compared with 35% a year ago, according to official estimates. In sunset industries like textile and rubber, the proportion rises to 70%. As a result, thousands of workers have been sent home for what is locally known as 'indefinite vacation' as their employers have suspended all or part of production. By official account, nearly 200,000 Chongqing workers are 'vacationing' on just 60 yuan a month in living allowances, less than a quarter of the average worker's salary in the city."

The introduction of a capitalist sector has driven a deep wedge into the deformed workers' state; bureaucrats in prosperous southern coastal areas seek greater independence from Beijing, while residents of the impoverished interior increasingly resent the special status accorded the south. In June of 1993 thousands of peasants stormed government headquarters in a town in the central Chinese province of Sichuan, and held local officials captive while they aired their grievances. This was only the most serious of over 200 such incidents reported by the Chinese government since 1992. Peasants were reportedly aggrieved over a host of arbitrary new taxes levied by provincial bureaucrats seeking to bring their lifestyles up to par with their affluent south-coastal counterparts. Another complaint was that peasants were not paid for grain deliveries, but given IOUs.

The incidents highlight the profound social tensions generated by the economic imbalances between the cities and the countryside, the coastal areas and the interior. Yet the vast majority of the Chinese people live in the interior, and that is where Mao Zedong mobilized the peasant armies that brought him to power. The peasantry has historically been the mainstay of support for the Communist Party. Mass peasant disaffection could be the beginning of the end for Mao's heirs.

The widening gap between coast and hinterland has implications not only for the future of the Chinese workers' state; it also gives a hint of what a capitalist China might look like. The rest of China cannot simply follow

Guangdong Province and the other SEZs on the road to export-led industrialization. There may be room in the world market for the exports of a few small Asian "dragons," but consumers for the exports of a country of two billion people simply don't exist. Capitalist penetration is already beginning to impose upon China an economic profile all too familiar in the "third world": small islands of urban affluence surrounded by teeming slums and even vaster seas of rural poverty.

The regime appears increasingly powerless to arrest the steady growth of the private sector. Attempts by Beijing to reassert a measure of central control ran into opposition at the March session of the National People's Congress, a legislature which Mao established to rubber stamp party policy:

"The congress's closing session offered some delegates a chance to vote their displeasure over Beijing's policies. In one of the stronger shows of dissent, some 20% of the 2,721 representatives present voted against or abstained from voting on China's new budget law.

"That's because the law requires provincial governments to submit annual budgets to local congresses for approval, and then stick to them. The law also bans provincial governments from issuing bonds.

"This year's budget, which incorporates a new tax system aimed at fattening the central coffers, also drew a noticeable negative vote.

"This year's dissenting votes only hinted at the dissatisfaction behind the scenes. 'There was a lot of confusion about (last November's) reforms in general and a lot of complaints about the new tax reform in specific,' says one government official who sat in on many provincial group meetings.

"Vice Premier Zhu Rongji unveiled the wide-ranging reforms last year in an effort to resolve some of the tangled, persistent problems that are hampering China's transition from centrally planned to market economy. Besides a new tax revenue-sharing system for the center and regions, Mr. Zhu's program includes reforms for banking, the foreign-exchange system and ailing state enterprises. "The reforms also are aimed at helping the central government regain some of its old authority, as well as badly needed funds, from China's increasingly independent provinces."

—*Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly*, 28 March

The Balance Sheet

The Trotskyist movement was born in a political struggle to defend the Marxist program of world revolution against the Stalinist falsifiers, who claimed that a self-sufficient socialism could be constructed within the borders of a single, backward, predominantly peasant country. Following Marx, Engels and Lenin, Trotsky argued that as long as scarcity remained the dominant characteristic of economic life, and as long as production was carried out mainly on small peasant plots, it would be impossible to construct a socialist, i.e., classless society. The world socialist revolution had begun in relatively backward Czarist Russia, but it would only be victorious when it had triumphed in the metropolitan centers of the advanced capitalist world. The agency for international revolution could only be the class located at the heart of the modern capitalist world economy—the proletariat.



Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 revealed fragility of Stalinist rule

The political progenitor of the International Bolshevik Tendency—the international Spartacist tendency—was formed in opposition to Pabloism, a revisionist current within the Trotskyist Fourth International that sought historical substitutes for the working class as the agency of revolution. One of the most seductive arguments for questioning the central role of the working class was the formidable reality of the Chinese Revolution.

As a result of the bloody suppression by Chiang Kai-shek of an incipient workers' revolution in Shanghai in 1927—a disaster brought about by the misleadership of Stalin's Comintern—the Chinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, turned its back forever on the working class. Mao responded to the 1927 defeat by going to the countryside, and began to build a base among the peasantry. The CCP's peasant army resisted the Japanese during World War II, and held at bay the U.S.-backed armies of the reactionary Chiang Kai-shek. Upon conquering power in 1949, Mao remained true to the Stalinist notion of "socialism in one country," and set out to build a self-contained Chinese peasant socialism.

The Chinese Revolution was a world-historic event. It changed the whole balance of power on the Asian continent to the disadvantage of imperialism. China fought the U.S. to a stalemate in the Korean War, and the existence of the Chinese deformed workers' state encouraged the insurgent Stalinist movements of Indochina. On the home front, the revolution liberated the peasant masses from the serfdom of centuries, emancipated women from the literally crippling yoke of domestic slavery, ended the cycles of famine and plague that had devastated the countryside since time immemorial, and raised the general standards of health, literacy and material well-being for hundreds of millions.

At the time of the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, Maoism became a pole of attraction the world over for Communist Party members disillusioned with the class-collaborationist policies of their pro-Moscow leaders, as well as for large sections of the emerging New Left. With its polemics against "modern revisionism," and tough talk directed at U.S. imperialism, its penchant for orches-



PICTORIAL PARADE

Zhao Enlai and Henry Kissinger seal reactionary anti-Soviet alliance, 1971

trated mass mobilizations and moral, as opposed to material, incentives for constructing "socialism," Mao's regime provided what seemed like a left-Stalinist alternative to the colorless Kremlin oligarchs.

The Maoists sneered at the Trotskyists who asserted that, despite the considerable achievements of the Chinese Revolution, the Beijing leadership was no different in kind from its Soviet rivals. The revolutionary Spartacist tendency of the 1960s argued that Beijing's militant anti-imperialist rhetoric could be traded in for a few crumbs from Washington's table and insisted that the egalitarian sloganeering of Mao's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" was in reality a smokescreen for an intra-bureaucratic squabble. Subsequent developments have vindicated this estimation. The Beijing bureaucracy has indeed proved no more revolutionary and no more capable of creating an isolated socialist society, or of advancing the interests of the international proletariat, than the Soviet Stalinists.

Jonas Savimbi, Augusto Pinochet, Pol Pot—these are just a few of the friends cultivated by the Chinese bureaucrats over the course of their squalid twenty-year alliance with U.S. imperialism. The 1966 Suharto coup in Indonesia, in which over a million leftist workers and peasants were butchered, was the direct result of the class-collaborationist policies urged upon the Communist Party of Indonesia by its patrons in Beijing. These horrendous betrayals cannot be blamed on the "capitalist roaders" who opposed Mao within the Chinese Communist Party, for they all took place during the lifetime, and with the blessing, of the "Great Helmsman" himself.

Today the regime of Deng Xiaoping is caving in to capitalism on the home front as well. Deng is probably aware that the foreign investors who now dominate Guangdong are no friends to collectivized property or the CCP bureaucracy. But he knows, on the other hand, that the growing consumer culture of coastal China is one of the few remaining props for the regime. Hence, every attempt to curb imports and impose austerity measures is followed by a wave of popular discontent, which sends Deng scurrying back to foreign bankers and capitalists.

Maoists may argue that Deng always opposed Mao's economic prescriptions. And it is true that, before the Cultural Revolution, Deng was right-hand man to Liu Shaoqi, reviled by the Maoists as the chief "capitalist roader." But Deng's faction only gained power after bouts of Maoist hysteria and moral exhortation twice brought China to the brink of ruin. The Great Leap Forward brought famine in its wake. The Cultural Revolution led to economic paralysis. Now the Deng faction's attempts at "market socialism" have also come undone, and they are selling chunks of the country to foreign capital because they see no other option. Chinese Stalinism, in short, has come to the end of its rope.

The ruling Stalinist caste derived its power from control of the central administrative apparatus of the collectivized economy. Today millions of CCP functionaries can see that the growth of the private sector threatens their prerogatives. This "conservative" section of the bureaucracy remains an important political factor, with a potential base among the hundreds of millions of workers and peasants who know that further market "reforms" will come at their expense. But, as in the USSR, the so-called hardline elements are demoralized and cynical, and lack both popular support and any kind of coherent positive program.

In any future confrontation we will bloc militarily with those elements of the bureaucracy that attempt to defend collectivized property against the forces of capitalist counterrevolution, just as we sided with the Soviet Stalinists in their last pathetic attempt to cling to power in August 1991. But we harbor no illusions about the ability of the Stalinists to defend what remain of the gains of the Chinese Revolution. That is the historic task of the Chinese proletariat, a class that the present regime has always regarded with suspicion and hostility, but which has demonstrated its willingness to defend the "iron rice bowl" that Mao promised in 1949.

Although information is sketchy, there is no doubt that workers throughout China are spontaneously resisting the ruthless exploitation of their new foreign employers, as well as the attempts of their old bureaucratic taskmasters to deprive them of existing social and economic rights. Reports of strikes, battles with police, and even the shooting of factory managers now percolate throughout the country. The 10 April *New York Times* reported that:

"a secret Government report leaked to a Hong Kong newspaper...tallied more than 6,000 illegal strikes in China in 1993 and more than 200 riots. Many were protests against layoffs and unpaid wages in cash-starved state industries."

The militant Chinese working class must take power directly into its own hands and establish a revolutionary workers' government based on soviet democracy. The key to this is the creation of a political leadership committed to the program of revolutionary Trotskyism. A proletarian political revolution that ousts the Stalinist rulers and expropriates the foreign exploiters will not only safeguard the social conquests of the past, but also spark a wave of revolutionary struggles by the combative working class of South Korea, Japan and other countries in the region, and thereby open the road to socialism on a world scale. ■

MLP's Long March to Oblivion

At its Fifth Congress in November 1993, the Marxist-Leninist Party of the USA (MLP), a group that once claimed to be the "anti-liquidationist" and "anti-revisionist" party of the American working class, voted to dissolve. The final edition of the *Workers Advocate* (WA), dated 28 November 1993, was a single photocopied sheet. It reported that the MLP had lost too many members to continue to produce a monthly paper, and hence the Central Committee concluded that the group had reached "the end of its natural life." The dissolution statement also included a frank admission by what remained of the MLP leadership that: "Outstanding theoretical problems have multiplied beyond our ability to satisfactorily address them." A small remnant of the MLP, based in Chicago, the group's former center, is apparently not quite ready to pack it in. The first issue of its *Theoretical Supplement* published by the "Chicago Workers Voice Group" reports that, "ideological disunity played the key role in the complete dissolution of the party." Disagreements apparently included:

"1) the assessment of imperialism, 2) analysis of the program of the capitalists and what the program of the working class should be in the post Cold War world, 3) assessment of the role of the working class as a base for revolutionary politics, 4) assessment of Leninism, 5) assessment of Soviet history, and 6) analysis of the role of a small revolutionary party or group in the present situation."

That doesn't leave much. With such far-reaching and profound differences, it is remarkable that the MLP survived as long as it did.

Since its origins in the late 1960s, the MLP went through several transformations. It began as the American Communist Workers Movement (Marxist-Leninist), ACWM(M-L), a U.S. offshoot of Hardial Bains' cultist Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist). The absurd and mindless devotion to Mao Zedong that characterized the group at that time is captured in one of its favorite slogans: "Mao- Mao- Mao-Tse Tung! China's Line is Our Line!" ACWM(M-L) was always on the wacky fringe of American Maoism. Like its Canadian parent in that period, a good deal of the group's activity involved confrontations with police, or fascists, or, on occasion, with other radicals and leftists—a category the Bainsites subsumed under the heading "social fascists." In hindsight the MLP characterized much of its activity in this period as "semi-anarchist" and "outrageous" (WA *Supplement* 15 May 1989). We would add "brainless."

In the early 1970s, as Mao and the Chinese Stalinists were getting cozy with Richard Nixon, ACWM(M-L), by then renamed the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists (COUSML), continued to "Hold High the Banner of Mao Tse-Tung Thought." A few years later, in pursuit of the Tirana franchise, Bains decided that Mao had never been a Marxist and that China had always been capitalist, and began singing the praises of "Socialist Albania" under Enver Hoxha. COUSML followed in lock-



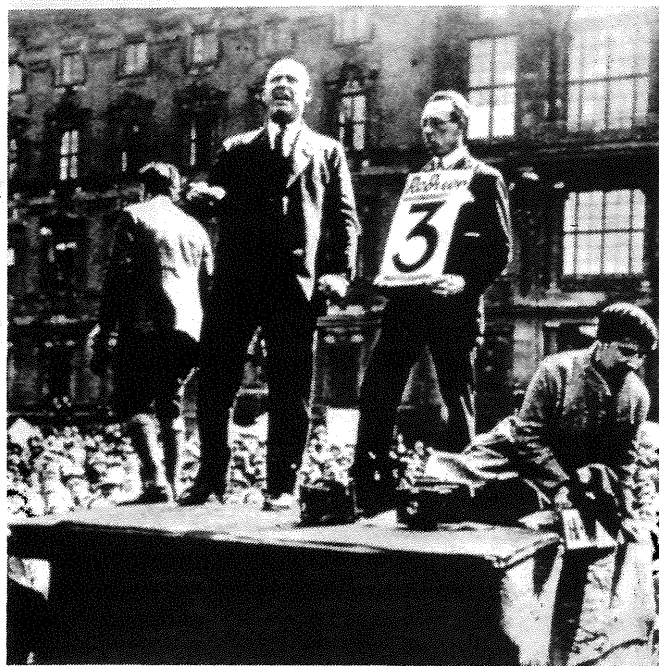
February 1936: Spanish CP supports Popular Front

step. In 1980 COUSML changed its name to the MLP, and the next year broke publicly with the Bainsites. But apart from not having to take abuse from the megalomaniacal Bains, not much changed initially in the group's politics. It remained devoted to the brutal Stalinist regime in Tirana.

MLP Breaks with the Popular Front

Over the course of the next few years the MLP gradually turned to the left. Throughout most of the 1980s it distinguished itself as the only Stalinist group in the U.S. to regularly denounce the class-collaborationist politics of those leftists whose activity centered on the Democratic Party. At a time when much of the once formidable Maoist milieu was climbing aboard Jesse Jackson's "Rainbow Coalition," the MLP took a more critical attitude. The MLP also criticized overtly liquidationist currents in the Maoist movement internationally, denouncing, for example, their former comrades in the Dominican Republic for abandoning working-class politics in favor of an alliance for "democracy and National Liberation."

The MLP's most important international connection in the 1980s was with the Nicaraguan MAP-ML, a potentially significant formation with a small mass base,



German CP leader Ernst Thälmann (1930): advocate of suicidal 'Third Period' sectarianism

which had played an independent role in the uprising against Somoza, and stood generally to the left of the governing Sandinista regime. As we noted in 1917 No. 3, the MAP-ML was never able to break decisively with the Sandinistas, but they did make leftist criticisms of the FSLN's conciliation of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie. The MAP-ML also organized its own small "dual union" which led some strikes and occasional confrontations with the regime. The FSLN responded by periodically sending some of the MAP-ML cadres to jail, and routinely denouncing them as "ultra-lefts."

The MLP's criticisms of class collaborationism conflicted with the Stalinist tradition it claimed. After all, Gus Hall (leader of the Communist Party U.S.A.) had not invented the Popular Front—the MLP's supposedly revolutionary forbears in the CP of the 1930s had made similar adaptations to the "New Deal" Democrats. The MLP undertook to address this apparent contradiction in a series of articles on the history of the American Communist Party, the Spanish Civil War and the history of the Communist International.

This partial step to the left had some far-reaching implications, most of which the MLP felt compelled to dodge, as it was clear that the overt class collaborationism of the American CP, along with the rest of the Communist Parties of the period, originated in Moscow and was endorsed by Joseph Stalin, who remained a revered figure in the MLP pantheon. To cover its right flank, the MLP felt it necessary to turn up the volume and shrillness of its polemics against Trotskyism, as the depth of its criticisms of the Comintern's class collaborationism increased.

The MLP leadership had to be aware that it was doing no more than crudely rehashing some of the criticisms raised by the Trotskyist International Left Opposition 50 years earlier, but all discussion of this was strictly

avoided. The MLP drew the line at 1935, and limited its criticisms to the mistakes made from the Seventh Congress of the Comintern onwards. This left a lot to be explained, including the errors of the German Communist Party that helped pave the way for Hitler, the betrayal of the Chinese Communists to the KMT in 1927, and the sabotage of the British General Strike of 1926 by the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Alliance. All of these political crimes were either defended or passed over in silence by the MLP.

MLP Muddlers and the Russian Question

Most of the theoretical problems that so perplexed the MLP could be traced to its refusal to confront the reality of the Soviet Union. The MLP clung to the Maoist characterization of the USSR as a "revisionist state capitalist" society, in which capitalism had supposedly been restored sometime between the moment that Stalin died and Nikita Khrushchev gave a speech denouncing him. According to the MLP, Khrushchev was the one who had "revised communist principles into bourgeois ideas and practices" (WA, 1 April 1990). This did not explain how "socialism" had turned into "revisionist state capitalism" without requiring any major changes in the personnel of the state apparatus, without any alteration in the mode of operation of the economy, and with the endorsement of the same party cadres who had unanimously supported Stalin only a few years earlier.

In 1989 the MLP addressed the question of Soviet Russia in polemics with the Marxist-Leninist League of Sweden (MLLS), which had abandoned the crude Maoist theories about "capitalist roaders" in favor of Tony Cliff's social-democratic pseudo-analysis. The MLP was able to show why the USSR was *not* a state-capitalist regime in 1928 (the year the Cliffites claim a capitalist counterrevolution occurred), but this only highlighted their confusion about when and how the "socialist" USSR had gone capitalist. The best the MLP could come up with was the vague assertion that the USSR had, over time, gradually "evolved into a state-capitalist system" (WA, 1 October 1991).

You Can Ignore History...

The MLP's historical explorations carefully ignored some of the central events in the early history of the Soviet regime. They ignored Lenin's deathbed struggle to remove Stalin from the party leadership for bureaucratic abuses. They also ignored the struggle of the Left Opposition against the bureaucratic strangling of internal party democracy and the imposition of the anti-Leninist program of "Socialism in One Country." So too the whole industrialization debate between Preobrazhensky and Bukharin, and how Stalin's support to the program of "socialism at a snail's pace," gave rise to a powerful restorationist kulak class in the countryside. This error led, in turn, to an abrupt lurch to the left with the massive forced collectivization, which crippled Soviet agriculture for decades. The MLP's only comment on the collectivization of the countryside was that it had "major impact on the subsequent development" of the USSR, but they refrained from specifying exactly what that im-

pact was. The MLP had no comment on the Great Purges of the 1930s, where Stalin's juridical apparatus "proved" that most of the key leaders of the October Revolution, and millions of less prominent Soviet citizens, were imperialist spies, agents and saboteurs. The MLP's "investigations" of Soviet history never went beyond dabbling because they were circumscribed by the necessity to avoid a political reckoning with Trotskyism, the only coherent critique of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution to emerge from within the Bolshevik tradition.

During the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of the Soviet bloc, the MLP continued to assert, with less and less conviction, that Albania remained a "socialist" country. When the Albanian Party of Labor moved to contain growing unrest by implementing its own version of perestroika, the MLP denounced the "Gorbachev-style" reforms as a "betrayal of socialism." Yet, according to the MLP's theory, the market reforms proposed by Gorbachev merely modified the form of capitalism, from "revisionist state capitalism" to regular market capitalism. They could not explain why "socialist" Albania would be prone to the same kind of crisis as the "revisionist state-capitalist" states of the Soviet bloc. Nor how there could be a "Gorbachev-style" reform where there was no state capitalism in the first place. Their inability to account for the remarkable similarities between Albanian "socialism" and the "revisionist state capitalism" of the rest of East Europe was, of course, because they were all fundamentally similar social formations, i.e., deformed workers' states.

...But History Won't Ignore You

During the 1980s the MLP was loosely linked to "anti-revisionist" Maoist groups in Sweden, Spain, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere, which also proclaimed their intention to deepen their "Marxism-Leninism" through historical investigations. But all these experiments ended in failure. The Swedish group embraced the "Third Campism" of Tony Cliff, and then dissolved into the social-democratic Workers' List. The Colombians ended up championing Fidel Castro and the Cuban regime. The Dominicans came to champion outright nationalism. Inside the MLP, there were some who thought that the group's problems could be solved by changing their name and ditching the hammer and sickle.

The MLP went further than most of its sister groups in attempting to develop a viable historical alternative to the pseudo-Marxist ideological rubbish which was their legacy from Mao Zedong and Stalin. But such projects can never bear fruit if they are premised on a refusal to confront the actual historical and political struggles that took place within the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern after Lenin. The Left Opposition (LO) led the only serious anti-revisionist struggle against the degeneration of Lenin's party. The MLP would like to write Trotsky off as an "outsider" to Bolshevism. The truth is that, next to Lenin, he was the foremost leader of the party from 1917 on. As the Commissar of War, he forged the Red Army from a dispersed collection of armed worker detachments and guerrilla bands. The LO led the



SOVFO

Stalin and his successor, Khrushchev

struggle against the bureaucratic strangulation of the Third International under Stalin. It provided the only coherent communist opposition to the sectarian idiocy of the "Third Period." It was the only consistent opponent of the treachery of the class-collaborationist Popular Front which destroyed the Spanish Revolution.

The Bolshevik Tendency sought to intersect the MLP politically during its initial tentative steps to the left. We welcomed their investigation into the history of the Communist movement, and tried to point out the logical contradiction between their sometime leftist impulses and their Stalinist patrimony (see "The Myth of the 'Third Period'," 1917 No. 3 and "Leninism and the Third Period: Not Twins, But Antipodes," 1917 No. 4). We also proposed to debate them, and sought on a number of occasions to engage them in a serious political exchange. The MLP leadership responded with political evasions and bombastic denunciations of Trotskyism. But, as the group's subsequent disintegration proves, such tactics are no substitute for serious politics.

Those former MLPers who have not reconciled themselves to the inevitability of a world run in the interests of a tiny handful of capitalist parasites should recall Marx's observation that ignorance never did anybody any good, and have a look at what Trotsky actually wrote. A good place to begin would be with *Third International After Lenin*, which Trotsky submitted to the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, where he was expelled. Find out what went wrong—don't repeat the errors of the past. Learn to think! ■

IBT's First International Conference Facing the New World Order



1917 PHOTO

The three years since the founding of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) in 1990 have witnessed a series of momentous historical events, which are among the most significant of the century. In early January of this year delegates to the IBT's first international conference took stock of our response to those events, discussed political questions that had arisen over the past few years, and projected tasks and perspectives for the coming period.

The IBT was formed through a fusion of three organizations: the North-American-based Bolshevik Tendency, the Gruppe IV Internationale (Germany) and the Permanent Revolution Group (New Zealand). All three organizations were products of, and reactions against, the political degeneration of the international Spartacist tendency (iSt—now the International Communist League [ICL]), a formerly revolutionary organization that was transformed by degrees into a highly bureaucratized and hyper-centralist obedience cult, marked by a capacity for erratic programmatic deviations.

The leadership of each of the founding components of the IBT was trained in the iSt when it was still a revolutionary organization. There was therefore an underlying unity existing prior to the 1990 fusions, both on the level of agreement on formal programmatic and historical questions, and also in terms of a common understanding of how a Leninist organization should function. The task since the formation of the IBT has been to cohere those three small and widely dispersed groupings into a homogenous international collective. Our first international conference, and the intense period of discussion which preceded it, marks a significant step forward in this process. There were several questions on which delegates who had differences with the majority presented minority reports to the conference. This is a

normal occurrence in a healthy Leninist organization. All of the debates took place within the context of a common commitment to building the IBT as the only international current which represents authentic Leninism-Trotskyism.

Counterrevolution in the Soviet Bloc

The most important historical event since the founding of the IBT was the showdown in Moscow in 1991 between the decrepit and incompetent Stalinist "hardliners" and the forces of capitalist counterrevolution spearheaded by Boris Yeltsin. The conference discussed our response to those events, and noted that our position of blocking militarily with Yanayev against Yeltsin had been powerfully vindicated by all subsequent developments. It was noted that this position helped define us internationally as hard "orthodox" Soviet defensists.

The principal international report, endorsed by the conference, observed that in 1991 all our ostensibly Trotskyist opponents either sided militarily with the Yeltsinites (e.g., the United Secretariat, the British Workers Power, Labour Militant) or sought refuge in neutrality and confusionism (e.g., the ICL and the International Trotskyist Opposition). The political cowardice of these various groupings (all of which claim to be Soviet defensist) prevented them from taking a defensist position when it counted. This, in turn, predisposed them to close their eyes to the obvious connection between the victory of the Yeltsinites and the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers' state.

The chaos and irrationality of the nascent bourgeois social order in Russia has been marked by profound social and political instability. Last October, squabbling among the would-be rulers led to an armed clash between Yeltsin and Rutskoi/Khasbulatov. Unlike 1991, when the fate of the degenerated workers' state hung in the balance, the 1993 dispute was essentially a power struggle between rival counterrevolutionaries in which the working class had no side (see article this issue). But, this is not how most of the world's "Trotskyists" saw it. Many of the same organizations which in 1991 had refused to defend Yanayev and the degenerated workers' state against Yeltsin/Rutskoi and the counterrevolution had no trouble backing Rutskoi against Yeltsin in 1993 when the restorationists fell out.

The international report to the conference also noted that the collapse of the Soviet workers' state set in motion a chain reaction internationally which has shifted the whole political spectrum to the right. This is reflected in the capitulations by erstwhile leftists and radical nationalists from Palestine to El Salvador. Imperialist pressure on the remaining bureaucratized workers' states in Cuba and East Asia has increased enormously, and the defense of these states against counterrevolution and imperialist aggression is a crucial task for the interna-

tional workers' movement. The collapse of a whole series of Stalinist regimes, which only a few years ago paraded as examples of "actually existing socialism," has also underlined the centrality of the Trotskyist program of political revolution. The seizure of direct political power by the working class, and the shattering of the bureaucratic ruling castes in the remaining deformed workers' states, is the only way to preserve the gains of the anti-capitalist social overturns and break the imperialist stranglehold.

The tasks and perspectives document adopted by the conference observed that the collapse of the USSR:

"has been an unfortunate vindication of Trotskyist theory, and a tragic refutation of both Stalinism, with its pretense that socialist societies could be built in a world still dominated by capitalism, and also of Pabloism, with its illusions in an objective historical process in which the inexorable march towards socialism proceeds automatically without the intervention of a revolutionary leadership, or even the active participation of the working class. It has never been clearer than it is today that the historical crisis of human civilization is reducible to the crisis of proletarian leadership."

The destruction of the Soviet Union and the deformed workers' states of Eastern Europe has given impetus to a resurgence of fascist activity, both in West European parliaments and on the streets. This poses a deadly danger, and requires an active policy of aggressive but tactically intelligent united-front mobilizations to break up the fascist formations before they can grow. Our comrades in Germany and North America have been involved in such activities in the past few years, and such work remains an urgent task wherever the fascists raise their heads.

The "death of communism" has sparked genocidal civil wars in the Balkans and the Caucasus. It has also encouraged a renewed assault on wages, living standards and working conditions, particularly in Western Europe. The rise in chauvinist sentiments and anti-immigrant hysteria, and the drift toward protectionism and trade war among the imperialist powers, are also conditioned by the disappearance of the "communist menace."

The capitalist offensive has not gone unchallenged. In recent months there have been a string of militant mass strikes and demonstrations across West Europe. Just as the conference was beginning, news came of the Zapatista peasant uprising in Mexico. Millions of workers and oppressed people are being driven onto the road of revolt by the capitalists' insatiable thirst for profit. Today the masses have just as much capacity to shake the world as they did in 1917. The decisive question now, as then, is one of forging a revolutionary leadership.

Realignments on the Left and the Propaganda Perspective

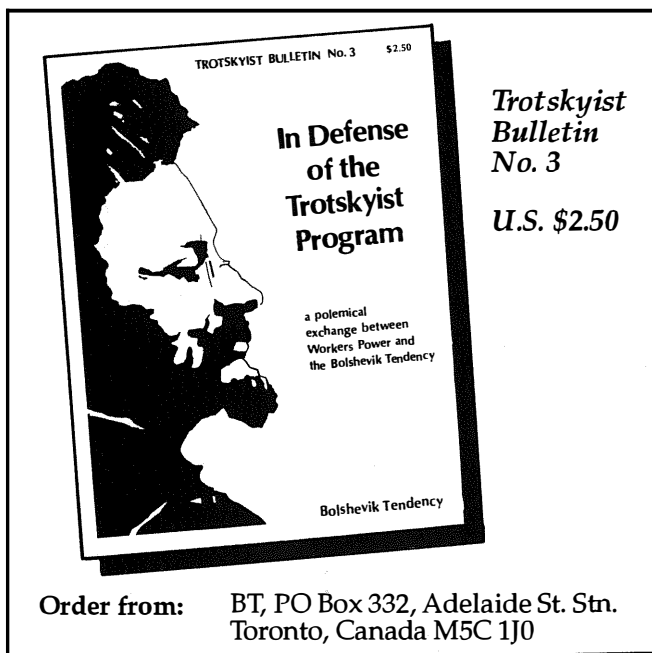
During the past period the bulk of the left and workers' movement has shifted rightward. In many countries the mass social-democratic parties are barely distinguishable politically, and even in terms of social base, from liberal bourgeois parties. Various ostensibly revolutionary organizations—particularly Maoist and Mos-

cow-line Stalinist formations—have simply disappeared from the scene, or are in the process of doing so. Many of the groupings claiming to be Trotskyist have proven to be seriously disoriented by the transformation of the bi-polar, post-war world into a period of renewed inter-imperialist global disorder. One reflection of this has been the tendency of most of the European so-called Trotskyist groups to align themselves with the protectionist wing of their own bourgeoisies during the recent referendum over the Maastricht agreement (see 1917 No. 13).

With the organized left profoundly shaken by the events of the last half decade, and the capitalists on the offensive, a section of the best working-class militants and left activists must inevitably begin to look for new answers. This presents considerable opportunities for revolutionaries, as well as for new varieties of mislead-

ers. The conference affirmed a perspective of seeking political regroupment with leftward-moving currents internationally around the central elements of the historical program of Trotskyism. To this end we will attempt, within the limits of our slender resources, to increase the range of materials available in languages other than English and German. To date we have been able to produce issues of 1917 in French, Spanish and Korean, and hope to do more in the future.

It is particularly important for us to seek to engage centrist and reformist tendencies that present themselves as continuators of the Trotskyist heritage. Such organizations necessarily embody a profound contradiction between their professed beliefs and their actual activity. They constitute the greatest political obstacle to the growth of the forces of authentic Trotskyism, and at the same time are the most important immediate source of cadre. It is essential to struggle politically with these organizations, both to win over subjectively revolutionary elements among their members and to expose their fundamental political inadequacy.



Trotskyist Bulletin No. 3
U.S. \$2.50

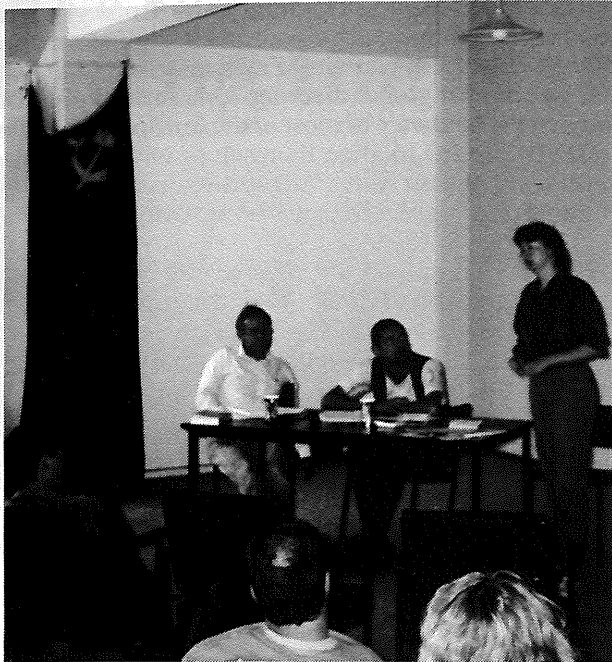
In Defense of the Trotskyist Program

a polemical exchange between
Workers Power and
the Bolshevik Tendency

Bolshevik Tendency

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IBT Debates ICL



1917 PHOTO

Pip Naughton, representing the Spartacist League/Australia (ICL) debated Bill Logan of the IBT on 4 March in Wellington, New Zealand. We look forward to further exchanges.

The conference confirmed *1917's* role as the IBT's main propaganda organ, and endorsed its policy of high-quality revolutionary journalism. The struggle for international political regroupment can only be advanced through dealing with the major programmatic questions of the day, while presenting a hard Leninist critique of the politics of the various pseudo-revolutionary organizations. The target readership of *1917* will therefore remain individuals who are already somewhat interested in far left politics. Where possible, IBT sections will also seek to produce topical local or national propaganda, which can address issues of more immediate interest to broader layers of working people and other militants.

Our appetite to maintain an aggressively programmatic thrust in all activities was echoed in delegate reports on trade-union work. The conference affirmed the Bolshevik perspective of building communist caucuses in the unions, rather than reformist "rank-and-file" movements, on a low-common-denominator "anti-bureaucratic" platform. Only by forging programmatically based caucuses and advancing a consistent Marxist critique of the class-collaborationism of the trade-union officialdom can revolutionaries win mass support within the working class.

Where the forces do not exist to launch caucuses, individual communists can still intervene in particular union battles, and even stand for elected positions. Active participation in the struggles confronting the class can provide valuable experience in doing mass work and establishing credentials as class-struggle militants. This can help lay the basis for undertaking larger-scale activ-

ity in the future as our forces increase.

One of the features of the rightward political shift internationally is the bourgeois ideological offensive pushing "traditional family values," as the classical nuclear family is undermined by the proliferation of single-parent or other non-traditional living arrangements, as well as the large-scale integration of women into the workforce. Conference delegates agreed that it is important for the IBT to produce more material dealing with questions related to "sexual politics."

Among the documents submitted for discussion and approved by the conference was a historical piece on the question of homosexual oppression. The issue of pedophilia, and how it should be addressed by revolutionaries, was also a subject of discussion. As Marxists we reject age-of-consent laws because they prescribe an arbitrary threshold, decreeing that, as a matter of law, consent cannot be given by a person below a certain age. The key issue in every case is that of meaningful consent. The conference also unanimously endorsed a position of flat opposition to censorship of "pornography"—whether by the state or by pseudo-leftist or feminist "direct action" vigilantes.

For Leninism!

The conference reviewed the internal political struggles in each of our sections. Over the past three years all IBT sections have had disaffected (and usually pretty demoralized) individuals resign over various issues. In each case, the IBT accorded its dissidents ample opportunity to argue for their views, and in general conducted the internal political struggles in an exemplary fashion.

An important discussion at the conference revolved around the final stage in the ratification of the rules and guidelines for the IBT. A series of drafts had been circulating within the organization for over two years prior to the conference and had been the subject of a good deal of discussion. The end result is based closely on the rules of the revolutionary Spartacist League of the 1960s, which were in turn derived from those of the Socialist Workers Party (U.S.) of the 1930s, and the early Comintern.

We are a very small group of people, with very limited resources, who are widely dispersed over the face of the globe. However, the first fully delegated conference of the IBT registered considerable progress in moving toward a more cohesive and politically homogeneous organization. Our tasks are immense, but the Bolshevik tradition that we seek to uphold is equal to them. As the tasks and perspectives document concluded:

"Our primary strategic objective at this point is to establish ourselves as a pole of regroupment internationally for those who are committed to struggle to realize the program of consistently revolutionary communism, i.e., 'orthodox' Trotskyism. If we misconstrue our task as any form of substitution for the working class, or as a substitution for the future vanguard party of the working class, then it is completely impossible. Our job is historically crucial, but also historically achievable so long as we face the immediate situation with a modest list of appropriate objectives." ■

Geoff White Interview (Conclusion)

Spartacist League: The Early Years

This is the third and final instalment of our interview with Geoff White. In the early 1960s White was one of the original leaders (along with Shane Mage and James Robertson) of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the U.S. After being expelled from the SWP, the RT cadres launched the Spartacist League/U.S. which upheld the banner of revolutionary Trotskyism in the 1960s and 1970s. The International Bolshevik Tendency is committed to carrying forward the best traditions of the revolutionary Spartacist tendency of that period.

In the first part of this interview (which appeared in 1917 No. 7), White recalled the decade he spent as a cadre in the Communist Party before being won to Trotskyism and joining the Socialist Workers Party. The second part of the interview (1917 No. 8), dealt with White's role in the RT's fight against the SWP leadership's abandonment of Trotskyism and rapprochement with Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel in the revisionist "United Secretariat of the Fourth International."

In this, the concluding portion of the interview, White recalls his early years as the leader of the Spartacist League in the Bay Area, and his eventual decision to resign in 1968. Shane Mage had given up on Trotskyism some years earlier, so White's departure left only James Robertson from the original RT leadership.

As an appendix to the interview, we reprint Geoff White's 1968 resignation statement, which outlines his doubts about the historic viability of the Trotskyist movement. We also print Robertson's rejoinder, which appeared in the SL's Political Bureau minutes. Robertson's postscript perhaps contains a hint of the "hard tactics" that White refers to in the interview, but his defense of the historic validity of the Marxist program demonstrates the revolutionary commitment which helped sustain the SL in a difficult period. Unfortunately, the contemporary SL is a corrupt and degenerate caricature of what it once was, with Robertson comfortably ensconced at the top as the omnipotent fatherly leader and chief political bandit.

1917: So you saw the fusion course with Pablo as evidence that the [SWP] party leadership was irreversibly centrist. There was a differentiation in the RT [extensively documented in the SL's Marxist Bulletin series] which culminated in a split dictated from London. The Bay Area RT remained solidly with Robertson against Wohlforth and Healy. What was your involvement?

GW: By this time I was pretty much the leader of the Bay Area RT. When Art Fox came in from London with his ultimatum [which rejected the characterization of the SWP as centrist, and claimed that it remained "the main instrument for the realization of socialism in the U.S."], all of us without exception just shot that down as hard as we could. In the first place I couldn't stand that kind

of operation, and, in the second place, most of the people were in political agreement with Robertson over the alleged substance in his fight with Wohlforth, which none of us believed was the real issue at hand. There were some people who agreed with Wohlforth on the putative difference, but they went along with us. Everyone knew there was something else and everyone knew what it was, pretty much.

1917: The RT saw itself as being linked to Healy internationally?

GW: Oh yes. We had leaned heavily on Healy. Healy was the Grand Old Man.

1917: Before the split was dictated from London, did you have any intimations of the kind of operation Healy was running?

GW: No. We'd been in close correspondence with Healy. Mostly organizational stuff. I've got quite a file of 186a Clapham High Street. It wasn't any tactic within the organization, it's just that he wrote to us as well as to people in New York.

1917: Was this clandestine correspondence?

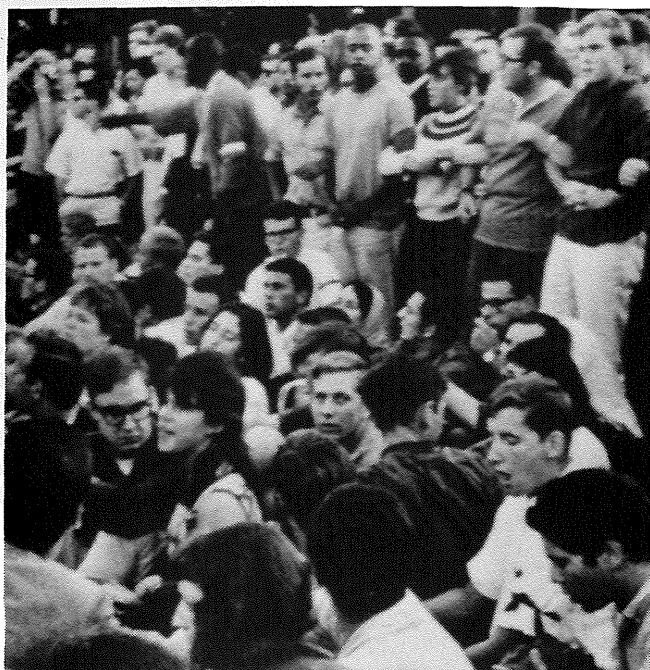
GW: It was clandestine in the sense of content. We certainly didn't give carbon copies to the majority, but they knew we were in correspondence. We would come to branch meetings with the latest copy of Healy's press and sell it. Occasionally someone would give us some static about that: why can't we sell our own stuff? But it was trivial. We were fairly open about this.

1917: So Healy splitting the tendency came as something of a shock?

GW: It came as a total shock. That was the most traumatic meeting our tendency ever had, when Art Fox came in with that ultimatum. Somebody had called up from New York. I recall getting a call. It wasn't from Robertson because apparently everything was at sixes and sevens out there. He delegated somebody who gave us the essence of it, and we had less than 24 hours to prepare. Fox was already scheduled to come out. The meeting had been set up.

There had been this problem between Wohlforth and Robertson before the Art Fox ultimatum came down. It looked like a tactical difference between Wohlforth and Robertson, and I agreed with Robertson on the tactical thing. They knew that, so they had some hope. I don't know how well anyone back there knew me personally, I don't think they did, but I could have predicted how I would have reacted to that kind of ultimatum.

Another person who was extremely influential here was Ed Lee, who, as an ex-Stalinist, was really solid on



DON KECHELY

Free Speech Movement demonstration, October 1964

the question of organizational hanky-panky. He ended up an anarchist. So you can see what his tendency was.

Robertson and Wohlforth

1917: You had seen trouble between Wohlforth and Robertson before? That was evident to everyone in the tendency?

GW: Everyone in the tendency knew there were these disagreements, but we didn't know how deep they were. I remember at one point writing a letter about the thing. Essentially what I was trying to do was to blow the whistle on the factionalizing: "We've got enough of a fight on our hands without you guys acting like idiots." I made it as sharp as I could, and I knew I had the backing of everybody out here regardless of their opinion on the tactical differences at issue. Of course this was before the days of word processors. When you sent a letter, the question was, "who gets the carbon?" So I made two carbons, and sent them both carbons and kept the original. They compared notes and found out about it. Robertson thought that was funny, and Wohlforth couldn't see the point. That's one difference between Wohlforth and Robertson. Robertson had a sense of humor, and that was a saving grace for him. He really saw things were funny. He used to send me documents and I'd send them back saying *imprimatur albus episcopus Californiae*, and that was okay with him but some people around him in New York were horrified at this sacrilege. That was alright with Robertson. Robertson was a bigger man than the people who surrounded him.

1917: Did you have many dealings with Wohlforth?

GW: No, not many. I had an idea of what kind of guy Robertson was. Wohlforth I didn't know much about; sometimes on the telephone. There was a lot of correspondence; he was a good letter writer; he was conscientious about things like that. I felt he didn't have

the—I've got to be very careful about hindsight here—I think I felt, even before the famous Fox ultimatum, that Wohlforth, perhaps, didn't quite have the power, the principles. It's pretty tentative because I didn't have much personal contact. I had a lot of personal memories of Robertson. You get to know somebody when you're out at the coffee house with them a lot, which you don't get by any amount of formal correspondence. Formal relations with Wohlforth at that time were okay. But from the time of the Fox ultimatum on, I have very negative feelings about Wohlforth. I have no respect for him at all. He advanced this naive stuff about "gee whiz, this is what James Cannon says about the SWP." Well, I thought Wohlforth has no right to say anything gee whiz. He's been around too long. It's disingenuous. I think he was maybe disingenuous in the beginning. You could never accuse Robertson of that, because he was absolutely clear.

1917: As regards the tactical differences between Wohlforth and Robertson preceding the Fox ultimatum, did you have a perception that this was an authority fight?

GW: Yes. We saw it as unprincipled. On the only issue that I can recall them mainly arguing about, on the attitude toward the SWP, I felt that Robertson was right. Robertson had a somewhat harder line.

Art Fox, Shane Mage, Kay Ellens

1917: How did Fox end up getting associated with the RT? He was supposed to have something of a base in Detroit; he was an autoworker.

GW: Yes, he had a base. He joined the tendency. He, his wife and some other people in Detroit, so we had a Detroit group for a while. The first time I laid eyes on Fox was when he came with the loyalty oath. In fact, I'd barely heard of him before that; he was nobody to us. But he was somebody that Healy wanted to use because he didn't have this historical association with either Wohlforth or Robertson, for one thing. Another thing was he could pass him off as the true voice of the proletariat: a Detroit autoworker, what more do you want? Of course he wasn't any more proletarian—well, you know how that works.

1917: Besides you and Robertson, the other prominent leader of the RT was Shane Mage. Did you have much contact with him?

GW: Not much. He put me up when I was in New York at the convention, and I met him on various other occasions, but I don't have any very profound thoughts about Mage. It seemed to me at the time I thought he was a little gassy, but I didn't have very strong feelings about him.

1917: Was he a guy who mostly did theoretical work up in his loft, or did you have a sense that he was factor in, say, the Wohlforth-Robertson dispute?

GW: I don't think he was much of a factor in the way things developed organizationally. I think he formulated things well. He was a very sharp guy, a good mind, but a lot of guys like that are without other abilities. I don't think he had much other ability. He did not play a

very big role. He was not the kind of guy you could rely on when there was a confrontation coming on to be there, to back up the team. You didn't want him cracking pistols behind you.

1917: *Rose [Kay Ellens] also played some kind of role in the leadership?*

GW: Yes, she did. She played a very substantial role. She really came out of the Robertson tradition. She was trained in the Robertson school. For a while, she was Robertson's wife, of course. She represented some of the same kind of thinking. But she came out here and spent quite some time. She injected some of the more positive things of that tradition during the RT days. She was a good tactician, and, like Robertson, she had a pretty good insight about people, I thought, and knew what their limitations were and what could be expected and couldn't be expected. I think she played a positive role on the whole. I don't think she was a theoretician; she was not any kind of an intellectual. I think she sometimes let her personal life and the kind of personal lifestyle that she adopted narrow her political perceptions a bit. But on the whole I think she did a good job.

The Bay Area RT After the Split

1917: *When Healy split the RT, the Bay Area branch remained solid, so you didn't have to contend with the Wohlforthites out here?*

GW: No. One guy showed up later who I think was a Wohlforthite, but he was totally ineffective. We never had to deal with him. There were a couple of people in the RT who were wavering a bit, mainly because they wanted some way of compromising the thing, some way of avoiding a split. Possibly I think some of them were motivated by a deep distrust of Robertson, but that never came to much. I think that the main effect the split had was that it was demoralizing. Some people, although they didn't drop out of the tendency or anything, became less active and less enthusiastic.

1917: *Given that you were locked into a certain geographical area, you had done pretty well with perhaps 40 percent of the combined branches. You had a pretty stable situation. Besides the nibbles in Seattle and L.A., did there ever seem to be any opportunity for the RT to break out nationally, or was it a period of just going through the motions?*

GW: We felt that we were stable, but we were not going anywhere and that what we had was what we were going to have, until such a time as there was a split, and then there was a possibility of recruitment. But it was very difficult for us to recruit when they wouldn't admit our people.

1917: *What did you do with the people they wouldn't admit? Were you able to keep them around?*

GW: I think we kept one or two of them, but we lost most of them. There were only three or four of them, and I would say that probably only one of them we were able to keep. We didn't really have anything to offer. If we had met with non-party people to discuss party matters, then that would have been a perfectly legitimate basis on which to expel us, so we didn't want to do that. There

was a difference of opinion about that because some people said "so what, they're going to expel us anyway."

1917: *Of course, the majority could have just planted somebody on you.*

GW: Well, I don't know if they would have done that. I think that would have been difficult for them to do. There were people out here who wouldn't have gone for that. It could only have been done by people who were working on their own directly from New York. It could not have gone through the branch out here because there were really good people in the majority who would have objected to that; they would have blown it; they would have told us. I hadn't even thought of that as a matter of fact.

The Expulsion of the RT

1917: *You went to the 1963 SWP convention as a delegate?*

GW: That's right, and Robertson was a delegate. I thought we had three delegates, now I'm not sure. Maybe we had two from this area.

1917: *At the convention it was pretty clear that you were not going to survive [in the SWP]. How was morale in the RT? Were people looking forward to the future fairly confidently, or were they worried about the prospect of being thrown out?*

GW: Well, in the Bay Area, it varied. Some people were discouraged and other people were confident. It was mixed.

1917: *At the convention itself how much of the time was taken up bashing the RT?*

GW: I think we and the Wohlforthites, between us, were the center of attention. That is what it was mainly about. Because they had already broken with Healy, and they wanted to formalize the marriage with Pablo, they were already starting, and perhaps somewhat consciously, on the road to the present situation. They had already said "C" and "D" and they were really moving along. I thought the convention was a very unenlightening experience. You know, we got up and made our points, they got up and made their points. They bashed us. We snarled back at them. We had positions on about four or five different things. That's all in the documents; I can't remember what they all were. I remember making a presentation on one of them.

We had a little trouble internally on what was then called the "Negro" question, because we had some differences of opinion within the RT about our attitude toward nationalism, but it wasn't too serious. It was one of those things that just took us a little while to work through. And there were a couple of other fairly exotic things that came up which gave us all a chance to see how Marxist we could be, about taking the positions, and it was alright. But, because everybody knew by that time what the outcome was, it wasn't much fun. It wasn't very enlightening. We knew what was going to happen.

I mean you take your lumps, and by this time we'd been taking lumps for two or three years. People can only give you lumps if they've got some kind of moral authority, and they'd lost the moral authority as far as

we were concerned. We couldn't do much about them either for the same reason. Whereas earlier, during the Cuba thing, there was some real listening—not much, but some. Therefore in a certain sense the Cuba thing was more painful, although it was more focused, and people had a more hopeful attitude about it.

1917: At the convention you'd line up and then there'd be ten speak against you and then you'd have another one speak in favor?

GW: You make your presentation and somebody does some kind of back-up thing, and then that's it. And there wasn't any point in trying to do anything more. What's the use of just going over the same territory again and again?

1917: You were then unceremoniously kicked out?

GW: Oh, ceremoniously! There was a plenum after the convention. They decided we had maintained our faction beyond the discussion period, which was perfectly true. There was association with non-party elements, which was not true, at least it wasn't true here. I don't know what they were doing in New York. New York said that they didn't do this, so I assume they were telling us the truth, but we were a little suspicious about that. Anyway, there was this kind of thing going on, and they just made up their minds they were going to expel us. They expelled the leadership. I think I was the only one expelled in the first wave out here. I remember when I got the message that I'd been expelled by the plenum I was in Arizona somewhere on vacation. I called somebody and they said, "well you're out." And you're entitled in the SWP to come back and make a final statement after you've been expelled, so I thought well, you know, let's follow this whole thing through—I like being organizationally correct if it's possible. So, I went back and I made my pitch and people were quite friendly by this time, in the majority, because it was all over.

We still wanted our people to stay in the party for a while. The rest of us who were expelled were going about getting the SL organized, and we knew that people in the party weren't going to be able to last very long. They'd been affiliated with this condemned, illegal tendency. It was just a matter of time. But they didn't want a mass expulsion.

1917: Why was that? To look more democratic?

GW: To look more democratic. Because they had Weissites and Fraserites and various other "ites" here and there who were worried. And toward the end was when we really began to get support from people whom we considered to more or less represent a right tendency. Myra Tanner Weiss especially was very, very good on the question of democracy and very, very helpful to us. And we did work with the Fraserites. They were Maoists and they really hated our politics. Because one of the things we kept hitting on was any tendency toward Maoism, so it was a little more difficult for them, but the Weissites, especially Myra, were quite, quite decent. By this time there were some Weissites out here. In the last days of our existence in the party sometimes we would combine with them on organizational questions, and we always

made it very clear that we were combining on the question of democracy. We voted against them when they brought their things up, and they voted against us on the political level. But it made life a little easier having some other lightening rods, because some of the party leadership was beginning to shoot at the Weissites as well as at us.

1917: When you were outside you were presumably advising your people who were still inside?

GW: This time we were meeting with them—to hell with the rules because we knew the game was up. But one of the problems we had was that a lot of our people didn't want to stay in and we had a lot of discussions about whether they would. Dorothy [White's second wife] resigned and some other people did.

1917: What was the plan, to leave people in and fight a rear-guard action indefinitely?

GW: No, no, just temporarily as I understand it. There had been some talk about, you know, an indefinite SWP orientation. Everybody knew this wasn't for real. We couldn't have done it even if the SWP had let us. The RT people were of the caliber to do it, but they wouldn't put up with it. They wanted their own organization where they could do their thing. Their caliber was fine. They were good people. We had real old-time people, some of them, as well as some young ones, all ranges. Guys back from 1946 right on through.

1917: So before long, most of the tendency is outside the organization.

GW: Very shortly everybody's out of the SWP. I think the final people were not expelled, but resigned. It was a foregone conclusion.

Early Years of the Bay Area SL

1917: Did you do some work around the Berkeley student sit-in and the Mario Savio business?

GW: No, we really didn't get much involved in that—we wanted to, but we couldn't really find a way to get in on it. I think that was one of our first big failures, and I think I was personally responsible for it. I couldn't come up with a way to get in on that, and I was probably in a better position than most people to figure out a way because I knew people there. Dorothy had good connections up on campus and knew a lot of these people so I got a chance to meet them and talk to them, stuff like that, but I couldn't quite figure out what we could do.

1917: Because the nature of the issue?

GW: Because of the nature of the issue, because we didn't have any kind of a student base, and because of their attitude toward the Old Left. I guess somebody who had more imagination might have been able to mount some kind of what we used to call an intervention. But we didn't get in on that much.

We were constantly being stymied by the fact that we didn't have anybody on campus. That was a big weakness, and because we didn't have anybody on campus, we couldn't get anybody on campus. There probably

would have been ways to get around it. I don't know what they were. I didn't know then how to get around it and I don't know now how we could have. But it's the kind of obstacle which is not insurmountable in theory.

1917: *Was one of the reasons you didn't have anyone on campus because you were in an older age bracket?*

GW: Oh, all of us were in an older age bracket and we had never had anything on campus. The YSA never really had anybody on campus. We had a couple of people who were sometimes students, but they never had any connections with anybody on campus. We had Mario Savio to dinner and all this kind of stuff. Nothing ever came of that politically because they really were not prepared to listen to anything that wasn't New Left. If we had vowed to make ourselves felt there we would have had to get out and do a hell of a lot work which a lot of people in the SL here were reluctant to do.

1917: *For political reasons or just for lack of energy?*

GW: Lack of energy. Beyond that we would have had to really define what it was that we had to say to these people that they were prepared in the beginning to hear. Because if we just wanted to go in there and explain to them about the revolutionary role of the working class: "excuse me, that's ridiculous." So we never were able.

1917: *You obviously made some attempts if you had Mario Savio over for dinner.*

GW: Yes, but we had Mario Savio for dinner more for the sake of having a friend for dinner. It wasn't for politics. I never expected anything to come of it.

1917: *Did any other organization get much out of the 1964 events?*

GW: I think the ISL [successor to Max Shachtman's Workers Party] did. I think they were quite successful. Hal Draper wrote something on the student revolt in Berkeley which I thought was very good. They were by temperament suited for working in that milieu and they had some real students. They got more out of that than anybody. I don't know, the CP may have picked up a recruit here and there, but they were stumblebums on campus.

1917: *So, looking back on it, you think that there wasn't a lot more you could have got out of the '64 business.*

GW: Given the circumstances including the nature of the people involved yes, that's true. But I'm not saying the people who were better adapted to the thing couldn't have done something because they could have.

1917: *While still in the SWP, the RT had a correct anticipation that PL [Progressive Labor—a Maoist split from the Communist Party] was a fairly vital and vibrant organization. Was PL active in California at that time?*

GW: Yes, there was a PL out here, and we had a lot of discussions with some of their people, and especially with Lee Coe, who was one of their old-timers. I talked with him a lot, possibly because we had a common background in the CP and it was a little easier for me to talk, and I knew his language. He was a pretty good guy, you

The Berkeley STUDENT REVOLUTION

Facts and Interpretations

Edited by
Seymour Martin Lipset and
Sheldon S. Wolin

THE GROUPS ON THE PERIPHERY SPEAK UP

PLURALISTIC SOCIETY OR CLASS RULE?*

BY SPARTACIST

All good political science majors know how this society functions. It is a dynamic balance of various interests and pressure groups ranging from organized labor, to downtown merchants, to the John Birch Society. Of course. To speak of class rule is to exhibit naiveté and bad taste. Worse yet, it is to "use the rhetoric of the thirties."

Now Governor Brown (the good, gray "vector zero" product of the pluralistic society) has turned the cops loose on Berkeley students and is vowing to put down "anarchy and revolution." Does the governor's charge have any substance? The issue which first brought the students onto the scene was civil rights. In theory racial equality is fully compatible with the present social order. Indeed, the abstract model of the society works better with racial equality than without it. Civil rights, therefore, is a reformist demand. The actual society, however, is so beset by internal contradictions and external conflicts, and racism so deeply imbedded in it, that the demand for racial equality in practice takes on a revolutionary character. Hence the crackdown on student civil liberties. The campus had to be sealed off from the community because, with the prospect of deepening struggles in the black ghettos, the students were not only a powerful force in their own right but also threatened to provide a link between the ghetto and potential anti-status-quo forces in the white community. The fight for civil rights led to a fight for civil liberties. The rights, too, are theoretically a reformist issue and are even enshrined in the political constitution of the society. But the actual exercise of civil liberties by dissenting groups (as opposed to their intellectual)

Bourgeois sociologists reprint
December 1964 Bay Area SL leaflet

know; for a PLer he was not bad at all. And he knew how to do a little community organizing. He could get people out to get a stop light on the corner and stuff like that, which nobody in our movement had the foggiest notion about. On the other hand, you know, he really didn't understand. Of course, ultimately maybe none of us really understood what the long-range historical process was, but he sure as hell knew less of it.

1917: *He wasn't even interested?*

GW: Well, he was interested, yes he was interested, but he was a Stalinist.

1917: *Did you have prospects of getting anything out of PL?*

GW: We thought there might be. We tried and I think we did think there were some prospects, but nothing came of it.

1917: *The early days of the Bay Area branch weren't really lucrative. The branch contracted as I understand it.*

GW: One of the key people who'd been in the RT was Ed Lee, and he didn't come into it at all. Toward the end of the internal struggle he began to pull back from it because he could see it was kind of futile, and he had other ways to spend his time. When we were expelled from the party he said that's it as far he was concerned. He was never part of the SL. He told us in advance that he would see it to the end with the RT, but when it came to the end with all the minutiae with the Pablo thing, he lost a lot of enthusiasm. I can't fault him for that. I wanted to stay with it, but I was a lot younger than he was.

Dorothy didn't come into the SL. She took a position somewhat similar to Ed Lee's, that she didn't want to have much to do with it once the fight in the party was over. And I think there were one or two other people that were that way too.

The differences between us and New York became more apparent; we began to feel them more at this point. Again they seemed to be mostly stylistic, but people suddenly arriving from New York were, well, they were welcome but there was a little uneasiness about them.

1917: *Did the Bay Area branch's divergence from New York have anything to do with the press?*

GW: It didn't come out as often as we thought it should, and it was kind of strident at times. But those were just stylistic differences. We were always getting directives from New York to trash the IS [Independent Socialists]. And what we really wanted to do here was to see what we could work out with the IS, and maybe have common actions or some discussions, and maintain reasonably amicable relations with them. So this was a source of friction, and New York kept urging us to do this and we kept dragging our feet. And it never came to any kind of confrontational stuff.

We were good pamphleteers. Wrote good pamphlets—I thought they were. I'm speaking from ego because I wrote most of them, but I thought they were good. I wrote one which was directed to some kind of namby-pamby, wishy-washy liberal group that was really trying to do something but didn't know what the hell they were

doing, and the headline was "Join the Revolutionary Party of Your Choice." We didn't clear anything like that with New York; we just put out our own stuff and we sent them a few copies for the archives. We knew they would keep archives. Robertson was great on archives, and besides, they wanted to know what the hell we were doing and that was one way to let them know. So we sent them that and we got a rather frosty letter back from them about this sort of indifferentism. I think that's what the church calls that kind of stuff. That's what it was, indifferentism, but that all blew over. Nothing ever came to a head.

1917: *There was no attempt by New York to send anyone out to take charge of the branch?*

GW: No, no, they never tried to put us in receivership or even made noises in that direction. They would express a little uneasiness about what they considered our softness from time to time, and we'd express a little uneasiness about what we considered their harshness and sectarianism, but it was nothing.

1917: *Was there much personnel interchange between the two branches?*

GW: Not much.

1917: *So, the Bay Area branch of the Spartacist League was pretty much what the Bay Area RT had been.*

GW: That's right, it was pretty much the old gang. We didn't recruit much and we didn't have much exchange.

The 1966 London Conference

1917: *Did you have much of a role in the 1965-66 unity negotiations with the Wohlforth group?*

GW: Well, I went to the Montreal conference. I was one of the delegates. And I had long discussions with Healy there. That was kind of the high point as far as I was concerned of the unity prospects. We were involved in that. There was a lot of correspondence between us and Robertson back east, but we didn't take any direct part in that because we didn't have anybody to talk to out here. There weren't any Wohlforthites. There was this one guy, but he didn't count.

1917: *How did Healy strike you when you talked to him?*

GW: My reaction to Healy at the time was not overly positive. He was a funny little old gnome-like man with a lot of energy, and he was being affable at the time, and it seemed to me that we could work with him. I thought maybe it was going to be okay. I didn't pick up on the part of Healy which was so unpleasant. He seemed a strange guy for a revolutionary leader.

1917: *The prospects of fusion with the Wohlforth group were seen as a pretty important opportunity.*

GW: Out here we had always thought that the split with Wohlforth was a negative, a very strong negative, and that it could be overcome on a principled basis, and that it would be okay. Of course, our definition of a principled basis was not necessarily the eastern definition of it. What we were mainly concerned about was we didn't want any diktats from Clapham High Street; we would

not have put up with that under any circumstances. On the other hand, if you're going to say the "reconstitution" or the "reconstruction" of the Fourth International, we didn't give a damn about that. We felt that this fusion was important, and we wanted to do it. On the other hand, it didn't have the kind of immediacy that it had for the people back east because we didn't have any Wohlforthites to deal with. They were a national abstraction as far as we were concerned. We did want to be represented in Montreal and we were feeling optimistic at that time.

1917: Were there any differences between you and the people from the east in the Spartacist League in terms of dealing with Healy? You said that Healy talked with you quite a bit. Was that because you were from the CP, or was he trying to line you up?

GW: No, he didn't seem to be. I think it was generational. For instance, I presented a bridge between the people of Robertson's generation and his generation. Perhaps because I had a CP background; I don't know. It just happened. But I don't want to exaggerate the extent to which it's significant. We never had any private political discussions that were pertinent to the issues at hand.

1917: In the branch here, you would presumably get the SLL press?

GW: Oh, yes. Before the break with Healy we had used it very much—we used Healy almost as a cover. Healy's respectability in the movement was sort of a plus for us. After we were out of the SWP, that became less important.

1917: What about Wohlforth's newspaper, did you read it very closely?

GW: No. There wasn't much interest in it.

1917: At the London Conference in 1966, the expectations of unity were disappointed. Healy broke with the SL on the pretext that Robertson had missed a session. What kind of effect did this have on the Bay Area branch?

GW: I think it was good for us because it made everybody mad and re-energized them, because it seemed like it was a re-run of this goddamn loyalty oath that Art Fox had brought over in the first place. It also meant that was the end of this whole business with Healy. We weren't going to have to deal with that in anyway, shape or form anymore. There's a certain relief in even a bad thing coming when it comes, and it's over with, and now you can proceed. I don't recall it having a bad effect. I think on the whole it had a good effect. I remember that Robertson was a little concerned to make sure that nobody was going to fly the coop out here. Nobody did that I can recall. And I think that we gave very strong support to the position that they had taken at that time.

1917: There was no softness on anybody's part?

GW: There had never been much softness toward Healy out here. I mean, when Healy was on our side, you know, we were leaning on him, sure, but as soon as this nonsense began to start I think that there was probably more hostility to Healy on the West Coast than there was



DON KECHELY

Mario Savio, 2 December 1964

on the East Coast, if there was any difference at all. No, we were hards on that.

In Montreal Jim and I met, and we discussed how to handle the tactical thing and we thought that soft-cop/hard-cop would be the way to go. And we also decided that he would be the soft and I would be the hard because it kind of went against the grain in both of us. Therefore we would be restrained from going too far in the roles we were playing. That suited me fine because I was still smarting from the earlier business, and I wanted to bring some of this out. Healy was charging me with being an American nationalist and stuff like that, which I rather resented as being without any substance. He probably knew it was without any substance. What he meant was that we weren't taking orders from anyone.

Robertson and the SL

1917: The Spartacist League did grow in its initial configuration?

GW: Yes. They recruited at Cornell. I think that was the first group, and that was a number of pretty good people. And it seems to me that we were reinforced out here by some of the people from the Cornell group who were SL Texans. The initial reaction by people out here when we heard these people were coming out was to be a little suspicious. People thought that maybe the east was going to put the thumb on us.

But after these people came out, relations were very good, and it worked out well; everybody got along. They did, perhaps, represent a little tougher style than the dominant thing out here; it was probably good for us. I think some of us felt it was good for us to be moved a little bit in that direction, and more than that, I think that they were kind of assimilated into the West Coast way of doing things, so that I never felt during this period that there was any big problem. This is not true about other people from New York, and my own personal feelings at the [1966] Chicago convention [which launched the SL] were extremely negative. That's when I began first to get a really bad dose of some things,

which were one of the causes for me dropping out of the League.

1917: A bad dose of what, small group megalomania?

GW: Small group megalomania, a kind of Stalinoid style of personal harshness, a lack of humor. It's not an original thought, but you can characterize Robertson as a giant surrounded by real midgets. And I couldn't stand the midgets, and the fact that Robertson was using these people. I thought he was using them for political purposes, and also to build up his own ego. I thought that Robertson couldn't stand anybody of stature around him, and the people that I knew from New York who were close to him I had very little respect for. I had very little respect for their political judgment, and they weren't good, they weren't comradely, I felt. They were harsh. They reminded me of the old CP style. They had a totally unrealistic view of real relations in the real world. They were out of it. They were sectarian. They were all these things that really bothered me. But at the same time, the basic politics of the organization I was in agreement with. Life out here on the West Coast in the SL was okay. We could function. I could see that they had a lot of energy and were producing things. They were recruiting at a time when we weren't, and that's hard to argue with. And I hoped that either we could just co-exist with this sort of thing, or that over time they might mellow a little bit.

1917: These would include some of the young theoretician types?

GW: Mostly the young theoretician types. They're the ring around Robertson.

Contact the International Bolshevik Tendency

New York	Box 385, Cooper Station New York, NY 10276 USA (212) 533-9869
Bay Area	Box 31796 Oakland, CA 94604 USA (510) 891-0319
Montreal	B. P. 1703, Succ. Place d'Armes, Montréal, Québec H2Y 3L2 Canada
Toronto	Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn. Toronto, Canada M5C 1J0 (416) 461-6864
Wellington	Permanent Revolution Group Box 9671 Wellington, New Zealand (04) 382-8408
Hamburg	Gruppe Spartakus PLK 079 731, Postamt 20 20253 Hamburg, Germany
Berlin	Gruppe Spartakus M. Martin, Postfach 210 254 10502 Berlin, Germany

1917: Not Harry Turner for instance?

GW: Oh, Harry was a good man. I thought Harry understood a lot. I don't think I met him until after we were expelled from the SWP, when the SL had been organized formally. I just saw him at conferences, and I think I may have had some correspondence with him about something or other, I don't know, but at any rate he did impress me. The CP people—you can pretty much identify them—because there are some things that they have in common. Anti-Stalinism is usually one of them, and I think they've got better tactical sense than those who were around then.

I mean he might go off on a few things, I can't remember the details, but I remember that my feeling about Harry was that he was a reliable guy. But I didn't think that these kids were reliable. I thought that under certain kinds of stress and pressure they might do almost anything; they were unpredictable.

"Kids" is a bit of an invidious word and I'm sorry for using it. Because they were mature, grown-up people, but I didn't think they were all that mature. They were mature in years but they bothered me, they really bothered me. Then that's a rather subjective reaction, and I didn't talk to anybody except my wife about them. But I could also feel that other people out here were picking up some of those same vibes.

1917: In your opinion had that become the dominant character of the organization?

GW: Well, I thought Robertson prevented that from becoming too bad because he understood people pretty well. And he might be manipulative, and he might be this and he might be that, and he might be the other thing, but he knew what the price was that you had to pay to work in the real world with certain people, and so, therefore, I was rather looking to Robertson to prevent this thing from getting out of hand. But I was also asking myself: why was Robertson encouraging these people and bringing them forward when there were people like Harry and other people in the organization? Why didn't he educate these people? Maybe you can't educate people out of stylistic things, but you can damn well try, and he was in a position to do it. I would have some arguments with him and all I got for my pains was sharp personal attacks.

1917: From Robertson?

GW: Not from Robertson, from these other people. No, Robertson wouldn't do that.

1917: But Robertson's style, which you spoke of earlier, was hard, even harsh. You mentioned earlier that you feared that he might prematurely harden things up in the SWP.

GW: Yes, yes, that's true but his style was one of hard tactics, and also a hard ideological line, which sometimes in both areas can be a serious error, but that is sometimes necessary and sometimes desirable. He could come up with these real bitter statements, but he always knew how to deal with human beings, I felt, at least on some levels. I mean his personal life might not have been that well organized, but I felt that Robertson had a far better evaluation of people's function and ca-

pabilities, and the conditions necessary to their work, than any of these younger people did. If they had got their hands on the branch out here they would have destroyed it.

1917: *Did you feel that there was a danger of them taking the organization in a bad direction?*

GW: No, I didn't think they could stand up to Robertson. I thought he had things under control.

1917: *You had confidence in Robertson?*

GW: It was a limited confidence, but I did have confidence, yeah, relative confidence in Robertson. And I think I was correct.

1917: *Did the people in New York around Robertson tour nationally?*

GW: Occasionally one or two of them would come out on a tour. If we learned that Robertson was coming we could expect a certain amount of fireworks, but basically we thought it was going to be helpful. My attitude, and I think it was shared, without being made too explicit by a lot of the other people out here, was that these other people might just as soon have stayed in New York. And yet they were running the organization pretty capably: the press was expanding, we were recruiting. They were the ones that recruited the Cornell group which was very, very important to us—good people.

1917: *One of the chronic complaints of the Spartacist League in that period is the infrequency of the press. Was that a problem in the branch out here?*

GW: Yes, and we got a lot of local bulletins out on our own. We did a lot of leafleting. We were upset by the problems of the press irregularity, but we didn't know what the problem was really. I felt at the time that we were holding our end up, because some of the stuff was written out here. And we tried not to put spokes in the wheel, but we did want to see the definitive articles before they were published because they became the line of the organization, and we had not only a right, but a duty to see them. Sometimes it took a few pieces of paper going back and forth to get that sort of thing straightened out, but I don't think that we were responsible for the irregularity of the press. There was some problem they had back there; I don't know what it was. All we wanted was for them to clean it up one way or another.

1917: *Were there ever serious problems with the line in any of the articles?*

GW: I don't think so. I don't recall. We recognized that the national leadership was in New York. We didn't have any problem with that. We didn't have any basic political differences. Sometimes we said, "well look at this paragraph." More often it would be a matter of going through with a blue pencil and cutting out some of the provocations, and usually they would accept that. It was a price they had to pay, and if they didn't accept it, well then, we would accept the existence of it. Some of the stuff, of course, was written out here. And then it was a matter of sending it there, and they'd say, well, beef up this and beef up that. It all worked out.

1917: *Generally relations were pretty good?*

GW: Generally relations were pretty good and we were productive. I know I wrote the thing on Israel. That was pretty well received and I think they edited a little bit, but only normal stuff, no problem. It depends on what you define as basic in politics. We are taught in the movement—and this conversation brings me back into that frame of mind, I sort of feel like I'm fifteen or twenty years younger and I'm thinking in those terms—that the basic problem was your political line or ideology. But actually politics has a great deal to do with style and personal attitudes also, and I think we shoved all that kind of stuff under the rug and thought it wasn't legitimate, and really, especially in small organizations, it can be decisive. Personal relations, attitudes, the way you conduct yourself in life in general. I wonder if the current problems with the SL, which I gather are fairly extensive—I don't know too much about it—if some of them don't stem as much from that as certain problems with their line. To me it's an academic question, but not to you guys.

I think Robertson is able to use humor directed against his own position on this sort of thing—referring to Spartacism as "old high Trotskyism." This is one of his most endearing characteristics, and he has some very endearing characteristics. I recall him saying one time, not to me, actually to Dorothy, that he had already got himself to be a footnote in the history books, and he was working on getting himself up to be a chapter.

He has self-understanding, as well as understanding of other people up to a point, I think. Of course, I don't know what he's like now. Robertson loved, and probably still loves, to be provocative, and he would say things in a way which would leave his interlocutor with his mouth hanging open. I remember him one time spitting out the phrase: "The god-figure Nehru!" I can't reproduce the tone, but it was just *wonderful*. He was very aware of himself, and he knew exactly what kind of an impression he was making on all these things. And he really had control, and he really understood what he was doing up to a point.

1917: *Did he always have that, did you see it develop?*

GW: I think it was developed, and I think he probably always had it, but I think it matured in him as he matured, and it may be decaying if he's now decaying, which I don't know, because I haven't had any contact with him in a long time, but he always treated me personally quite decently. He's not my favorite person by a long shot; there are a lot of things I find unattractive about him, but at the same time I also feel some admiration and respect even though I don't have much in common with him politically.

The Peace & Freedom Party Dispute

1917: *We were going to talk a little bit about the Peace and Freedom Party dispute. This came towards the end of your career in the SL.*

GW: Yes, it was significant in that the Peace and Freedom Party was organized when I was out here. It was sort of a vague New Left organization. It had a lot of adherents

and it made a considerable amount of impact in left circles. In this precinct, for instance, in which I live, there were more people registered Peace and Freedom than there were Republicans—it's a strange precinct. The Peace and Freedom Party had its merits as a mass organization, and I thought it was an organization in which the Spartacists could profitably participate as a recruiting ground and as a means of also getting some experience with some kind of mass work.

I know that this was in our lexicon a bourgeois organization; it did not have a socialist ideology; it didn't have a working-class ideology, but it was a genuine radical opposition. It seemed to me that we were engaging in an exercise in formalism of the worst sort to say that we don't want anything to do with it because it doesn't have a socialist ideology, so we have to keep our distance, differentiate ourselves and counterpose the working-class thing. But this view was characterized as "popular-frontist." I understood at the time, and I certainly understand now, that it is legitimate, intellectually acceptable, and it's not absurd to call this "popular-frontist"

because it was popular frontism. But it also seemed to me that, given the situation in which we were, and in which the Peace and Freedom Party was, that it was the thing to do. So I proposed this, and apparently it created more of a flap in New York than I had realized at the time.

1917: Had you proposed to enter the Peace and Freedom Party or to go to the meetings?

GW: To put our people into it as an arena of mass work. I found that there were a lot of people here who were against it too. In the first place, I didn't want to precipitate a real head-on confrontation between east and west. And in the second place, I couldn't even do that because it first required a confrontation between the pros and cons out here. I also knew enough about how these things work out that when you come down in the name of orthodoxy against a proposal, and when you're correct on the grounds of orthodoxy, and it does violate the canons of the organization to do it, there's not much point in arguing it. So I said, okay, we won't do it. Well, that may have had more reverberations than I felt at the time. I was just rather disappointed because I wanted to get the Spartacist League out here involved, in day-to-day politics, and get them so that they could have an influence on something maybe, so that we could, perhaps, do some recruiting because you can't recruit in a vacuum and finally just to bloody the troops. Just to get a little experience.

The following is Geoff White's resignation statement from the Spartacist League and Jim Robertson's reply. They were attached to the 29 July 1968 Spartacist League Political Bureau minutes.

Geoffrey White
Berkeley, California
[received 23 July 1968]

The Political Bureau,
The Spartacist League
New York, New York

Dear Comrades:

As I am sure you know, for some time now I have been developing in my thinking a series of questions concerning the politics and the role of our group and other groups of a similar character. These questions led indirectly to my leave of absence at the beginning of this year.

I do not think it is useful to raise fully here questions which I know you consider closed, and indeed, must so consider in order to continue your political existence as presently organized. Never-the-less, I would like to try to indicate very briefly the salient points in my feelings on this subject.

In the first place, there is the long term history of what may broadly be called our movement from the emergence of the Russian Left Opposition to the present. This history is characterized, I think, by two outstanding features. On the one hand, we have observed, analysed, criticized, and commented on events, often brilliantly, sometimes not so brilliantly, but with an overall record



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of which we can be proud. On the other hand, never, in any of the great historical crises, have we been able to influence the actual courses of events. This applies to all the great historical events of recent times, the rise of Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, the post-war revolutionary opportunities in Western Europe, the Polish-Hungarian Crisis of 1956, and, of course, on a less grand scale, the rise of the CIO in the United States. Our people were involved in all these crises, with the possible exception of 1956, and yet, can you honestly claim that the outcome would have been in any significant way different if we had not existed?

Of course, we had an explanation for these historical incapacities. The Stalinists had wrongfully appropriated the banner of the October Revolution, and stood between us and the masses who needed our leadership. In 1956-57, this Stalinist monolith was shattered on a world scale, and in Great Britain and the United States, and I believe this is true in most of the rest of the world as well, we could no longer attribute our isolation to the overwhelming power of the Stalinist movement. Certainly the crisis was all the comrades of the pre-1956 era could have dreamed of, and yet, we were unable, on a world scale or in this country, to alter our position qualitatively as a result of it. In fact, according to our own analysis at the time of the fight in the SWP, the general crisis of world Stalinism soon became the general crisis of world Trotskyism.

For us in America, especially, the explanation still remained that there were, after all, no masses in motion. This explained our operational insignificance. Now, however, this is no longer true. This country is in the grip of a profound political crisis, but in the midst of rapid polarization, radicalization, and ideological and political turmoil, we remain exactly as we were, except that the contradictions of the situation lead to greater demoralization in our ranks. The course of the struggle refuses to follow our preconception, and we are unable to make our ideas or our history relevant to it.

The point of all this is not a long series of defeats in themselves being the decisive factor; rather, it is the effect this history has had on the mentality and outlook and habits of our organizations and our comrades, and the degree to which the resulting patterns have come to guarantee that the series shall be continued. Certainly one thing Marxists might be expected to examine with great care would be the effect of a history of this kind, however interpreted, on the life and thinking of those almost organic entities, the left sects.

I have come to some tentative conclusions about what has happened to us. I think we have become so habituated to the role we have been forced to play that it has become a value in itself, and the real basis of our political existence. Over the years, certain rules have developed. Originally, most of these were for purposes of survival and quite rational. However, these rules now survive and develop autonomously, regardless of their relevance to the objective world. It is as if we were involved in a great game, the object of which is to make points according to an elaborate and very sophisticated set of evolved rules and stylistic considerations. The analogy to bull-fighting comes inevitably to mind. In short, I

question whether our basic orientation is not toward making a good record in some cosmic history book, rather than making history itself. Perhaps, too, this abstractness is necessary for the preservation of our political identity. In the only two cases I know of where groups like ours have actually achieved a small but significant mass base, the POUM and the LSSP, we ended as ministers in bourgeois governments.

The Spartacist League specifically has an admirable record. On middle level political questions especially, such as guerrillism, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Israel question, and draft resistance, the League has far outshone its competitors. Only the last of these, however, is potentially fruitful in terms of immediate political involvement. I suggest that certain difficulties we have encountered in implementing our line on this point are not so much the result of individual weakness, although they have are certainly that too, as symptomatic of our ingrained inability to relate abstract correctness to meaningful implementation.

If I were confident in the League's essential validity, such organizational atrocities as a semi-annual publication schedule, despite personnel changes, and eighteen month delays in the publication of PB minutes would stimulate resolve rather than despair. As it is, they seem to me rather manifestations of an underlying sickness.

We have differences over the PFP. I feel we did right to enter, and were wrong to withdraw. This in itself is simply an episode. What really bothers me about the PFP is the way in which our comrades discussed it, reacted to the arena, and carried out their withdrawal. The whole discussion revolved around what are to me the relatively sterile question of the exact political and ideological nature of the PFP, not the fruitful one of whether we could contribute to making things we theoretically desired actually happen. My impression of the arid and scholastic nature of the discussion may be a subjective error. However, the attitude that the group as a whole brought to the intervention is quite clear. Our comrades felt extremely uncomfortable at being involved in a real arena, seemed to fear some sort of contamination. They greeted our ludicrous and futile exit with intense relief. The danger of a blot on our cosmic record had been avoided and we would not have to meet the challenge of actually trying to influence events in even the smallest arena.

I don't think the PFP question is of great importance in itself, but it is typical of an attitude and an approach to politics which I think is fundamentally invalid and destructive to our professed goals. The long chain of failures will not be crowned with the final justifying success because we really don't want it to be, because that is no longer the standard by which we judge ourselves and our organizations. Judged by its ability to influence the resolution of the political and social crises of our day, or of future days, our existence is, in my opinion, one of total futility. Our existence is justified only in terms of our own abstract criteria, not subject to the criticism of reality.

This is the conclusion I have been moving toward with increasing consciousness at least ever since the Chicago conference, and in some ways, considerably before

that. I have been reluctant to follow these thoughts to their logical conclusion for two main reasons. One is the subjective reason of considerable personal investment in the sectarian movement. The other is that despite my confidence in the validity of these criticisms, I have been unable to discover, much less develop, adequate alternatives. Just as I, as I suspect many other comrades, have subscribed to the degenerated workers' state position on the Russian question largely because the visible alternatives present even more horrendous intellectual difficulties and destructive political consequences, so for some time I have subscribed to the validity of Spartacism because I have been able to see no valid alternative.

However, that position is too full of contradictions to maintain long. Comrade Robertson correctly stated at the time of my leave that my course led straight as an arrow out of this organization. I was fully aware of it at that time. I believe it was the common feeling of the C.C. comrades and my own at the time of that discussion that my leave of absence was transitional. In the last six months it has become increasingly anomalous, and I feel that the time has come to make the formal relationship conform to what exists in reality.

I am therefore officially submitting my resignation from membership in the Spartacist League.

Fraternally,
Geoffrey White
CC: BASL, file

A Comment on Geoffrey White's Resignation Statement

Ex-comrade White's resignation contains four main sections. The first argues that the history of the Trotskyist movement has been one of failure, at bottom indefensibly so. Second, White argues that as a result of these failures a set of formal little "rules" to maintain the movement's purity evolved which moreover served to reinforce the failure of our movement. His third point, which is given a length and emphasis comparable to the other sections, argues that leaving the Peace and Freedom Party typifies our futility. White devotes to PFP about a quarter of his attention in his resignation justifying his break from revolutionary Marxism. Fourth, he concludes that he has been moving in his present direction for a long time and the substance of his break can no longer be denied. He further notes, however, that he had resisted until now the logical conclusion of his drift, both because of his "considerable personal involvement in the sectarian movement" and because whatever his distaste for our position on the Russian question he could see no valid alternative.

Regarding the first of White's points, that of the alleged failure of Trotskyism, the position he advances is either too much or too little. In a direct sense, Trotskyism would be a failure, and moreover decisively disproved, if somewhere the working class were to come to power without the Trotskyist revolutionary program and party, or the reverse, if the Trotskyists came to power but not the working class. The reasons for this should be obvious. The "rules" of Trotskyism were not worked up by

the Trotskyists to explain away defeats and failures and keep "pure." They are, or at least aim to be, nothing other than a codification of that experience the significance of which White completely overlooks, the Russian October Revolution, the great working-class revolution which *succeeded* and which, despite all vicissitudes, still endures and still represents, even in its present great deformity, an enormous threat to the bourgeois order. It is logically incumbent upon White, if he is not simply to abandon politics—which as a highly politicized intellectual he is, in any case, unlikely to do—to show either that Trotskyism differs from the lessons of the October Revolution or that the revolution itself is without relevance. This leads to the other, broader, level of consideration, namely that if White is so sure that Trotskyism has failed, where are the successful political practices to which he orients? What his perspective toward social change? And what social change does he now want, anyhow? This latter point is raised by the ends and means linkage—the forces which effect social change determine its shape.

In short, if you don't know who has won or can win, how can you speak of other than a transient failure of Trotskyism, a failure which is but the ideological and organizational expression of the failure of the working class itself to threaten in a serious and prolonged way the bourgeois order in the past several decades? Or, to put it in reverse form, every time the proletariat has surged forward in an elementary way as a class at least to the point of embryonic soviets or the urgent felt need for soviets (Spain 1936, Italy 1943, Bolivia 1952, Hungary 1956, Belgium 1960, France 1968), then the atmosphere positively reeked of the main elements of the Trotskyist program, and only (only!) the lack of preparation of the vanguard and the brevity or abortiveness of the incidents prevented the emergence of a powerful revolutionary party—and that could only be a party of Trotskyism, the Marxism of today.

Everything else about Comrade White's resignation is anti-climactic to the above considerations. His argument that our initial historical failures led us to evolve elaborate, abstract "rules" of purity with which we render ourselves permanently impotent is defeated when White rather pathetically observes that perhaps these "rules" *are* necessary, considering the fate of the two "groups like ours", the POUM of Spain and the LSSP of Ceylon, which departed from the "rules" and ended up helping capitalists run their governments! To call the questions White raises "rules" is disingenuous—what he's talking about are not rules but *politics*, specifically, what *kinds* of struggles the working class can undertake which if victorious will lead it to power, and what kinds will betray the working people and perpetuate capitalist imperialism. Comrade White has nothing historically to add or subtract. He merely regrets that "rules" exist and ignores their real origins in the Russian Revolution and the building of Lenin's Bolshevik party.

But for the present day, White has found a place where he hopes the "rules" don't apply—the Peace and Freedom Party. Faint hope that! What has the Peace and Freedom Party discovered that differs from or goes beyond the Leon Blum Front Populaire or the Henry Wal-

lace Progressive Party? The answer is: *less* than nothing. The PFP is a self-conscious mobilization of young intellectuals which *refuses* to even aspire to becoming a mobilizer of working-class masses, *even* in order to subordinate the workers to middle class ideology and aims. And *this* appears to be the *ad hoc* alternative to which White now goes as he leaves our modest, but only genuine embodiment in the U.S. today of revolutionary Marxism, the Spartacist League.

* * *

Receipt of White's resignation statement creates mixed feelings. Comrade White, for all his inner corrosion, was a mainstay of our tendency in the Bay area and nationally. Comrade White was instrumental in holding together the Bay Area tendency at the time of the Healy-Wohlforth spilt from us in 1962, so that not a single member of the Bay Area tendency went over. In those years he played a valuable role in the development of our perspectives and our theoretical outlook. Later, he made some of the finest journalistic contributions in SPARTACIST. However, from the beginning of his relationship with the tendency, a skeptical quality and a careful, sanitary aloofness were not absent from his make-up. These debilitating features evolved and grew greater and more pervasive. By our 1966 Founding conference, Comrade White argued, albeit without stubbornness and unsuccessfully, that we should oppose the possession and development of nuclear weapons by the Sino-Soviet bloc, a position which cannot in any practical way be squared with the defense of the deformed workers' states against imperialism. Probably the last real opportunity to deflect Comrade White from the course which led him out of the Trotskyist movement came with the anticipated reunification with Healy. White played a strong role at the Montreal Conference in 1965. But that possibility ended with the revelation of the illusory character of the Healy connection.

Locally, in the Bay Area, comrade White's organizational contributions were on balance ultimately decisively negative. His skepticism was not without deep impact, especially his view that perhaps the historic opportunities for proletarian revolution had been missed and humanity faced now only the prospect of nuclear holocaust. In our principal local spokesman and political leader, this quality naturally alienated would-be revolutionaries and militants who came in contact with the Bay Area local, effectively leading to the recruitment of only one or two people in the area in a half decade! Moreover, the great Berkeley student strike of 1964, with many of whose militants White had close contact, was for us a lost opportunity. Comrade White felt strongly at the time that the Marxist movement—i.e. he—had nothing to tell the student radicals! Later, his loss of necessary organizational focus and hardness led the local to distribute a leaflet, at a demonstration where many radical-talking tendencies were present, containing the outrageous slogan: "Join the revolutionary organization of your choice"! Finally, as implied in his resignation, it was White who led our local into the Peace and Freedom Party, a step from which we extricated ourselves satisfactorily and without undue internal turmoil. Later, in *Spartacist-West*, our comrades acknowledged the error,

but opponents, particularly the SWP, continue to exploit our misstep, the only departure from principle in our history, in a way which shows full well the SWP's sensitivity to their own departures and their eagerness to turn on us with "you're another." White may despair of our impact, but our opponents are not unaware of it by any means. (Parenthetically, we wonder what White thinks of the SWP's own "valiant" efforts to transcend the "rules" of Marxist principle. But that gets us into the whole question of the incompatibility of different species of opportunism, i.e., essentially the adaptation to different and often sharply, even bloodily, counterposed forces.)

So we miss White for what he was and what he might have been in helping to forge a revolutionary workers movement in this country. And we note that in his leave taking he was organizationally responsible. He agreed to a gradual withdrawal so as to minimize damage to the Bay Area local in which he played a dominant role until the end of his active period. But given what he had become, his formal departure becomes mainly a new opportunity for younger comrades to build on foundations he helped lay but then himself lacked the strength to help develop.

James Robertson

[based on notes of 29 July 1968]

Postscript

On helping proof-read White's resignation statement I was struck by his reference to the lack of "relevance to the objective world" of Trotskyist political rules. In particular his use of the word "relevance" excited my memory. So I checked back to confirm that nineteen years ago there was played out with a closely parallel content the exchange of opinion displayed today in White's "Resignation" and my "Comment." Only at that time both contributions were literarily much superior, but each politically rather poorer (though more comprehensive).

I refer to "The Relevance of Trotskyism" by Henry Judd in the August 1949 *New International* and its reply "The Relevance of Marxism" by Albert Gates in the January-February 1950 *NI*. Judd's denial of Trotskyism's relevance and his random search under the pressures of anti-Stalinism and imperialism led him shortly to become (as Stanley Plastrik) a founder of *Dissent* magazine (ech!). Even with the large handicap of the bureaucratic-collectivist line on Russia, Gates made mince-meat of Judd and properly so. However this didn't prevent Gates (Glotzer), Shachtman's long-time #2 man, from following his leader into the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation ten years later after a combination of the arid, unrewarding 1950's and a profoundly wrong Russian position had combined to wreak their havoc on the Workers Party-Independent Socialist League.

Nineteen years ago Geoff White was a CP youth leader who had just graduated from Harvard to go on to struggle for nearly two decades as a communist. By his present lights, it's a shame White couldn't have read and accepted Judd back then and saved himself a lot of trouble.—J.R.

Dale Reissner: 1942-1994

Dale Reissner, one of the outstanding cadres of the revolutionary Spartacist League of the 1970s, and the original editor of *Women and Revolution*, died at her home in early January at the age of 51.

At the time of her death Dale was living and working in Campbell, California for Santa Clara County Child Protective Services. In 1988 she completed a Master's Degree in social work at San Jose State University while working full time. In the early 1970s she had obtained a Ph.D. from Rutgers University in Modern European History.

Like so many of her generation, Dale's first involvement with radical politics came in the protest movement against U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. She was active in the women's movement and was won to revolutionary Trotskyism as a member of San Francisco Women's Liberation. She joined the Spartacist League (SL) while in Berkeley, California completing her Ph.D. dissertation. She spent the next dozen years as an active revolutionary militant.

She had formal speaking engagements at Yale, Harvard and other universities, where she gave lectures on "Alexandra Kollontai and the Workers' Opposition," "Women and the Russian Revolution," "Marxism vs. Feminism," and "Sex, Class and the Women's Movement." In 1970 the Socialist Workshop published an essay by her, which was reprinted the next year by the New England Free Press, entitled "How the Russian Revolution Failed Women," which posed the problem as follows:

"The new Soviet Government attacked the problem of women's inequality with a thoroughness and enthusiasm which left no doubt as to the seriousness of its commitment; but despite the fact that it has never officially abandoned this commitment, it is clear that the Revolution has failed women."

The essay concluded "it is impossible to understand the failure of the Revolution for women without understanding the general betrayal of the Revolution itself" by the Stalinist bureaucracy that usurped political power. She argued that the Bolsheviks had been correct in asserting that the fight for women's liberation required participation in a revolutionary workers' party, and that the task, therefore, was to take up the struggle to build an authentically Bolshevik, i.e., Trotskyist, vanguard in the American working class. Unlike many radical academics of her era, Dale took the struggle for socialism seriously. She was a person who did many things well: she was a good paper seller, a good writer, and a good public speaker.

Dale's doctoral dissertation was entitled, "The Role of the Women of Petrograd in War, Revolution and Counterrevolution, 1914-1921," and her expertise in this area provided an important impetus for the launching of *Women & Revolution*, a journal which, under her editorship, was an outstanding organ of Marx-

ism. Dale played an important role in the SL's rediscovery of the Bolshevik conception of the transitional organizations for work among the specially oppressed. When publication of *W&R* moved from San Francisco to New York, Dale transferred to continue her editorial work with the journal. In New York she also served as a staff writer for *Workers Vanguard* as well as a member of the SL's Women's Commission.

In the winter of 1978-79, when most of the left was enthusing over the "progressive dynamic" of Khomeini's struggle against the Shah of Iran, Dale was one of the foremost public representatives of the SL's revolutionary opposition to both the Islamic theocrats and the bloody dictatorship of Reza Shah Pahlavi. She ignored numerous death threats from fanatical Islamic fundamentalists to address meetings on the dire implications of a Khomeinist regime for Iranian women, workers and minorities.

A few years after joining the SL, Dale was elected to the Central Control Commission, an internal party body responsible for "investigating any person or circumstance" it deemed necessary, sorting out internal disputes, and "periodic audits of financial accounts." Membership on such a body within a revolutionary organization requires a reputation for personal honesty, a sense of fairness, and political integrity. Dale was recognized as a comrade who had an abundance of all these qualities, and one symptom of the gradual erosion of the revolutionary character of the SL was her displacement from the Control Commission.

By the late 1970s Dale was one of a number of senior SL cadres who were uneasy with the growth of a personalist bureaucratic internal style, centered on James Robertson. Dale eventually fell afoul of the regime when she suggested that the SL leadership (including Robertson) should enjoy no special privileges, and should be accountable to the organization, particularly through the Control Commission.

This took place at a time when the Robertson regime was hardening its bureaucratic character, and was engaged in the early stages of a series of purges of leading cadres considered to be "unreliable" from the point of view of the *lider maximo* and his courtiers. Dale's name was added to the list, and a nasty and baseless slander campaign was initiated against her. The leading clique eventually succeeded in driving her out of the organization in 1983.

In the last few years of her life Dale was preoccupied with her illness and her work, and had little energy left for anything else. Yet she never abandoned the revolutionary ideas of her youth. She will be missed by all those who knew her, but her contributions to the revolutionary movement, particularly to the preservation and rediscovery of the tradition of Bolshevik work among women, will live on and help guide a new generation of young communist fighters. We salute her memory.

Fascism...

continued from page 40

brought to court. Even those convicted of murder usually receive extremely light sentences. Occasionally, for public-relations purposes, a Nazi group is banned, but it reappears the next day under a new name.

On those rare occasions when the police "forbid" Nazi mobilizations, they do so because of the "danger to social peace from counter-demonstrators." The Nazis obligingly change the location of their provocation to somewhere less accessible for the left and inevitably receive massive police protection. During the August 1993 march through Fulda to mark "Rudolf Hess Memorial Day," the police closed the area to anti-fascist demonstrators and left the streets open to the Nazis.

The German capitalists certainly have no intention of handing over political power to the deranged Hitlerite hooligans. But the Nazi gangs have a certain utility as the ruling class seeks to deflect social unrest caused by falling living standards and rising unemployment by scapegoating foreigners. This xenophobic sentiment, in turn, provides a fertile milieu for the growth of fascism. For the German bourgeoisie, the racist attacks are a cheap and effective way of discouraging "illegal" immigrants and refugees, while also exerting pressure on Germany's sizeable immigrant population. The fascists may sometimes be a bit of an embarrassment, but they are valuable auxiliaries to the official capitalist state apparatus.

Fascism and the 'New Right'

More than 30 hard-core fascist organizations in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands are linked in an underground network with above-ground umbrella front organizations for legal cover. They seek to recreate the Nazi SA (storm troopers) with squads of "political soldiers," coordinated through an electronic communication network. Nationally circulated leaflets and newspapers such as *Einblick* publish the names, addresses and photographs of anti-fascists with thinly disguised invitations to murder. Fascist "bulletin boards" relay information and instructions, even including plans for building firebombs. In many localities in the east, youth centers have been taken over by gangs of racist skinheads. Pubs and musical concerts for youth have been attacked. All of this takes place under the nose of the "democratic" authorities, who claim to be powerless to act.

The racists and ultra-nationalists of the far right, who constitute the mass base for the fascist gangs, are gathering strength under the democratic constitution. Public meetings of the extreme rightist parliamentary political parties such as the REPs (Republikaner) and the DVU (German Peoples Union) are often protected by phalanxes of fascist skinheads as well as the usual heavy police mobilization. Meanwhile "New Right" intellectuals are busy trying to make fascist ideology "respectable" enough for the right-wing parliamentarians to embrace openly. Nationalist groups such as the "Thule-Seminar," newspapers such as the weekly *Junge Freiheit*, *Mut* and



DER SPIEGEL

Anti-fascist attacked by Hamburg cops

Criticon, and various far-right political and economic "think tanks" are all laying the basis for a fusion of the "nationalist democrats" with the fascist shock troops.

The demarcation between the right wing of "normal" bourgeois politics and the anti-democratic racist fringe is being erased, as the whole political spectrum shifts dramatically to the right. Jackboot Nazis and pseudo-academic Holocaust deniers, racist skinheads and anti-Maastricht nationalists, revanchists, and even some nationalist social democrats, are all linked through a growing web of German "patriotic" organizations and publications.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), the party of the labor bureaucracy, has joined in the xenophobic hysteria against immigrants. Last year, when the government decided to gut the constitutional provision of the right of asylum (thereby bestowing parliamentary respectability on the Nazi terror campaign), the SPD supported the decision. More recently, there was the obscene spectacle of Herbert Schnoor, SPD interior minister in the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen, personally participating in the campaign to drive out thousands of Roma and Sinti ("gypsies") who had fled pogroms in the Balkans, Romania and Hungary.

Even in "Red Hamburg," where the social democrats have run things for decades, the SPD tried to cling to power by swinging far to the right and running an ugly anti-immigrant campaign in a special state election late last year. But they failed to win a majority. Meanwhile the far-right REPs and DVU, who ran an openly racist campaign and also attacked the Maastricht deal, gained an unprecedented eight percent of the vote. This year's round of elections is expected to be dirtier than any campaign since the late Weimar Republic, as the traditional parties try to fend off (or undercut) the ultra-nationalists and racists.

'Left' Nationalists Drift Right

The SPD leadership tolerates the crudely German nationalist "Hofgeismarer Circle" within their party. These people approvingly quote Niekisch, a minor "national-



Police protect fascist FAP leader Friedhelm Busse during local election campaign, Berlin, May 1992

revolutionary" figure from the 1930s who criticized Hitler for being "too legalistic." This is of course faintly embarrassing for many SPDers, but it is a logical extension of social-patriotism in a period of growing reaction. There has been a progressive capitulation to German nationalism, the ideological wellspring of fascism, by broad layers of the liberal/radical petty-bourgeois left. An early symptom was the development of a "Green/Brown" nationalist wing of the ecology movement. Another was 1968 student radical Rudi Dutschke's denunciation of the "victimization" of Germany by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, a position embraced by German Maoists in the 1970s.

In 1989-90, much of the supposed "left" supported capitalist reunification under the banner of German imperialism's inalienable "right of national self-determination." Initially German public opinion was overwhelmingly opposed to the imperialist coalition in the Gulf War, but, after a barrage of bourgeois propaganda equating Saddam with Hitler, many members of the peace movement and the Greens ended up supporting some kind of military action (e.g., the naval blockade) against Iraq. Most of these same former "anti-imperialists" supported the creation of new German client states in Slovenia and Croatia, a development that accelerated the disintegration of the former Yugoslav deformed workers' state and the onset of communal warfare. Today the "left" nationalists are discussing the possibility of supporting German participation in the UN/NATO imperialist intervention against the Serbs.

While there has been a profound shift to the right in German politics, there is still immense popular revul-

sion at the results of fascist terrorism. To date this sentiment has, for the most part, been channelled into impotent demonstrations "against hate," candlelight vigils and other forms of moral witness. The bureaucrats who head the DGB (German Trade Union Federation) have not only opposed any union mobilizations to confront the fascist terror gangs, but have also endorsed the use of police against anti-fascist demonstrators.

German Left: Confusion, Abstention and Prostration

Many members of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), the left social-democratic successor to the former East German Stalinist ruling party, which retains a sizeable popular base in the east, have shown an appetite to fight the fascist thugs. But the PDS leadership so far has shown far more interest in conducting a dialogue with these racist killers. The PDS ranks were shocked when Christine Ostrowski, a well known party spokesperson, engaged in a "discussion" with the fascist National Offensive. It is unlikely that she was acting on her own initiative and, in any case, she drew only the mildest reprimand from the party leadership. Similarly, the chairman of the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern PDS, Johann Scheringer, was only gently admonished for giving an interview to *Junge Freiheit*. Responding to leftist critics in the ranks, Gregor Gysi, the popular former general secretary of the PDS, said that personally he saw nothing wrong "in principle" with talking to *Junge Freiheit* ("Declaration of the PDS/LL Press Bureau," 26 August 1993).

The Spartacist Workers Party of Germany—SpAD

(German satellite of the Spartacist League/U.S.) sometimes takes very militant-sounding positions. For example, in their writings on fascism they talk about the importance of mobilizing workers against the Nazis. But the SpAD has a credibility problem. Its practice falls far short of its sometimes formally correct literary posturing. It tends to denounce every bloc entered into by rival leftist groups as class-collaborationist "popular fronts" regardless of whether such charges have any basis in fact. The SpAD's tendency to hysteria, and its willingness to slander its leftist opponents, have rendered it largely irrelevant to political developments on the left. SpAD members are simply not taken seriously.

If the SpAD tends toward sectarianism, the SAG (Socialist Workers Group), aligned with Tony Cliff's Socialist Workers Party in Britain, strongly inclines to right opportunism. The SAG is occasionally prepared to engage in united-front activities against the fascists, but is open about its appetites to build a multi-class anti-fascist movement. Its inclination to adapt to the current level of political consciousness has led the SAG to advocate a campaign to pressure local governments (including those headed by the conservatives of the CDU/CSU) to ban fascist meetings and demonstrations. Apparently the SAG thinks that things would be a lot better if only the "elected representatives make clear that Nazis are not welcome" (*Klassenkampf* No. 125).

This kind of timid sub-parliamentary cretinism points in exactly the *wrong* direction, and can only embolden the fascists. Revolutionaries do not call on the capitalist state to ban the Nazis (or to make them feel "unwelcome"!)—the fascists in fact represent the bourgeoisie's extra-legal reserve battalions. All prior historical experience indicates that such legislation, even if ostensibly aimed at the right, is inevitably used against the left and workers' movement.

How To 'Educate' Nazis

VORAN, the German sister section of the British Militant tendency, plays the leading role in the German YRE (Youth Against Racism in Europe). The YRE, founded in 1992, claims 10,000 members in Europe. The YRE program opposes "poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and destruction of social services" and proclaims the group's intention to lead "struggles against racist and fascist attacks." VORAN supporters in the German YRE national leadership are quite capable of sounding militant. They correctly called for "preventing Nazi marches, meetings, and information booths" (*Voran*, No. 156). But in practice VORAN has been swinging back and forth between revolutionary rhetoric and opportunist accommodation, between militant anti-fascist action and tailing social democracy.

The December/January issue of *Voran* contains an article on "social work" with young Nazis, which comments: "Naturally young fascists are victims of this society in so far as they react to unemployment and homelessness." Perhaps realizing how this might sound to immigrants facing daily fascist terror, the author adds that of course the Nazis are "first of all perpetrators." But the writer continues to fret about how to save the misguided fascist "fellow travellers" or "next-generation



Anti-fascist Autonomen

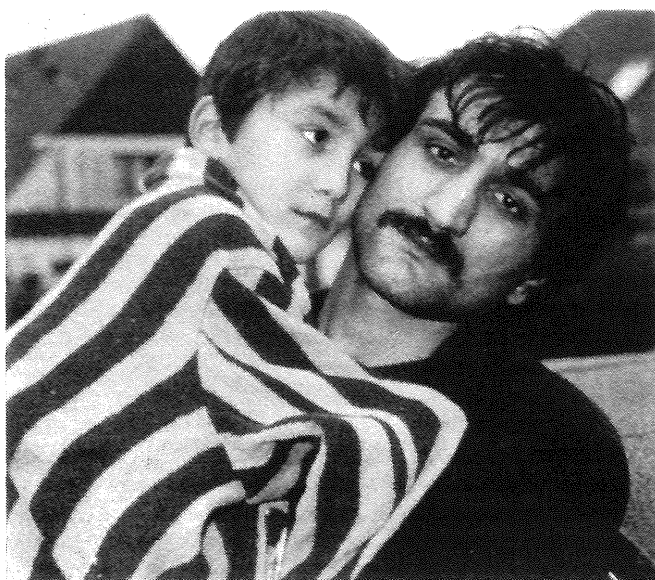
young Nazis" from their leaders and claims that it is: "necessary to drive a wedge between the base of the Nazis and their political leaders...But this will succeed not through acceptance but through political struggle, through creating a gulf between them."

As an afterthought the *Voran* article mentions the need for "political and concrete blows" against the Nazis, but fails to take a hard line against dialogue with Nazis. This question was addressed head on in a submission to the YRE's national conference last January by a delegate from Berlin-Kreuzberg:

"The strength of fascism does not lie in its arguments or in its political program. Its strength consists in merging together the hatred and desperation (fear of descent into 'skid row') of declassed elements into a reactionary (irrational) program of direct action against 'scapegoats'....This program is really a call for war and genocide and cannot be met by 'better' arguments. Anyone who discusses with Nazis presumes indirectly that there is a (common) level of (rational) argumentation with fascist propaganda. With such an approach one makes fascist arguments acceptable and puts a higher value on them. There is nothing to debate about genocide! Fascists have no rights. Actions to smash the Nazi gangs are necessary.

"...the focus of our political work today must be to win leftist youth and especially the trade-union youth for the struggle against fascism. Our direct actions to smash the fascist gangs contribute to demoralizing the Nazis and to drying up their potential field for recruiting."

In theory the Militant tendency opposes reliance on the capitalist state to ban fascists, but the leadership's opportunism leads in other directions. In Britain, Militant Labour advises the state to "close the [fascist] BNP offices or we will do it," and appeals to local councils to adopt a policy of "No rental of public meeting rooms to fascists." At the British YRE conference last December, Militant supporters argued for the YRE to adopt a demand for the "democratic accountability" of the police. Militant has long pushed reformist-utopian calls for



Father and brother of girl killed in Mölln fascist bombing

"community control" of the cops and is in favor of police "unions" affiliating with the labor movement.

VORAN has not yet attempted to shove this down the German YRE's throat, but their appetites were clearly revealed when they invited a representative of the "Critical Police" to the January 1994 conference. The "critical" cops didn't show up. Gruppe Spartakus (GS) supporters within the YRE denounced VORAN's dangerous illusions on this question and argued that the police, who constitute the armed fist of the capitalist state, cannot be "reformed" to serve the oppressed. As Trotsky noted in "What Next," his brilliant 1932 essay on fighting fascism: "The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state is a bourgeois cop, not a worker."

VORAN's Capitulation to Social Democracy

For VORAN, this opportunism is a matter of smart "tactics." The hard leftist phrases that appear sometimes in its press are useful for attracting young militants who want to fight the Nazis. But the VORAN leadership worries that revolutionary criticisms of the state, the cops, and/or the labor misleaders and SPD, raised in the context of a serious mass mobilization against the fascists, could "frighten the [social democratic-influenced] masses." This deeply ingrained political adaptation to German social democracy can be traced to the fact that VORAN's leading cadres were shaped by the decades they spent as deep-entrists within the SPD. As the SPD moved rightward, the VORAN leadership found it almost impossible to maintain any semblance of socialist politics and eventually gave up on burrowing in the "stinking corpse" of German social democracy. But the effect of their training is still evident in VORAN's call for workers to vote SPD in 1994.

The young militants who joined the YRE because they wanted to smash the Nazis are in general not favorably predisposed to the SPD. They know that the social democrats joined the racist campaign against immigrants and refugees. Within the YRE, VORAN at-

tempted to make its pro-SPD position more palatable by posing it in the negative, "Speak out against the right—Vote against the fascists and the [bourgeois ruling parties] CDU, CSU, and FDP." But it is very difficult to convince anyone that to vote for the SPD is to "speak out against the right." On virtually every political question—from driving down wages, to dismantling social services, to supporting imperialist interventions abroad—the SPD leadership eagerly champions the interests of the bourgeoisie against the workers. In the upcoming elections the SPD is campaigning on the basis that it can do a better job "modernizing" German imperialism than the bourgeois parties.

Even VORAN is forced to concede that "this [SPD] program means that an election victory for the SPD doesn't mean a political turn" (*Voran*, No. 157). The most that VORAN can hope for is that an SPD government might provide a better "point of departure" for workers' struggles because it would be more susceptible to pressure from the working class. But the only concessions that any capitalist government ever makes are those it is forced to make by hard class struggle. To give any kind of electoral support to the SPD when it is campaigning on an openly anti-working-class program can only confuse militants and undercut the possibility of future resistance. The real reason that VORAN still supports the social democracy is because the proletariat "in spite of all disappointments sees the SPD as the only alternative to the Kohl government," (*Voran*, No. 158). This is tailism, not Leninism.

Whether dressed up as a vote "against the right" or "a point of departure," a lot of YRE members can see no reason to support the social democrats. At the national convention a third of the delegates (including some VORAN members!) voted for a motion supported by the GS to refuse any electoral support to the treacherous SPD. The VORAN leadership was evidently taken aback at the size of the opposition on this issue, and, as a result, YRE members and local groups are free to express their own views on the election.

'Don't Give an Inch to the Fascists' Coalition

A major British/German soccer game was scheduled for Hitler's birthday, April 20, in the Berlin stadium where the Nazis staged the 1936 Olympic games. The CDU/SPD "Grand Coalition" which governs Berlin approved the match knowing full well that the Nazis intended to use it as an occasion for a national mobilization. The fascists have so far not been able to appear publicly in a major German city, so it was extremely important that this provocation be dealt with aggressively.

The union brass concentrated on selling tickets to the game that had been arranged by their "comrades" in the Berlin municipal government. A high-profile protest committee composed of the PDS, Greens, Humanist Union, some of the anarchoid "autonomen," and a few trade unionists, sought to pressure the Berlin authorities and the British Football Association to cancel the game—as if calling off this particular event would solve the growing fascist danger. This committee explicitly stated its intention of ignoring the fascists, although it also promised to try to provide some protection for a few

“endangered points.”

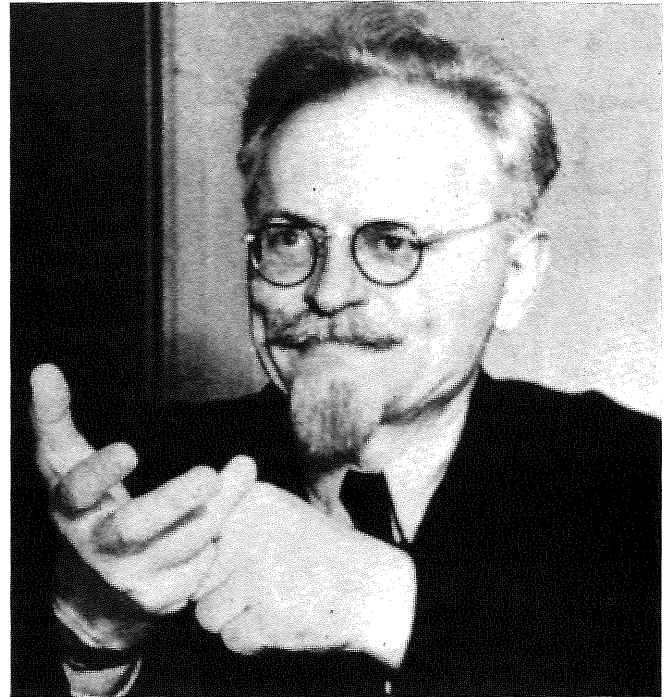
The anti-fascist Genclik Committee, composed largely of Turkish immigrants, organized a demonstration of 3000 in the Kreuzberg district in the late afternoon of the 20th. But they explicitly rejected proposals to involve German leftists and trade unionists in a united militant defense. This sectarian attitude significantly narrowed the base of the demonstration and thereby increased the dangers of police persecution of the largely immigrant demonstrators.

Spurred by GS supporters, the Berlin YRE helped launch a united-front coalition in early March, aimed at spiking fascist activity in Berlin on 20 April. Besides the YRE, the “Don’t Give an Inch to the Fascists on 20 April!” coalition included VORAN, SAG, GS and, later on, the Sozialistische Liga. A few weeks after the coalition was launched, the national YRE leadership ordered their members to withdraw from it, using as a pretext the reluctance of the bureaucrats heading the ÖTV (Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union) to endorse the initiative. After VORAN pulled the YRE out of the coalition, the SAG followed immediately, and the united front was effectively scuttled. Instead of trying to organize sufficient forces to shut down the planned fascist mobilization, the national YRE leadership proposed to distribute “red cards” to fans entering the stadium. The idea was that the fascists would be demoralized by the sight of people waving these little pieces of paper inside the stadium.

Our comrades in Gruppe Spartakus proposed to the organizers of numerous decentralized self-defense groups in immigrant centers and other likely Nazi targets that these mobilizations should be coordinated and attempt, if tactically feasible, to prevent a Nazi march. YRE Kreuzberg and YRE Pankow endorsed this initiative. Two weeks prior to the event the British soccer authorities unilaterally withdrew from the match. This created confusion about whether or not the Nazis were going to go through with their threatened provocation.

As it happened, the Nazis did not appear. But in the days leading up to 20 April there were practical preparations for organizing defense squads in districts where the likelihood of fascist violence was high. Typically, many of the Nazi attacks are carried out by small dispersed gangs which visit pre-selected targets and/or launch random assaults on any identifiable immigrants, gays, leftists, etc., that they happen to encounter. If a pack of racist thugs is spotted heading for a particular neighborhood, a prompt report to a properly prepared squad of militants based in the area could neutralize the Nazi gang.

The Berlin leadership of the YRE decided to participate in the defense squads in some areas. Plans were made for establishing communication links among the different branches of the Berlin YRE to coordinate tactical responses. VORAN supporters at the meeting then stated that the YRE units should also *immediately* call the police with any information about fascist movements! A GS supporter then moved: “The ‘YRE headquarters’ will in no case inform the police when it gets any information about a Nazi rally/Nazi activities.” This motion failed,



Trotsky called for a united front of labor and the oppressed to smash fascism

with about a third of the leadership voting in favor, and the rest (including all the VORAN supporters) voting against.

Trotskyists do not, on principle, rule out any form of cooperation with elements of the bourgeois state against fascists. But in the present situation in Germany it is absolutely clear that the cops would intervene on the side of the fascists. Informing the police of the activities of self-defense squads in advance, as VORAN proposed, could only endanger the anti-fascist militants and protect the Nazis.

This decision suggests that the VORAN leadership intends to resolve the earlier contradiction in the YRE between calling for smashing the fascists and attempting to pressure the capitalist state to ban them. If VORAN succeeds in pushing through such a right turn, the YRE will soon be emptied of youth who want to fight the Nazis; it will instead be made up of those who believe that all good things come to those who work through the proper channels.

As Trotsky wrote in 1932: “An organization may be significant either because of the mass it embraces or because of the content of those ideas that it is capable of bringing into the workers’ movement.” VORAN fails on both counts. Instead of relying on the capitalist police for protection against capital’s fascist praetorians, a revolutionary organization must orient to the most militant elements among the working class and oppressed, seeking to turn them in the direction of mass, organized resistance to the murderous fascist bands. The only way to discourage the Nazis is through smashing them physically, and to do that requires courage, organization and intelligence. But the first requirement is the revolutionary will to struggle. ■

Fight the Nazi Scourge!

Fascism and the German Left

HERZLAUSIGNUM—SIPA



BERLIN—German fascism continues its ominous resurgence. In the three years following the capitalist reunification of Germany in October 1990, there were over 75 fascist-inspired murders in Germany. Clandestine firebombing attacks on immigrants and minorities occur every week. The Nazi principle of eliminating “useless eaters” has resulted in a horrifying wave of murderous attacks on handicapped children and adults, homeless persons and the elderly. Fascist attacks on leftists are on the rise, and Nazi propaganda is increasingly directed at the trade unions, which are accused of “endangering German coal and steel.” There has also been an increase in anti-Semitism. Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated and recently the synagogue in Lübeck was the target of arson.

The fascist bands are growing, but they are still rela-

tively small and, at least in the major urban areas, have not been able to achieve physical superiority over militant anti-fascists. Yet so far no effective counter movement has developed.

The prolonged siege of asylum seekers in Rostock by fascist-led mobs in 1992 was bad for Germany’s image abroad. After the massive international media coverage of the firebomb murders of Turkish women and children in Mölln and Solingen last year, the German government felt compelled to announce a “crackdown” on rightist terror. The fascists responded by holding large national rallies to celebrate the firebombings. The police attended and looked on impassively.

While officially disapproving of Nazi terrorism, the state’s real attitude is reflected in the extremely lenient treatment accorded the handful of fascists arrested and

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