

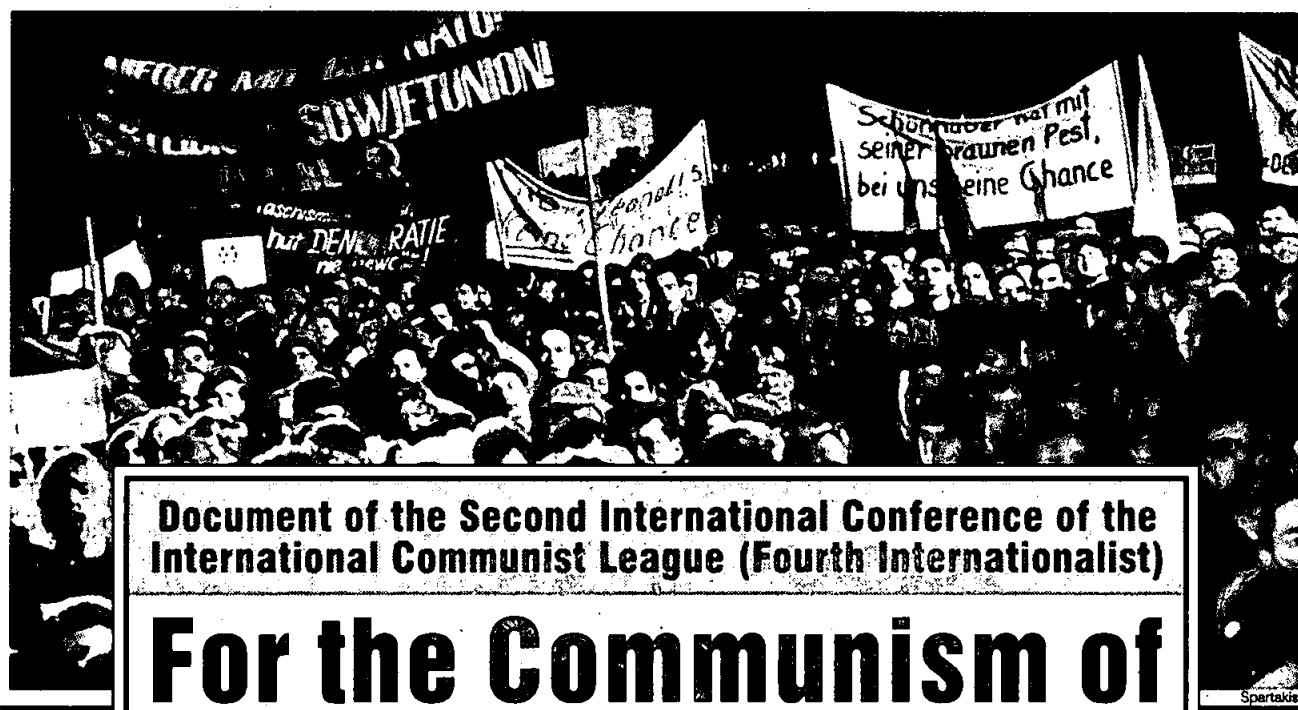
# SPARTACIST



NUMBER 47-48

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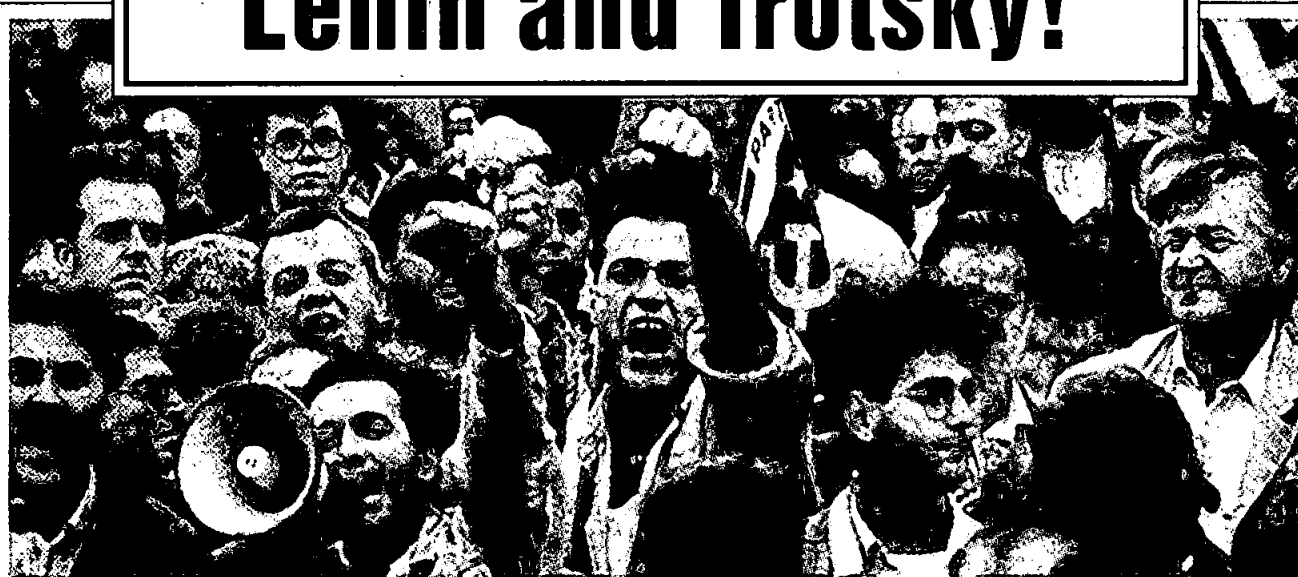
WINTER 1992-93



Document of the Second International Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

## For the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky!

Spartakist



Corriere della Sera

East Berlin, January 1990: 250,000 protest fascist desecration of Soviet war memorial in Treptow Park (top). Italy, autumn 1992: militant strikes against government austerity drive sweep the country.

### James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism

See Page 56

AUSTRALIA...A\$2

BRITAIN...£1

CANADA...Cdn\$2

IRELAND...IR£1

USA...US\$1.50

## Document of the Second International Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

# For the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky!

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*In late fall the Second International Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) was held in Europe. The main task of the conference was to assess the tasks of our party in the face of the demise of the former Soviet Union as a degenerated workers state (readers are referred also to "Stalinism—Gravedigger of the Revolution: How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled," Workers Vanguard No. 564, 27 November 1992). Other themes receiving close scrutiny at the conference were our work toward reformist and centrist opponents (particularly Ernest Mandel's decomposing "United Secretariat") and the fight for Leninist methods of collective functioning. We publish below the main resolution adopted by the conference; amendments mandated by the conference have been incorporated.*

### 1. Introduction

"The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

—Leon Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938)

"Under the guise of providing an economic justification for internationalism, Stalin in reality presents a justification for national socialism. It is false that world economy is simply a sum of national parts of one and the same type. It is false that the specific features are 'merely supplementary to the general features,' like warts on a face. In reality, the national peculiarities represent an original



Workers Vanguard

The Second International Conference of the International Communist League dips the red banner of the Fourth International in honor of comrade Martha Phillips, who died on the front lines of the struggle to reimplant Lenin and Trotsky's communism in the homeland of the October Revolution.



G.P. Goldshteyn

Lenin, with Trotsky at right, addresses Red Army troops in Moscow on their way to defeat Polish dictator Pilsudski's offensive against Soviet Russia, May 1920. Lenin hoped counteroffensive against Pilsudski would spark proletarian revolutions in Poland and Germany.

combination of the basic features of the world process. This originality can be of decisive significance for revolutionary strategy over a span of many years."

—Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*  
(1930 introduction to German edition)

The bourgeois masters of the world are reveling in triumphalism. With the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of East Europe and the ascendancy of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, they proclaim the "death of communism." In a one-sided war against an upstart Near Eastern dictator in Iraq, U.S. imperialism declares a "New World Order." Bush announces the "next American century" in a "one superpower world." German imperialism renews its *Drang nach Osten* (drive to the East), swallowing up the East German deformed workers state, carving up Yugoslavia and dominating East Europe through the deutschmark.

Yet only two years after the capitalist reunification of Germany, 18 months after the Persian Gulf slaughter and a year after the Yeltsin counter-coup in Moscow, there is rampant malaise in the capitalist world. Hardly a single imperialist leader is secure in his position. The Japanese "economic miracle" was undercut as the speculative real estate bubble burst and the Tokyo stock market nose-dived; the sharpest labor struggles in decades broke out in western Germany; and a racially integrated upheaval of the impoverished in Los Angeles revealed a highly unstable new world disorder.

In the center of world events, as it has been for most of this century, is the fate of the Soviet Union, of the remaining gains of the first and so far only successful workers revolution in history, besieged by imperialism, betrayed by Stalin and his heirs, and now in the throes of counterrevolution.

The events of August 1991, placing the forces of open capitalist restoration in the ascendancy in the Soviet Union, marked a turning point in contemporary world history. A piecemeal consolidation of this counterrevolution has taken place. The degenerated workers state of Stalin and his heirs has been destroyed, representing a world-historic defeat for the international working class.

The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), standing on the program of Lenin and Trotsky, has fought down the line against the restoration of

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capitalism and for world socialist revolution. With Stalinism in its death throes, the Trotskyists proclaim: Communism lives in the struggles of the working people and in the program of its revolutionary vanguard. *We are the party of the Russian Revolution!*

## I

The October Revolution of 1917 opened a new epoch for humanity. Where all previous social revolutions, except for a time the Great French Revolution, placed power in the hands of tiny exploiting minorities, in the Bolshevik Revolution the working class raised itself up to become the liberator of all the oppressed. The *Communist Manifesto*, written almost seven decades earlier, acquired flesh and blood. The dictatorship of the proletariat—the elimination of the state apparatus of capital and the concentration of power in the hands of the working class, first shown in potential in the 1870-71 Paris Commune—was realized by the Bolsheviks through the rule of the soviets (councils). This signal event of the 20th century excited tremendous enthusiasm among the workers and downtrodden of the planet, and provoked fear and loathing among those who live off their toil.

The workers came to power in a backward and heavily peasant country. Emerging from the terrible destruction of imperialist World War I, followed by civil war and imperialist invasion, the young Soviet republic remained nonetheless isolated. Without the vital aid of revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe, the besieged revolution degenerated. A conservative, nationalist bureaucracy usurped political power from the working class and seized control of the Communist Party upon Lenin's death. Standing at the head of this layer, Stalin threw out the Leninist program of world revolution and replaced it, by the fall of 1924, with the nationalist lie of "socialism in one country."

### ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The document from the Second International Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) pre-empted the contents projected for this issue of *Spartacist* in the "About This Issue" box published in *Spartacist* No. 45-46 (Winter 1990-91).

### CORRECTIONS

A caption on page 34 of *Spartacist* No. 45-46 (Winter 1990-91) incorrectly identifies Maxim Gorky as the man playing chess with Lenin. In fact, the photograph pictures Alexander Bogdanov at the chessboard with Lenin; Gorky is standing at the rear, watching the game.

In our obituary for Louis Sinclair, published in the same issue, we correctly gave 1937 as the date Sinclair joined the British Trotskyist movement, but incorrectly named the organization he joined as the Revolutionary Socialist League. In 1937 the British movement was divided; the RSL was not founded until 1938.

The article "For Marxist Clarity and a Forward Perspective" by Albert St. John, also published in *Spartacist* No. 45-46, incorrectly identified former East German premier Modrow, who presided over the liquidation of the DDR in 1989-90, as having previously been the mayor of Leipzig. In fact, he had been the head of the local Stalinist leadership in Dresden.

As Trotsky maintained, following Marx, an isolated workers state could not survive in the historic long run since its level of economic productivity could not rise above that of the powerful advanced capitalist-imperialist states committed to its destruction. Proletarian state power in the USSR could be preserved only by its *extension* through worldwide socialist revolution. After an uninterrupted string of defeats and betrayals, from Germany and China to the Spanish Civil War, and Stalin's blood purges of the late 1930s which killed off the Bolshevik Old Guard and decimated the Red Army general staff, the existence of the Soviet Union was in grave danger. But despite Stalin's sabotage, the upsurge of revolutionary energy in the war against Hitler's invasion gave the bureaucratically degenerated workers state a new lease on life. Elsewhere, ironically, the West European Stalinists, who had earlier allowed Hitler to take power without a fight, emerged from the war in control of the militant workers of Italy, France and elsewhere, thanks to the authority gained during the anti-fascist resistance.

The victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany and of U.S. imperialism over its main capitalist rivals in World War II determined the basic contours of world politics for the next 45 years. In West Europe and Japan, capitalism was preserved (with the indispensable complicity of the local Stalinist parties) and revived under American hegemony. In Kremlin-dominated East Europe, capitalist property was expropriated and a collectivized economy established through a bureaucratically controlled social revolution, producing states modeled on the Stalinist-ruled USSR. During the Cold War era, the military/industrial strength of the Soviet Union made possible the victory and survival of peasant-based social revolutions in China, Cuba and Vietnam, leading to bureaucratically deformed workers states there as well.

The events of the past several years have demonstrated the full force of Trotsky's prediction of the 1930s that either the Soviet workers would oust the bureaucracy or the bureaucracy would devour the workers state. By the mid-'80s, under the cumulative military, economic and political pressure of world imperialism, the Kremlin bureaucracy began to crack, signaled by the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev under the slogans of perestroika (restructuring), glasnost (openness) and "new thinking" in foreign policy.

But this last attempt at Stalinist self-reform (a species of neo-Bukharinism) inevitably failed. Gorbachev's abandonment of Afghanistan and East Europe in 1989-90 was quickly followed by the collapse of the Soviet bureaucracy in its central Russian core. The coup de grâce for Stalinist rule in the USSR came in August 1991, when Yeltsin seized on a woefully ineffective coup attempt by Gorbachev's chief lieutenants. Yeltsin launched a U.S.-orchestrated counter-coup, ushering in a period of open counterrevolution.

## II

With the Soviet Union no longer a countervailing force, in 1990-91 U.S. imperialism launched a war of annihilation against Iraq. Washington's aim was to assert its control of vital world energy supplies and to demonstrate to its main imperialist rivals, the newly reunified German Fourth Reich and Japan Inc., the extent of American military might and its ruthless willingness to use it. In its would-be "New World Order," according to a Pentagon strategy document "for the next century," the "first objective" is to "prevent



Spartacist League contingent in San Francisco antiwar demonstration, January 1991 called for working-class action against U.S.-led imperialist slaughter of Iraqi people.

the emergence of a new rival” and “any potential future global competitor.” However, American power rests on a shrinking and obsolete industrial base, a bankrupt financial system and a working class whose standard of living has been deteriorating for two decades.

The end of the Cold War will not bring a new “American century” but intensifying interimperialist rivalries. The global system of “free trade”—the economic cement which held together the U.S.-dominated anti-Soviet alliance—is crumbling as the major capitalist powers seek to redivide the world into regional trade blocs. (1) The U.S. is striving to form a protectionist North American Free Trade Area, which is already drawing jobs away from Canada and will expand and intensify Wall Street’s exploitation of Mexico while erecting continental barriers to European and Japanese competition. (2) Germany is moving to strengthen its dominance in the European Common Market through the Maastricht Treaty, further restricting imports and capital investment by the U.S. and Japan, while seeking to establish a military force independent of American-dominated NATO. (3) Japan, whose near-total dependence on imported raw materials makes it the most vulnerable of the major capitalist powers, is carving out its own economic zone running from Korea through Southeast Asia to Australia—a present-day version of the Greater East Asia Co-Prospcrity Sphere of the late 1930s. Yet today U.S. imperialism has an even greater economic interest in this region than when it went to war with Japan in 1941 over control of the Asian edge of the Pacific Rim.

Since last spring we’ve seen the biggest strikes in western Germany since the late 1940s and the biggest workers’ mobilization in Italy since the prerevolutionary “hot autumn” of 1969. There has also been a massive strike wave in Greece, involving about a million workers, mainly in the public sector. During this period France was thrown into political turmoil by the Maastricht referendum, which came within a hair’s breadth of being a big embarrassment for the bourgeois establishment.

This coincidence of events is no accident. With the defeat of the Portuguese revolution in 1975 (in which the German

Social Democracy through the aptly named Friedrich Ebert Foundation played a key role), West Germany, backed by Washington, was able to stabilize the West European bourgeois order. Today, however, German imperialism is seriously economically overextended, while the fear of German dominance has produced popular political anxiety in the rest of West Europe.

The Kohl regime attempted to absorb the former DDR and subsidize the new counterrevolutionary regimes in East Europe and the ex-USSR *without* significantly cutting consumption levels in western Germany. To prevent the depreciation of German financial assets through inflation, the Bundesbank drove interest rates to a level that destabilized the entire West European capitalist economy and has now produced serious political repercussions.

In order to restore economic stability and international financial confidence following the devaluation of the lira, the Amato government in Italy introduced an austerity program of such severity that it provoked a spontaneous working-class revolt against not only the government but also the trade-union bureaucracy. Explosive working-class struggles could well occur in Spain and perhaps Portugal. In Britain, the devaluation of the pound amid the collapse of the European Monetary System has reopened the deep divisions within both the ruling bourgeois Tories and opposition Labour Party over the Common Market.

Just as the global imperialist alliance against the Soviet Union partially suppressed the conflicts between the U.S. and Japan, so it suppressed the conflicts between France and Germany. And now just as the main thrust of popular American nationalism has been redirected from the Soviet Union toward Japan, in France there has been a recrudescence of hostility toward Germany.

The Maastricht referendum was in substance a plebiscite on the Bonn-Paris alliance. The Mitterrand-led pro-Maastricht campaign in its own way also appealed to anti-German feeling. This new, powerful Germany, it was argued, must be bound to strong European institutions. The large size of the “no” vote indicated that many Frenchmen recognized such a prospect was *illusory*. With reunification

and the collapse of the Soviet Union, France has lost the political leverage it had over West Germany during the Cold War. That will be determined through political struggle. We should anticipate growing tension between Paris and Bonn.

In summary, the West European political and economic order—long defined by NATO and the Common Market—is becoming unstuck. And this will open up opportunities for us.

The post-Cold War world increasingly resembles the pre-1914 world of heightened interimperialist rivalries intersecting regional nationalist conflicts. The expansionism of nuclear-armed Zionist Israel could trigger a conflagration engulfing the entire Near East, a region of critical importance to world capitalism. The splintering of Stalinist rule in Yugoslavia has unleashed a nationalist/communist bloodbath in the Balkans which could draw in neighboring states and the Western imperialist powers.

But a big difference between now and the eve of World War I is that the use of nuclear weapons could destroy all of humanity. As we wrote three years ago:

“World imperialism has already brought human civilization to the brink of the abyss with two world wars. A rational human being would not consciously embark on a course leading to nuclear world war. But capitalism long ago created economic forces which strain against the boundaries of the nation-states in which they are fettered: world imperialism isn't rational, and neither are the men who rule over us in its interest.”

—Introduction to “Documents on the  
‘Proletarian Military Policy.’” *Prometheus*  
Research Series No. 2 (February 1989)

Another key difference from the pre-1914 period is the far greater weakness of revolutionary socialist forces today. The manifest bankruptcy and multiple betrayals of Stalinist and social-democratic reformism have taken their toll, as is evident in the prevalence of bloody nationalist struggles ravaging the former deformed and degenerated workers states.

### III

A gauge of the U.S. imperialists' intoxication over the semblance of their power was the 1989 publication of State Department ideologue Francis Fukuyama's article, “The End of History?” Amid the proclamations of the capitalist West's “victory” in the Cold War, he argued that “liberal democracy” constituted the “end point of mankind's ideological evolution” and the “final form of human government.” This fatuous “bourgeois-democratic” triumphalism has since largely dissipated. Increasingly, imperialist propaganda expresses contempt for the people of East Europe, who are deemed too primitive to emulate the “liberal” political order of the West. In this way Washington and the Common Market capitals are preparing the ideological justification for supporting right-wing bonapartist regimes in East Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The “death of communism” propaganda has had a deep impact on the left. In Europe, the long Stalinized and now shrinking Communist parties rush to throw off their names and cleanse themselves of any hint of Lenin and the October Revolution. The Latin American left is united around calls for a “democratic revolution,” the ideological watchword of Reaganism. The myriad pseudo-Trotskyist groups have long since renounced the revolutionary politics of Trotsky's Fourth International and now the main pretender, Ernest

Mandel's “United Secretariat” (USec), seeks “unity” with the remnants of the Second and Third. A whole academic industry has produced journals like *Rethinking Marxism*, essays on “Post-Marxism Without Apologies” and books by ex-New Leftists like *After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism*.

Yet the collapse of Stalinism fully confirms the principles, program and analysis of Marxism. Already in 1846, Marx and Engels insisted that communism would require the highest level of development of the productive forces “because without it only want is made general, and with destitution the struggle for necessities begins again and all the old crap must revive.” Only with the “universal development of productive forces is a universal intercourse between men established,” and without this “each extension of intercourse would abolish local communism” (*The German Ideology*). Trotsky based himself on this famous passage in refuting Stalin's anti-Marxist claim to be building “socialism in one country.” Today the bankruptcy of Stalinism stands revealed, and “all the old crap” is rising again.

### IV

In the Transitional Program, the founding document of the Fourth International, Leon Trotsky wrote:

“All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet ‘ripened’ for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ‘ripened’; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”

—*The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938)

Many, such as Ernest Mandel, who present themselves as Trotskyists while abandoning the Trotskyist revolutionary program, openly reject this fundamental thesis, talking of a “neo-capitalism” and supposed development of the productive forces in the “long postwar boom” leading to a new period of reformism. But the evidence all around us demonstrates conclusively that such a development is a bourgeois myth.

In the imperialist countries, the workers (along with large non-proletarian sections of the population) have had their living standards sharply cut. In the United States during the 1980s, four-fifths of all families saw their real incomes drop, while the rich grew substantially richer. For workers, real wages peaked in 1973 and have fallen since (now down to the level of 1960). Union gains have been slashed and many unions broken, “two-tier” wages were introduced, many older workers have been reduced to minimum-wage jobs. What Marx called the “industrial reserve army” is becoming a huge, permanently unemployable semi-proletarian mass; joblessness among ghetto youth is now 50 percent and higher.

The explosion of unrest in Los Angeles, where what little unionized industry existed was wiped out in the '70s and '80s, is symptomatic of conditions throughout the capitalist West. In West Europe, unemployment has been around 10 percent since the 1970s. Meanwhile, in eastern Germany, where capitalist reunification has meant the wholesale destruction of industry, more than half of all workers were thrown out of their jobs. The major cities of Britain have

in recent years regularly seen outbursts of rage by unemployed youth in working-class districts around Manchester, Bristol, Brixton, Newcastle and elsewhere. This high level of misery, exploited by reactionary forces, has led to a rise in racist terror throughout the continent. Most notorious are the anti-immigrant attacks by Nazi skinheads in Germany, not only against Turkish workers and dark-skinned refugees from Asia and Africa, but also against Poles and Soviet citizens. Similar racist attacks have become rampant in England, France, Italy and Spain.

But there has also been increasingly large and militant opposition to these attacks. Clearly the related questions of immigration, nationalism and fascism will determine the political activity of all ICL sections in Europe in the next extended period, and must be reflected in our propaganda and application of united-front tactics. Our Marxist proletarian-centered revolutionary program can be a powerful weapon to attract to our sections the vanguard of workers and working-class and student youth. This would also provide a means to intersect the radicalizing youth who are breaking from their reformist and centrist organizations precisely on the question of defense of immigrants and refugees.

With the disappearance of the Soviet Union as a rival world power, the imperialists regard the people of Africa, the Indian subcontinent and much of South America as surplus populations, whose death by starvation and disease would in no way affect imperialist interests, except in particular cases where superexploitation, largely based on extractive industries, is a factor. In Latin America, saddled with an imperialist debt of \$450 billion (more than \$1,000 for every man, woman and child); with 183 million people officially living in desperate poverty; with health and sanitary conditions so bad that cholera, a disease all but wiped out at the turn of the century, has struck 400,000 people and killed 20,000 in the last year and a half; in a continent with 20 million homeless children, a "Third World" where 40,000 children die of hunger every day, and a world where

some 10 million people have been infected with the deadly AIDS virus—conditions cry out for socialist revolution.

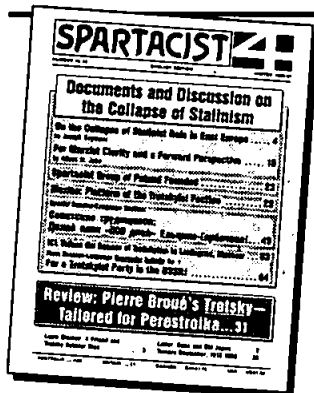
Much of the "deindustrialization" in the United States is due to the so-called "globalization of production," as capitalists have moved large chunks of industry to low-wage "Third World" countries in order to shore up their falling profits by jacking up the rate of exploitation. Not only does this mean devastation of industrial cities in the advanced capitalist countries, but massive impoverishment in the "industrializing" countries. The United Nations' *Human Development Report 1992* states that the gap between the richest and the poorest countries in the world has doubled over the past three decades. In Mexico, one of the biggest recipients of "runaway shops" from the U.S., during the bank-engineered "debt crisis" of the '80s real wages were slashed by *more than half*, falling below the level of 1940. The "economic miracles" of Brazil, Chile and South Korea were based on brutal military rule, poverty-level wages and 60-hour weeks.

But this has also created huge superexploited working classes in the most industrialized countries of the Third World, many of whom don't buy the "death of communism" propaganda. The situation is particularly explosive in South Korea, where a large combative industrial proletariat and militantly leftist student youth confront a thinly disguised military-bonapartist regime. In South Africa, the white-supremacist regime faces a millions-strong black working class, which is key to two-thirds of the continent and which flies the red flag, hammer and sickle of communism during its strikes. The fraud of "power sharing" in a "post-apartheid democracy" is brutally exposed by the continuing slaughter in the townships. Yet the biggest obstacle to socialist revolution against "neo-apartheid" capitalism is the Stalinist South African Communist Party, desperate to strike a deal with the Randlords. And in South America, the left is so immersed in corrupt parliamentary systems that the only outlets for mass discontent have been food riots, support to the brutal anti-worker peasant-based Sendero Luminoso

# SPARTACIST

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Spartacist is the theoretical and documentary repository of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). Published under the direction of the International Executive Committee in English, French, German and Spanish, *Spartacist* embodies the ICL's commitment to Leninist internationalism.



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**Boris Yeltsin and fellow capitalist-restorationists outside Moscow "White House," August 1991. Decisive workers' action to disperse counterrevolutionary barricades would have been opening shot in proletarian political revolution.**

in Peru or sympathy for right-wing nationalist militarists.

Today no less than in 1917, Trotsky's perspective of *permanent revolution* holds true—in this imperialist epoch only the taking of power by the proletariat at the head of the peasantry, under the leadership of an authentic communist party, can solve even the most basic democratic tasks of the revolution as it passes on to socialist tasks and to the necessary international unfolding and completion of proletarian revolution.

## V

Conditions are indeed "overripe" for socialist revolution, and the crisis of humanity is indeed focused on the crisis of revolutionary leadership—the desperate need for an authentically communist vanguard. Recent dramatic events—the Los Angeles riots and the furor surrounding abortion rights, the public workers strike in western Germany and the Tokyo stock market crash—have highlighted the internal contradictions of the major imperialist powers, dampened bourgeois triumphalism, and turned the attention of both the ruling classes and society at large inward. Even right-wing bourgeois ideologues now recognize that from L.A. to the Andes, from the Ruhr to South Africa, the post-Cold War world is increasingly turbulent, ugly and dangerous. While we can expect a period of mass social struggles, we are already witnessing a strongly negative consequence of the "new world disorder": the conflagration of national antagonisms. Wherever the "national principle" achieves hegemony in the former deformed workers states, the possibility for the emergence of a class axis of struggle is drowned in blood.

Against those who falsely claim the mantle of Trotskyism while tailing after alien class forces, the ICL, upholding the banner of the Fourth International, has fought for working-class independence. Our tendency was formed in struggle over the "Russian question," defending Cuba against Yankee imperialism while opposing political support to the petty-bourgeois Stalinist Castro regime. In the 1970s, as illusions in popular-frontism prevailed among the left internationally, we were unique in warning that any political support to such class-collaborationist coalitions was a betrayal of the workers' interests, leading in the case of

Allende's Chile to a bloodbath and terrible defeat.

The document of our First International Conference in 1979 noted:

"Carter's 'human rights' campaign, reviving the rhetoric of the Cold War in order to morally re-arm U.S. imperialism after Vietnam and Watergate, has conditioned a rapid shift to the right on the part of the ostensible Trotskyist movement."

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

Within months, this rightward shift was expressed in a full-blown "Third Campist" capitulation to imperialist anti-Sovietism, as these groups joined in the drum-beating over the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan and then hailed Lech Walesa's Solidarność in Poland.

In contrast, only our tendency upheld the Trotskyist position of Soviet defensism. Our call "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" and our demand to "Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution!" were met with howls from the anti-Soviet fake left. The union "labor fakers," and more generally the social democracy internationally, howled for Solidarność and bankrolled it through the "AFL-CIA"; much of the so-called left jumped right onto the bandwagon of Cold War "free trade unionism." These congenital tailists could see no further than the fact that "ten million Polish workers" had been drawn to Walesa & Co. out of disgust for the crimes of Stalinism; they lined up behind the CIA, the Vatican and Pilsudskiite nationalism. We were prepared to swim against the stream and speak the truth, no matter how bitter, to the proletariat, as the program of Trotsky's Fourth International requires.

Our principled stand earned us grudging respect at the time as the "Soviet-defensist Trotskyists," particularly among broader layers of Communist Party members and working-class militants who had never before encountered authentic Trotskyism. The Spartacist position was dramatically vindicated by subsequent events, which enhanced our political authority to fight against the counterrevolutionary tide. By the time of the August 1991 Moscow events, as everyone on the left from Western Communist parties to ostensible Trotskyists either collapsed or openly stood with the counterrevolution, only the ICL called on Soviet workers to "Smash Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!"



In early 1989, as Gorbachev was capitulating to Washington by withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan, we offered to organize an international brigade, drawing on leftist and Third World radical nationalist organizations, to defend the embattled Kabul regime against the CIA-backed *mujahedin*. Through the Partisan Defense Committee (PDC), we then organized a campaign of solidarity with the civilian victims in the front-line city of Jalalabad. Recognizing that many would-be communists in and around the Stalinist parties felt abandoned by their leaders, our International Executive Committee announced around the same time that the international Spartacist tendency had become the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). An article explained the change:

"Revolutionary regroupments on the program of Leninist internationalism are the means to resolve the disproportion between our small forces and our task. The heirs of Stalin manifestly lack the capacity to defend the Soviet power, of which they have been simultaneously the parasitic defender and the counterrevolutionary disorganizer for 65 years. Yet to the same measure that they have brought 'communism' into disrepute thanks to the crimes they have committed in its name, they have also reduced their ability to manipulate the allegiance of dedicated pro-Communist workers throughout the world."

—"International Communist League Launched,"  
*Spartacist* (English edition) No. 43-44,  
Summer 1989

In the coming period, sections and groupings of the International Communist League will be involved in manifold social struggles. In the United States, we have initiated and organized successful mobilizations against the Klan and Nazis in a number of major urban centers across the country. With the prospect of proletarian political revolution in the DDR (East Germany) in the fall of 1989, the ICL made a concerted intervention which had a considerable impact. Our call for a united-front workers mobilization against Nazi provocations at the Treptow Soviet war memorial in East Berlin, which was taken up by the ruling Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SED), brought out a quarter million people.

## VI

As noted in the call issued by the International Secretariat on July 15, the Second International Conference of the ICL "takes place in the midst of, and is in large part necessitated by, major upheavals in the international political landscape." A world-shaking event such as the counterrevolution in the DDR cannot but have an impact on the party. Most of the centrist and reformist currents have been driven rapidly to the right. The USec was split between some who wanted "champagne" to celebrate the demise of the DDR and others who wanted "Alka-Seltzer" to digest it. In contrast, the response of the ICL to this historic test showed the hard programmatic homogeneity of the tendency.

Instrumental in maintaining our revolutionary coherence during this and the subsequent turbulent period was international vigilance when programmatic blips appeared in a section or something seemed to be going wrong, and vigorous pursuit of internal debates. There has been intense, critical discussion over the DDR. Four bulletins of the *International Internal Bulletin* are devoted to evaluation of events and our intervention there.

In various sections of our International there was evidence of, at least, disorientation over the events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Drawing historically pessi-

mistic conclusions from the collapse of the DDR, in the aftermath of the Yeltsinite counter-coup in the Soviet Union, several comrades internationally wrote that the failure of the "coup" signified the end of the Soviet Union as a workers state. Some misused the category "no state" to this effect. The programmatic conclusions of such "sentiments" were most alarmingly vented by two central leaders of the British section whose initial impulses to neutrality toward the Yeltsin barricades represented a frontal challenge to the Trotskyist program of unconditional defense against capitalist counterrevolution.

The political drift in the direction of "Third Campism" in the SL/B reflected, and was an accommodation to, the pressures of the Cold War social democracy. But in other sections where the main body of politically advanced workers formed the base of mass Stalinist parties and had long regarded the Soviet Union as the bastion of "socialism," there has been among some comrades a sense of demoralization over the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and, in particular, the Soviet Union. The document for the 12th Conference of the Ligue Trotskyste de France noted "a creeping deviation called 'we are the party of the family of defenders of the Soviet Union,' instead of 'we are the party of the Russian Revolution.'" Such a view—seeing us as the consistent wing of the "family of defenders of the Soviet Union" and the Stalinists as the inconsistent wing—implicitly capsizes the contradictory nature of Stalinism in the other direction, i.e., that having arisen on the basis of deformed workers states, the Stalinist bureaucracies were at some level committed no matter what to the defense of these property relations. Thus when the DDR Stalinists reduced their "opposition" to merely quibbling over the terms of capitalist reunification, this naturally caused disorientation and/or demoralization among comrades who believed the Stalinists had to continue to oscillate between the two sides of their historic contradiction no matter what the circumstances.

These positions and their specific manifestations in other sections amounted to a priori writing off the capacity of the Soviet workers to fight and to carry out a political revolution. In the course of these fights it was repeatedly noted that this would and did lead to defeatism about the working class at home, opening the door to capitulation where the pressures are greatest, e.g., Labourism or social-democratic racism, depending on the country.

The substance of our discussions on Germany and the Soviet Union concerned the centrality of the subjective factor—the revolutionary party—and the internal fights and discussions have been, are and will be crucial to enabling us to maintain our communist edge. Thus we will enter the new period with the confidence in our program and internal collectivity that we need.

## 2. Stalinism: The Bolshevik Revolution Betrayed

The October Revolution of 1917 marked the high point of the proletarian class struggle to date. As American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon said in 1939, fighting against a petty-bourgeois opposition that abandoned defense of the Soviet Union at the beginning of World War II:

"The Russian revolution showed in practice, by example, how the workers' revolution is to be made.... It showed in

life what kind of a party the workers must have. By its victory, and its reorganization of the social system, the Russian revolution has proved for all time the superiority of nationalized property and planned economy over capitalist private property, and planless competition and anarchy in production."

—*The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*

The counterrevolutionary tide which engulfed East Europe and is sweeping through the Soviet Union demonstrates neither the "end of communism," as bourgeois triumphalists proclaim, nor that the October Revolution was a futile experiment, as some "leftists" would have it. Rather it confirms, albeit in the negative, the Marxist and Trotskyist program.

## I

The formation of the Communist International in 1919 was an expression of the Bolsheviks' understanding that the Russian Revolution was only the first, reversible episode of the world socialist revolution. The massive carnage of World War I broke the system of capitalist-imperialism at its weakest link, tsarist Russia. Over and over, Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders stressed that the revolution would either extend to at least several of the more advanced industrial powers or succumb to imperialist encirclement and counterrevolution. At the conclusion of the Civil War in 1920, Lenin said: "So long as both capitalism and socialism remain, we cannot live in peace. Either the one or the other in the long run will conquer. There will be a funeral chant either for the Soviet Republic or for world capitalism. This is a moratorium in a war" (cited in Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*).

But the first decisive blow against the Soviet workers state was struck from within. The pressure of imperialist encirclement, the devastation and atomization of the Russian working class in the Civil War, and the failure and defeat of proletarian revolutions internationally—particularly the 1923 German Revolution—set the stage for the rise to power of a bureaucratic caste headed by J.V. Stalin. A left opposition coalesced around Trotsky, as the "Platform of the 46" in October 1923 and Trotsky's *The New Course* (1923) warned of the danger of bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution.

In the mid-1930s, Trotsky retrospectively located Soviet Thermidor in 1924. He characterized the Soviet Union as a bureaucratically degenerated workers state that the proletariat was duty-bound to defend against imperialist attacks from without and capitalist counterrevolution from within. Only a proletarian political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucratic caste could restore the Soviet Union as a bastion of world socialism. Otherwise, bureaucratic degeneration would culminate in the restoration of capitalism by one historical path or another.

The nationalist conservative bureaucracy denoted its ascendancy with a frontal assault on the internationalist foundations of Bolshevism. Contradicting Marx, Lenin and his own statement of only eight months earlier, in late 1924 Stalin asserted that the Soviet Union "can and must build a socialist society" within the confines of a single, backward country. The doctrine of "socialism in one country" was not simply a false theory but the false consciousness of a bureaucratic stratum which had grown comfortable with its privileged status resting on collectivized property.

In the hopes of averting imperialist military intervention,

under Stalin's direction the Communist parties increasingly ceased being revolutionary instruments and instead supported those sections of their own bourgeoisies deemed friendly to the Soviet Union. This was codified in the popular-front policy voted at the Comintern's Seventh Congress in 1935. In an interview with Western journalist Roy Howard in 1936, Stalin raised the shibboleth of "export of revolution" in order to categorically renounce any intention of promoting socialist revolution in the capitalist countries.

However, imperialist military intervention was not the sole, nor even the primary, danger to the isolated Soviet state. Marx insisted that the material basis of a socialist society must be a level of economic productivity *higher* than that of even the most advanced capitalist economies. This requires an internationally planned economy applying the most scientifically advanced techniques. In *The History of the Russian Revolution*, written in 1930, Trotsky explained why the doctrine of "socialism in one country" was a reactionary utopia:

"Socialism is the organisation of a planned and harmonious social production for the satisfaction of human wants. Collective ownership of the means of production is not yet socialism, but only its legal premise. The problem of a socialist society cannot be abstracted from the problem of the productive forces, which at the present stage of human development are world-wide in their very essence. The separate state, having become too narrow for capitalism, is so much the less capable of becoming the arena of a finished socialist society. The backwardness of a revolutionary country, moreover, increases for it the danger of being thrown back to capitalism. In rejecting the perspective of an isolated socialist development, the Bolsheviks had in view, not a mechanically isolated problem of intervention, but the whole complex of questions bound up with the international economic basis of socialism."

Only the Left Opposition fought resolutely and to the very end against the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution. Even as they were exiled to the prison camps of Siberia or lined up against the blood-drenched walls of the Lubyanka, the Trotskyists continued to uphold the goals of October. The other oppositional currents emerging from the Bolshevik Old Guard capitulated to Stalin, demoralized and confused by what had befallen the land of the October Revolution. Writing many decades later, Leopold Trepper, a Polish Jewish Communist who as an officer in Soviet military intelligence headed the heroic "Red Orchestra" network in World War II, wrote that only the Trotskyists had a real understanding of Stalinism and a revolutionary program to fight it:

"Today, the Trotskyites have a right to accuse those who once howled along with the wolves. Let them not forget, however, that they had the enormous advantage over us of having a coherent political system capable of replacing Stalinism. They had something to cling to in the midst of their profound distress at seeing the revolution betrayed. They did not 'confess,' for they knew that their confession would serve neither the party nor socialism."

—*The Great Game* (1977)

## II

The various Stalinist/Maoists, anarchists and renegades from Trotskyism who place the decisive degeneration of the Soviet Union anywhere from 1919 to Khrushchev's 1956 "secret speech" mask a program aimed either at amnestying the Stalinist political counterrevolution or at abandoning defense of the social conquests of the October



Yevgeni Khaldei

**Soviet Union smashed Nazi Third Reich. Victorious Red Army raised red flag over Berlin's Reichstag, 30 April 1945.**

Revolution. In contrast, we have insisted: "After January 1924, the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled, and the purposes for which the USSR was ruled had all changed" ("When Was the Soviet Thermidor?" *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 43-44, Summer 1989).

This is vividly reaffirmed by Ivan Vrachev, one of the delegates who fought Stalin at the bureaucratically rigged 13th Party Conference of the CPSU in January 1924, who recently recalled:

"Yes, I said the final hours of party democracy were passing.... And thus it came to be. No further like-minded speeches were ever allowed. Anywhere. From that moment began the consolidation of Stalin's power."

As Trotsky came to see:

"The smashing of the Left Opposition implied in the most direct and immediate sense the transfer of power from the hands of the revolutionary vanguard into the hands of the more conservative elements among the bureaucracy and the upper crust of the working class. The year 1924—that was the beginning of the Soviet Thermidor."

—"The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism" (1935)

The subsequent destruction of revolutionary continuity by Stalin's terror was so deepgoing that Vrachev and Mikhail Baitalsky were the only contemporary survivors from the early Soviet Left Opposition, people who retained a genuine understanding of the Bolshevik Revolution, its goals and values, undistorted by subsequent Stalinist perversions. We may only now be witnessing the full effects of just how thorough Stalin's purge of left-wing elements was, as reflected in the absence of the development of a leftist political expression in the Soviet working class at this crucial juncture, 75 years since the October Revolution.

Latter-day revisionists like Ernest Mandel—seeking to ingratiate themselves with Western social democrats and the erstwhile Gorbachevite intelligentsia who lionized

Bukharin's *Right* Opposition—falsely seek to portray Trotskyists as simply the best and most consistent anti-Stalinist "democrats." Thus they groveled to Gorbachev to "rehabilitate" the Bolshevik leader. In contrast we insisted that Leon Trotsky did not need a good-conduct certificate from the heirs of Stalin.

Meanwhile, Pierre Broué criticizes the Left Opposition for rejecting a "left-right" alliance against the bureaucratic Stalin center in the late 1920s and early '30s. As we have written, Trotsky's opposition to a *political* bloc with the Right Opposition, which was the stalking horse for capitalist restoration, was key to the continuity of the revolutionary program of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party: "Democracy" was not a program in itself but rather the circumstance in which the revolutionaries of the Left Opposition, combating the Stalinist betrayals and usurpation of the political power of the working class, could *fight to reconquer the Communist Party for the Leninist program*.

Key to Trotsky's fight against Stalinism was the understanding that defense of the Soviet Union was integral to the struggle for world revolution. This is anathema to the various pseudo-Trotskyist pretenders, who capitulate to the pressure of Western bourgeois "public opinion," often via social democracy. Soviet defensism was at the core of Trotsky's last political fight, codified in his writings collected in *In Defense of Marxism*, which has been well-nigh taboo for those in Mandeliste organizations. In his April 1940 "Letter to the Workers of the USSR," the co-leader of the October Revolution insisted:

"It is the duty of revolutionists to defend tooth and nail every position gained by the working class, whether it involves democratic rights, wage scales, or so colossal a conquest of mankind as the nationalization of the means of production and planned economy. Those who are incapable of defending conquests already gained can never fight for new ones."

### 3. The Terminal Disintegration of the Stalinist Bureaucracy

In 1918, Soviet Russia was invaded by multiple imperialist powers, tearing at it like so many hyenas. Later, despite the seemingly bottomless attempts by Stalin and his heirs to sell out proletarian upheavals abroad, imperialist hostility continued unabated. Hitler vowed to extirpate the "Bolshevik world menace" and launched Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union, whose military defenses had been criminally undermined by Stalin. Since World War II, through two Cold Wars and proxy wars from Korea to Vietnam to Afghanistan, as well as brief periods of supposed "peaceful coexistence," the Soviet Union has faced an incessant barrage of imperialist harassment or outright aggression.

Immediately following World War II, Stalin's erstwhile imperialist allies embarked on a Cold War crusade aimed at containing Soviet military power and breaking the USSR economically through an effective embargo and an escalating "arms race." During the 1950s influential elements in American ruling circles (e.g., George Kennan, Nelson Rockefeller) maintained that applying sufficient military pressure could crack the more backward Soviet economy. This strategy was pursued with a vengeance by Reagan/Bush in the 1980s.

America emerged from World War II hegemonic over its imperialist rivals. Facilitated by the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany, the decisively weakened colonial empires either crumbled or were convulsed by anti-imperialist struggles, introducing prolonged periods of domestic instability in the various imperialist heartlands. The space between Cold Wars I and II was an interlude secured through the heroic efforts of the Vietnamese Revolution and ensuing social struggles in the imperialist countries. Gaullist foreign policy sought to maintain a separate niche for France, independent of both sides in the Cold War, but France came to the brink of civil war over Algerian independence.

This instability exploded in 1968 in a number of countries. The French Communist Party's betrayal of the pre-revolutionary situation with the May-June general strike/student revolt demonstrated in the clearest possible way that it is a *counterrevolutionary* party, committed to preserving the bourgeois order even under the most favorable opportunity for the proletarian seizure of power. The defeat of the incipient Portuguese revolution and the stabilization of West Europe for NATO ended this period.

## I

With the Pentagon war machine bogged down through the mid-'60s to mid-'70s in the long, losing war in Indochina, the Soviet Union was able to achieve strategic nuclear parity with the U.S. while substantially raising the consumption levels at home and subsidizing East Europe, Cuba and various Third World client regimes. However, the illusory success of Brezhnev's "détente" policy evaporated after the Vietnam War, as U.S. imperialism launched an anti-Soviet "human rights" crusade followed by an aggressive military buildup aimed at the USSR. Simultaneously, the cumulative effects of bureaucratic mismanagement resulted in a sharp decline in Soviet economic growth. Beginning in the early 1970s the Kremlin leaders pronounced their intent to switch to *intensive* economic growth through modernizing and retooling the existing industrial plant. However, as Trotsky had warned in *The Revolution Betrayed*, intensive economic development could not be effected under central planning in the absence of *soviet democracy*. High productivity and quality control can be achieved only by naked economic coercion and the threat of unemployment (under capitalism) or by the proletariat's understanding that its labor serves the social and economic goals of an egalitarian society. In an economy deformed by bureaucratic commandism, corruption and privilege, the efforts to stimulate and reorganize production were soon to come up against a brick wall.

The later Stalin regime and even more so the regimes of Khrushchev and Brezhnev linked their political legitimacy not to the Revolution but to the "Great Patriotic War." The Khrushchev generation of the bureaucracy, largely drawn from young workers and peasants awakened to political life by the October Revolution, viewed the triumph of socialism as an extension of the crude quantitative growth which the Soviet Union experienced in the 1930s and again in the period of postwar reconstruction.

With the relaxation of totalitarian terror under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the Soviet bureaucracy gradually lost its former cohesion as a closed, hierarchical caste. The Brezhnev generation, while continuing to pay lip service to "Marxism-Leninism," had as its real, functional ideology

what might be termed "superpowerism." Meanwhile the rampant personal corruption which was a hallmark of the Brezhnev era promoted a "mafia" which was protected by and overlapped with sections of the bureaucracy. It also fueled the appetites of the younger generation of the apparatus and the intelligentsia—the privileged, educated children of the bureaucracy—to live like Western capitalists.

During the last Brezhnev years, Soviet ruling circles, even the most conservative, were deeply dissatisfied with the stagnation of the economy and willing to accept structural changes to overcome the paucity of consumer goods. After the brief regimes of Konstantin Chernenko and Yuri Andropov, Andropov's protégé, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in early 1985 amid expectations that radical changes were in the offing. In addition to reviving Andropov's campaigns against corruption and for labor discipline, Gorbachev resorted to a number of economic measures on the labor front reminiscent of the Stalin era: reintroduction of piece rates, and widening of wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers and between workers and the technical intelligentsia. A consensus existed within the new regime to experiment with a neo-Bukharinite program of market-oriented "reforms" in order to improve microeconomic efficiency.

In the name of "new thinking," Gorbachev reached the conclusion that major concessions by the Soviet Union were required to end Cold War II and hopefully usher in a new period of "peaceful coexistence." At the same time, we noted the contradictory aspect of Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* which created a valuable opportunity for the crystallization of a Trotskyist party in the USSR. We wrote in a 1987 document for a national conference of the Spartacist League/U.S.:

"While there is presently no known tendency within the Soviet intelligentsia which aspires to revolutionary Marxism, the present intellectual ferment and openness could lead elements of the intelligentsia back to authentic Bolshevism....

"Gorbachev's *perestroika* not only goes against the immediate material interests of most workers but also affronts their deep reservoir of collective feeling. At the same time, the regime's call for *glasnost* permits a degree of organized dissent against official policies.... The present situation in the Soviet Union is probably more favorable for the emergence of an *independent* workers movement than at any time since the 1920s."

—"Toward Revolutionary Conjuncture"  
(June 1987)

## II

This was dramatically demonstrated in the summer of 1989, as a mass strike wave swept the principal coal mining regions of the USSR—the Kuzbass in western Siberia, the Donbass in the eastern Ukraine and the Karaganda region in Kazakhstan. While the miners' demands were limited to economic issues, the strike demonstrated enormous social power on the ground. Mass assemblies debated strike strategy and miners' committees began taking control of distribution in whole communities and regions, pointing toward authentic soviet formations. In its spontaneous and rapid development toward a situation of embryonic dual power, the miners strike demonstrated not only the possibility of proletarian political revolution, but also the urgent need for a conscious revolutionary vanguard to lead the workers' struggle. In the absence of a Trotskyist leadership, the strike dissipated and Gorbachev was able, with some immediate

success, to co-opt the strikers by promising that their legitimate grievances would be met.

This vacuum of leadership could not last long. As the regime's promises were broken and conditions continued to deteriorate, the mood in the mining communities turned sharply against the Soviet president. U.S. imperialism, acting through the American labor bureaucracy, moved to bend the most politicized and combative section of the Soviet proletariat to its interests. In October 1990, at the end of a miners conference in Kuznetsk, a small coterie of hardened anti-Communists—many of them protégés of the "AFL-CIA"—announced the formation of an Independent Union of Miners. A strike led by this union the following spring did much to further undermine the crumbling authority of the Gorbachev regime.

At the October 1990 miners conference, ICL representatives were able to make our first direct intervention into the Soviet workers movement. Our comrades temporarily spiked an anti-Communist campaign to enlist the Soviet miners behind the international witchhunt against British miners leader Arthur Scargill. Once again, the ICL's principled opposition to Solidarność counterrevolution stood us in good stead. Our comrades pointed out that the bourgeoisie and its lackeys hated Scargill for speaking out against Reagan and Thatcher's favorite "union" and for leading the momentous, yearlong 1984-85 British miners strike against the "Iron Lady," Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

With the exception of the coal miners, the actions of the Soviet working class did not play a decisive role in the outcome of the terminal crisis of Stalinist rule. Nonetheless, fear of popular, especially labor, unrest inhibited the Gorbachev regime from fully implementing its declared "transition to a market economy." Yeltsin denounced Gorbachev for "half measures" while exploiting growing popular discontent over the economic immiseration and chaos.

### III

The decisive step leading to the disintegration of the bureaucracy at the economic level occurred on New Year's 1988, when the Gorbachev regime effectively abolished centralized planning and management in favor of enterprise self-financing. At the same time, petty capitalist enterprises were legalized under the euphemism of "cooperatives." But rather than supplying consumer wants by loosening up a top-heavy "commandist" system, perestroika led to economic collapse, as planning was abandoned in a planned economy. As bureaucratic discipline broke down in economic administration, managers looted their enterprises and cut back production of low-cost (and therefore low-profit) goods, and consumer goods disappeared from the state shops.

Meanwhile, by 1989 the Stalinist bureaucracy had completely lost its former monopoly of political organization. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was divided into openly hostile factions while myriad nationalist, anti-Communist and other parties were proliferating. As a pressure tactic against the conservative apparatchiks, Gorbachev promoted non-party "popular fronts" in Russia and the Baltic republics, composed of pro-perestroika intellectuals. The "popular front" movement in Russia became the spawning ground for the anti-Communist "democrats" who would rally around Yeltsin against the Gorbachev regime. The Popular Fronts in the Baltic republics were quickly taken



Dimitryev/Argumenty i Fakty

**Soviet miners strike in summer of 1989 shook USSR, challenging Gorbachev's anti-working-class perestroika "market reforms."**

over by anti-Soviet nationalists who demanded secession from the USSR in order to join the capitalist "free world." Bureaucratic resistance against Gorbachev "going too far, too fast" coalesced around the figure of Yegor Ligachev, whose impotence expressed the absence of an alternative program, given that the Stalin-style "solution" of imposing mass terror and intimidation to suppress any perceived threat was no longer a viable option.

The destructive force of long suppressed nationalist antagonisms, unleashed by Gorbachev's perestroika, first broke through in the Caucasus. The conflict begun in early 1988 by Armenian nationalists over control of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region—a small, predominantly Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan—incited mutual communalist massacres. While much of the Western left took up the cause of the (Christian) Armenian nationalists, we denounced the fratricidal bloodletting, and pointed out how Gorbachev's market policies were encouraging the better-off nationalities (like Armenia) to seek to gain at the expense of weaker and poorer neighbors. The escalating war over Nagorno-Karabakh undermined the authority of the central Soviet government. In the Baltics, opposition to the stridently pro-capitalist nationalists such as the Lithuanian Sajudis was initially centered on the "Internationalist Front," predominantly composed of Russian-speaking workers. Meanwhile, the core of the USSR as a multinational state, the union of the Russian Federation and the Ukraine, was threatened by the emergence of the Ukrainian nationalist Rukh.

In the central Russian core of the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy/intelligentsia divided into two broad camps. Supporters of a full-fledged market economy and capitulation to Western imperialism called themselves "democrats." Many falsely assumed that capitalist restoration would instantaneously afford them a lifestyle similar to that of



ICL has fought for revolutionary internationalist program to defeat capitalist counterrevolution. ICL call (left) "Soviet Workers! Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!" was first statement widely distributed in USSR against Yeltsin's August 1991 pro-imperialist countercoup. February 1992 leaflet (right) called for formation of workers and soldiers soviets to stop capitalist restoration.

Wall Street and Frankfurt yuppies. A heterogeneous opposition to this course came to be identified as "patriots." They were defined by support for a strong Russian-centered state, but differed sharply over its socioeconomic basis. While prominent spokesmen included Colonel Viktor Alksnis, a vocal advocate of the "Chilean model" of capitalist transformation, by and large the "patriot" milieu consisted of "hardline" Stalinist opponents of Gorbachev. We warned from the outset that by harkening back to Great Russian nationalism, these elements were strengthening the hand of reactionary forces, including outright anti-Semites.

The pro-Western "democrats" initially lacked a strong organizational base to counter the entrenched "conservative" apparatus. They found a rallying point in Boris Yeltsin, who broke with Gorbachev in 1987. In his political comeback, becoming chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet in May 1990, Yeltsin built up popular support through pseudo-populist demagoguery and anti-Soviet Russian nationalism. He simultaneously railed against bureaucratic privileges, called for increased consumption through a cutback in military spending, and demanded increased economic autonomy for the Russian republic.

Under pressure from his base among the pro-Western intelligentsia and in the face of mounting economic crisis, in late August 1990 Gorbachev openly declared his support to capitalist restoration. After much hesitation, he endorsed a new program drawn up by his and Yeltsin's economic advisers to establish full-fledged capitalism in the Soviet Union within 500 days. In our first Russian-language leaflet we wrote:

"The 'liberal' Stalinist Gorbachev and his apologists claimed that perestroika (restructuring) meant the renewal and modernization of socialism. From the outset we warned that these market-oriented 'reforms' were designed to increase the privileges of the petty-bourgeois bureaucrats and intellectuals at the expense of the working class and would lay the basis for capitalist restoration. Now it is no longer a question of laying the basis but of posing capitalist restoration outright."

— "Soviet Workers: Smash Yeltsin/Gorbachev 500-Day Plan!" *Workers Vanguard* No. 510, 21 September 1990

Gorbachev subsequently abandoned the "500 days" program, but affirmed his commitment to capitalist restoration through "denationalization and privatization" at a slower pace. This led the imperialist bourgeoisie to fear that he had been "captured" by the bureaucratic "conservatives." Likewise Gorbachev's support to the January 1991 Soviet Army intervention aimed at preventing Lithuanian secession, and his denunciation of the Lithuanian Sajudis

for seeking to establish a "bourgeois regime," indicated to the Western powers that the Soviet president was unwilling to accept the breakup of the USSR into imperialist neo-colonies as he had earlier accepted the breakup of East Europe. Western imperialism began visibly withdrawing its support from Gorbachev, to Yeltsin's advantage.

Gorbachev's evolution from "market socialism" reforms to a program of outright capitalist restoration proved yet again the impossibility of "reforming" the Stalinist regime. The Stalinist bureaucracy was a brittle caste whose existence was threatened by any substantial loosening of its control over the political and economic life of society. In Hungary 1956, the "reform Stalinist" regime of Imre Nagy was rapidly overshadowed by an incipient proletarian political revolution. In the Soviet Union, "market socialism" was paving the way for counterrevolution, as it did in Yugoslavia. In the July 1988 Spartacist pamphlet "'Market Socialism' in Eastern Europe," we noted:

"The program of 'market socialism' is basically a product of liberal Stalinism.... It generates unemployment and inflation, widens inequalities within the working class and throughout society, creates dependency on international bankers, intensifies national divisions and conflicts, and enormously strengthens the internal forces of capitalist restoration."

#### 4. August 1991: Counterrevolution Takes the Ascendancy

##### I

With the imperialists backing away from Gorbachev (sending him home empty-handed from the July 1991 London G-7 conference), his evident weakness set the stage for the pathetic coup attempt by the beleaguered apparatchiks who were the chief ministers in his last regime. The precipitant was the imminent signing of a new union treaty which, by ceding significant central powers to the republics, posed the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and threatened to deprive the top administrative and party hacks of their bureaucratic fiefdoms.

Insofar as the coup plotters' "State Emergency Committee" had a coherent program, it was the bureaucratically controlled restoration of capitalism within a strong, unitary Soviet state: "perestroika without glasnost." We termed it the "perestroika coup." The Committee did not even demagogically appeal to "socialism" or the interests of the working class, instead declaring that it would "support private

enterprise" and endorsing Gorbachev's abandonment of East Europe to NATO imperialism.

Significantly, the hapless coup plotters made no attempt to suppress their main antagonist, Boris Yeltsin, nor even to disrupt his "hotline" to Washington, for fear of offending the Western powers and igniting a civil war, which would have unleashed social forces they could not control. The imperialist bourgeoisie grasped this long awaited opportunity to destroy the governing apparatus of the Soviet Union and install a pliant capitalist-restorationist regime in Moscow. Bush openly orchestrated the "resistance" of the Yeltsin "White House." Faced with the opposition of world imperialism, the "perestroika coup" collapsed within three days.

While Western imperialist propaganda (echoed by much of the left) hailed the Yeltsin countercoup as the "new Russian Revolution," in reality there was *no* significant mass opposition to the Kremlin coup. Yeltsin's initial call for a general strike went totally unheeded. One of the more perceptive Soviet anti-Communist ideologues, Aleksandr Tsipko, observed: "But millions of people, the overwhelming majority of society, were indifferent toward the coup. Had the conspirators been able to hold out and to throw enough food into the markets, the people would have reconciled themselves quite rapidly to the new conservative government."

The Emergency Committee's refusal to move against Yeltsin, while ordering workers to stay at home or on the job, forestalled socialist-minded workers and elements of the armed forces from fighting the counterrevolutionary scum (fascists, black marketeers, yuppies) on the Yeltsin barricades. While some rump Stalinists, such as the Moscow Workers Council, even talked of workers militias, it was for the "carrying out of the orders and instructions of the State Committee," which ordered workers not to mobilize.

What was needed, as we noted at the time, was a call for workers mobilizations to defeat the Yeltsinite forces. *This would have been the beginning of a proletarian political revolution.* In a polemic against pseudo-Trotskyist apologists for Yeltsin, we noted:

"The coup plotters were not only irresolute but didn't want to unleash the forces that could have defeated the more extreme counterrevolutionaries, for that could have led to a civil war if the Yeltsinites really fought back. And in an armed struggle pitting outright restorationists against recalcitrant elements of the bureaucracy, defense of the collectivized economy would have been placed on the agenda whatever the Stalinists' intentions."

— "Cheerleaders for Yeltsin's Counterrevolution,"  
*Workers Vanguard* No. 535, 27 September 1991

The question was thus posed: Had the proletarian state power established by the 1917 October Revolution been destroyed in August 1991 as triumphantly proclaimed by the imperialist bourgeoisie and echoed by most self-styled leftists? In reply, we recalled Trotsky's statement in "The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism" (1935):

"The inevitable collapse of Stalinist Bonapartism would immediately call into question the character of the USSR as a workers' state. A socialist economy cannot be constructed without a socialist power. The fate of the USSR as a socialist state depends upon that political regime that will arise to replace Stalinist Bonapartism."

The regime which *immediately* replaced Stalinist bonapartism in August 1991 was the capitalist-restorationist one of Yeltsin & Co. However, that government was installed through a narrowly based countercoup without the involvement, polarization or defeat of either the working class

or the armed forces. Hence it was fragile and potentially transitory. Lacking a solid state structure to impose counterrevolutionary "order," the Yeltsin regime could be overthrown in the course of working-class resistance to "free market" immiseration. Thus the proletarian state power in the USSR had been *fractured* in August but *not yet destroyed*. As we wrote: "The state power has been fractured, the Communist Party—its bureaucratic core—shattered and banned from the KGB and armed forces, the multinational union is ripping apart as one republic after another proclaims secession" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 533, 30 August 1991).

The ICL called for a proletarian political revolution to overthrow Yeltsin's capitalist-restorationist government in Russia and its counterparts in other republics, and to reforge the Soviet Union on Leninist principles under the leadership of an authentically communist vanguard party. This perspective was concretized at the time: 1) the formation of independent workers committees in factories, mines and other enterprises to prevent layoffs and privatization by taking over control of production; 2) the formation in the armed forces of committees of soldiers and officers to prevent anti-Communist purges and the use of the army against the interests of the workers; 3) the formation of multinational workers defense guards to ward off communalist massacres.

In contrast, most ostensibly Trotskyist groupings either took their stand on Yeltsin's counterrevolutionary barricades (in some cases, literally) and/or moved with shameless haste to declare the Soviet Union dead and buried, finally disencumbering themselves of the albatross of (abstract, in concrete mostly the opposite) Soviet defensism.

## II

With the fate of the homeland of the October Revolution decisively posed, the ICL issued a call: "Soviet Workers! Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!" Distributed in tens of thousands of copies, this was the first piece of propaganda widely circulated in the Soviet Union calling for workers resistance against the counterrevolutionary drive. At the huge Revolution Day march on 7 November 1991 and at subsequent anti-Yeltsin protests, our comrades have intervened as a revolutionary-internationalist pole. We sharply denounced Great Russian chauvinism and anti-Semitism, and sought to crystallize out of these heterogeneous mobilizations a core of cadre committed to the principles of Lenin and Trotsky's October. An ICL banner, "No to Capitalist Restoration! Yes to the Gains of October!", was prominently displayed as several thousand officers of the Soviet Army gathered on January 17 in the Kremlin.

In our post-coup article (*Workers Vanguard* No. 533, 30 August 1991), we wrote that "while Yeltsin & Co. now see a clear field to push through a forced-draft reintroduction of capitalism, *the outcome is not yet definitively decided*.... Opposition from the factories against the ravages of capitalist assault could throw a giant wrench in the works and prevent the rapid consolidation of counterrevolution." We noted that none of the imperialist powers was prepared "to finance a capitalist takeover." And we added: "The forces backing Yeltsin would like to be a capitalist class, but they are not yet one."

The price the imperialists are demanding for even the most paltry of aid packages is the massive unemployment of the working class and the *deindustrialization* of Russia, reducing its economy to that of a Third World supplier of



raw materials, especially oil and natural gas, to the world capitalist market. In December, under the prodding of Washington, Yeltsin, joined by the heads of the other Slavic entities, the Ukraine and Byelorussia, decreed the dissolution of the USSR and took over the Kremlin in the name of Russia, unceremoniously dumping Gorbachev as titular head of a nominal central government.

A month later, Yeltsin imposed draconian price rises on food and other necessities. On February 23, the militia (police) and elite Russian OMON (paramilitary) units were used to attack a demonstration marking Soviet Army Day. Around this time, the ICL called for the establishment of workers defense committees to seize government warehouses, confiscate private hoards and oversee the distribution of necessary goods. These nuclei of workers militias, in coordination with pro-socialist elements of the Soviet Army, could have been the spearhead of political revolution.

In the absence of the conscious proletariat organized in its own class interests, the Soviet armed forces, the only remaining multinational institution, have remained passive, dependent on Yeltsin for their paychecks. Elements of the high command have struggled to maintain a unified military in the face of conflicts between Russia and the Ukraine over the disposition of the Black Sea Fleet, but significant sections of the officer corps appear to be increasingly under the sway of Great Russian chauvinism, particularly in fratricidal wars involving Slavic-speaking minorities, as in Moldova. Such conflicts could lead to the rapid Russification of the Red Army officer corps—in both ethnic composition and ideological persuasion—comparable to the Serbianization of the Yugoslav People's Army through the nationalist wars which destroyed that deformed workers state.

While the separation of the tiny Baltic statelets under counterrevolutionary nationalists did not fundamentally affect the existence of the Soviet Union, the declaration of independence by the Ukraine in December 1991 heralded the dissolution of the USSR. The Ukraine was the second most populous and important republic in the USSR, the historic "breadbasket" of the Soviet Union. This proclama-

tion was both a concession to and emboldened more extreme nationalist and fascist forces, particularly in the heavily interpenetrated Western Ukraine, which has seen a grotesque resurgence of the Banderite fascists who collaborated with the Nazi occupation in murdering Poles, Jews and Communists. At the same time, there is evidence of a strong revulsion against nationalism among leftist elements in the Ukraine.

Most decisively, saddled with the legacy of decades of atomization and paralysis under the heavy hand of Stalinism, the working class has not yet moved in any significant way, despite evident and widespread sentiment against the restoration of capitalism. A note by comrade Jim Robertson, dated 11 April 1992, summed up the current situation in Russia:

"If Yeltsin can get his multibillion-dollar aid package from the big capitalist powers and if the police become simple docile machine instruments and if the armed forces are brought around to regime control—which does not seem to have yet occurred—then continued political passivity by the bulk of the workforce and its continued isolation from recalcitrants in the rest of society will likely add up to the vanishing of the workers state in any form or sense whatsoever.

"If Yeltsin or a comparable successor is to nail down a capitalist regime, albeit with little capital and a black-market bourgeoisie, probably they would find precipitating (and winning) a big bloodbath to be a suitable statement to the masses that things are then different and are going to stay that way."

Developments have continued to point in a dire direction. Stories abound in the press of "primitive capitalist accumulation," i.e., theft: Managers and former bureaucrats are scrambling, using all manner of shady practices to get their hands on socialized property—encouraged, abetted and advised by international imperialism. The recent strike by air traffic controllers in the Russian federation was decisively broken by the Yeltsin government using the OMON and elements of the MVD and KGB. An African student at Patrice Lumumba University was shot down by the Moscow militia amidst a hysterical racist press campaign. Tons

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of volumes of the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin are being destroyed in a pure ideological anti-communist frenzy. Yeltsin has reorganized the top echelons of the military, putting in a new layer of officers marked either by subservience to Yeltsin or by strident Russian nationalism. On May 7 he created a separate Russian army with himself as commander in chief. As the CIA's "Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty" (21 August 1992) observed:

"In many important respects, the appointment of [rabidly nationalist] General of the Army Pavel Grachev to the post of Russian defense minister on 18 May 1992 marked the beginning of the post-Soviet period in the security sphere, much as the creation of the CIS in December 1991 had marked the end of the Soviet period in the political sphere."

Now the Cross of St. Andrew, not the red flag, flies over the fleets of the former Soviet Navy.

Given the linear extension of recent developments, the International Conference is compelled to note and draw conclusions from the position that the degenerated workers state of Stalin and his heirs has been destroyed. This means that our work in Russia, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and elsewhere should be conditioned by the propositions that the bureaucracy has been obliterated as a caste and that a capitalist state, however fragile and reversible, has been created. The consolidation of this state through a big blood-bath—either a violent crackdown against the workers movement or a large-scale interethnic conflict à la Yugoslavia—is likely in the near future. The August 1991 events ("coup" and "countercoup") appear to have been decisive in the direction of development of the SU, but only those who are under the sway of capitalist ideology would have been hasty to draw this conclusion at the time.

The Soviet proletariat, having been completely politically disenfranchised for several generations—too long—is largely downtrodden, with historic consciousness which does not go back before WWII. In the Russian republic today, the overwhelming majority of self-described Communists (i.e., Stalinist "patriots"), far from seeking to lead the working class against the force of capitalist restoration, are pushing a program *more reactionary* than the consciousness of the mass of nonpoliticized workers. Following the Yeltsin countercoup, the rump Stalinists have moved ever more openly to embrace Great Russian chauvinists, monarchists and outright fascists in a "red-brown coalition." This was formalized in mid-March in a "United Opposition" whose founding document declares that "the salvation of the Fatherland is only possible through joint action on the basis of civil peace and national trust"—i.e., the suppression of *class* struggle in favor of Russian nationalism.

The Stalinist "patriots" have not sought to organize the working class, which in the main industrial centers is thoroughly *multinational*, reflecting the high degree of mobility and interethnic marriage in the Soviet Union. Their strategy is to pressure the Russian government to pursue a more nationalistic policy, echoing Yeltsin's vice president Aleksandr Rutskoi, who has denounced "free market" dogmatism in economic policy while pushing a more aggressive line on Russia's territorial claims in the Crimea, Moldova, etc.

Two currents seem to be contending among the present nascent rulers: Yeltsin's sellout to the International Monetary Fund which would turn the Russian economy into a Third World exporter of raw materials versus the recalibrants among the former plant managers, organized in

Arkady Volsky's Civic Union and other nationalists and fascists, who want to retain some semblance of an industrial base and are pushing for a subsidized military-industrial sector and a corporatist strong state. All this follows from Gorbachev's perestroika, i.e., the shattering from above of the deformed and Stalinist planned economy. There were, of course, particular steps in the decomposition of the Stalinist bureaucracy. In the service of an emerging bureaucracy Stalin and Bukharin, with their "socialism in one country," trampled on the internationalist communism of Lenin and Trotsky. The Brezhnev period, with its overt personal corruption at the bureaucratic top, made the ideology of "socialism in one country" completely cynical and empty.

The internal collapse of the Soviet Union is a considerable defeat for the world's working class and a catastrophe for Soviet workers. There remains, however, considerable instability. The struggle continues, in Russia and internationally, and under the variously different conditions that follow from an antagonistic world imperialist division of labor. There is no reason to believe that the vast area of the ex-USSR, being brutally deindustrialized by world imperialism, is not a fertile and important place for the work of our international organization.

### III

As early as 1984, the ICL made serious efforts, through visits and literature distributions, to get our propaganda into the hands of Soviet citizens. Our sustained presence in Moscow began in late 1990 and was reinforced in May 1991. That this was pretty late was due largely to the lack of Russian-language capacity among our international cadre. Our first Russian-language material appeared in *Spartacist* (English edition) in 1987-88 and our first Russian-language *Spartacist Bulletin* was published in autumn 1990, the beginning of the last period of the Gorbachev regime. Since then, we have published two more issues of our *Spartacist Bulletin*, numerous leaflets and offprints, and distributed hundreds of thousands of pieces of literature across Russia and the other republics, as well as to Red Army troops and officers stationed in the DDR. ICL branches, from Boston to Melbourne to Tokyo to Rouen, have gotten thousands of our Russian publications into the hands of seamen and touring artists.

The first major public presentation by Moscow Station was Martha Phillips' speech in July 1991 to the Moscow Workers Conference, which, while initiated by the Stalinist "patriots," was a broad forum for the expression of working-class discontent. Her Trotskyist call for the formation of genuine soviets to stop capitalist counterrevolution and for international socialist revolution received heavy applause from the several hundred delegates.

While virtually every organized political tendency in the Soviet Union has been sucked into the undertow of Russian nationalist reaction, we have stood out for taking a hard line on the most controversial social questions in this former Stalinist society. Soon after the nativist anti-Semites of Pamyat reared their heads, we began calling for workers mobilizations to smash these fascists, even as others dismissed the danger posed by the blackshirt thugs.

Our sharp opposition to anti-Semitism, in the face of its pervasive acceptance and promotion, has been a litmus test for those elements who sought to identify in some manner with the internationalist foundations of the Soviet workers

state. Our *Spartacist Bulletin* No. 3, titled "Leninist Party—Tribune of the People," is devoted to propagandizing the communist struggle against all forms of special oppression. Centering on the Jewish question, the bulletin also features the woman question and homosexual oppression.

Our perspective was and remains one of seeking to regroup a section of indigenous cadre around the authentic communism of Lenin and Trotsky, and to forge an ICL section across the former Soviet Union. We stand uniquely on unequivocal opposition to capitalist restoration. Others who pretend to this position in fact push some form of social-democratic "workers control" of capitalism. We recognized that those Soviet political activists—both workers and intellectuals—who considered themselves Communists and defenders of the October Revolution were likely to be under the sway of the "patriot" camp, which has been the organizational force behind anti-Yeltsin protests.

After Yeltsin's seizure of power, we participated in the demonstrations to defend the Lenin Museum and organized a contingent in the Revolution Day march. While we invariably were confronted by small groups of hardened anti-Trotskyist Stalinists and fascistic anti-Semites, we were usually able to ward off their attacks by appealing to other elements among the anti-Yeltsin protesters. But after the appearance of our leaflet which sharply attacked the nationalist leaders of the anti-Yeltsin opposition in March, escalating violence against our supporters forced us to curtail our Lenin Museum sale. Given the hardening of the "red-brown coalition," our regroupment perspective toward elements aligned with the "patriots" is not likely to bear early fruit. However, there is evidence of political discontent among some within the milieu over the ludicrous and suicidal alliance with fascists. Meanwhile, we have increasingly shifted our tactical orientation to emphasize the concentrated distribution of propaganda to Moscow's multinational proletariat at strategic industrial enterprises.

The murder of Moscow Station's most prominent leader, Martha Phillips, in February, by persons and for motives as yet unknown to us, was a tragic loss to the international tendency and a devastating setback for our work in the former Soviet Union. The fact that we continued our work in Moscow after our leading comrade was killed has made it harder for our opponents to simply dismiss us. However, we continue to be perceived as essentially an operation based on foreign ICL cadre. Meanwhile, the murder, along with stepped-up police harassment and surveillance, has had a chilling effect on recruitment possibilities. In addition to being an irrevocable loss to our work, the murder of Martha has left the central cadre internationally still reeling in shock and acute personal grief.

The looming mass unemployment and radical economic dislocation may yet generate working-class struggles and popular unrest. Should such struggles embrace the multinational proletariat, transcending localized economist actions and staying out of the grasp of nationalist forces who will seek to divert them into pogroms, they will inevitably throw up organs of proletarian dual power. An upsurge of major working-class struggle would also *explode* the "red-brown coalition," pushing leftist elements among the Stalinist "patriots" to the workers' side. In any case, the key to our immediate perspectives in Moscow Station lies in cohering a cadre before the counterrevolution consolidates through a bloody crackdown against the workers movement.

## 5. Germany: From Incipient Proletarian Political Revolution in the DDR to Capitalist Anschluss

A number of factors—both historical and current—combined to imbue the working class in the German Democratic Republic (DDR) with the highest level of social consciousness in Europe, East or West, at the time of the final collapse of Stalinist rule in the Soviet sphere. Prussia and Saxony were strongholds of the left wing of the pre-1914 Social Democracy and of the German Communist Party in the 1920s. Thus Soviet military occupation and subsequent social transformation took place in that section of Germany with the strongest proletarian socialist traditions. The Soviet occupation led to a purging from the former state apparatus of bourgeois functionaries who had served the Nazi regime, a purge that was far more thoroughgoing than elsewhere in East Europe.

Not accidentally, it was in East Germany that the first anti-bureaucratic workers political revolution in the deformed workers states broke out, on 17 June 1953. Newly opened DDR archives reveal that the uprising extended to 373 cities and towns, with strikes in 14 out of 15 district capitals and demonstrations involving some 500,000 people against the hated Ulbricht regime (Torsten Diedrich, *Der 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR*). Far from being the pro-Western uprising portrayed by both the Stalinists and the West German rulers, workers from the East German Hennigsdorf steel works marched through West Berlin to the East demanding a metal workers government. June 17 powerfully demonstrated the potential for our later Spartacist slogan for the revolutionary reunification of Germany through political revolution in the East and socialist revolution in the West.

Since the DDR was *not* a national state, its only basis for existence was social. Emigration acted as a political selection mechanism, with Nazi functionaries, hardened anti-Communists and German nationalists going to West Germany, while those who remained expressed at least passive willingness to be citizens of a self-described "socialist" state. That remained true after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961—a bureaucratic defense measure, which we have defended, to prevent the hemorrhaging of skilled labor. East Germany confronted a powerful imperialist state, which in the name of German nationalism denied the DDR's right to exist. To a significantly greater degree than its counterparts in East Europe and the USSR, the Ulbricht/Honecker regime appealed for legitimacy by emphasizing the "socialist" character and achievements of the DDR.

Within its narrow economic limits and under extremely tight bureaucratic control, the DDR provided its citizens with a high level of progressive social programs. The status of women—a key index of social progress—was the highest in Europe. For example, over 90 percent of East German women were employed. Access to free childcare and the relatively high wages of women workers plus a full year of paid maternity leave encouraged a birthrate higher than in West Germany (despite the latter's prohibition on abortion). As a result, the population in eastern Germany today is on average younger than in the west. The selection of a Jew, Gregor Gysi, to replace Honecker as head of the ruling party indicated the cosmopolitanism of the DDR's political

culture at a time of rising and rampant anti-Semitism throughout East Europe and the Soviet Union.

## I.

Over the last dozen years, the German section of the ICL, the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SpAD)—formerly Trotskistische Liga Deutschlands (TLD)—has experienced repeated problems. Its inability to recognize the rising climate of revanchist bourgeois nationalism in the country, disorienting the TLD in the “peace movement,” led to the TLD’s intolerable abstention, along with the rest of the German left, from protests organized by Jewish groups against the obscene 1985 Reagan-Kohl visit honoring Nazi SS officers at Bitburg. This led to the decision by the International Secretariat (ratified by a plenum of the TLD) to subject the section to a “controlled diaspora,” transferring out most German comrades for a period to work in other sections. This internationalization had a salutary effect, and the TLD was reconstituted two years later with the center shifted from Frankfurt to Hamburg and a small local in Berlin.

However, shortly thereafter, about a year before Honecker’s downfall, it was evident, even from the outside, that significant elements in the DDR were seeking to utilize Gorbachev’s glasnost to open up political and intellectual life. While recognizing this, the newly reconstituted TLD did not attempt to get suitable propaganda into the hands of DDR political activists. Nor did the I.S. alert the comrades to this opportunity early. Leftist-inclined oppositional groups were taking shape in the summer of 1989. Given the extremely tight control exercised by the East German security police (the Stasi), an effort to begin work in the DDR may well have been totally frustrated but should have been made nonetheless. As it was, we were perhaps the only current in Germany without an aggressive “Ostpolitik,” soon to face the task of shifting the center to Berlin and recruiting and integrating our initial cadre in the DDR while intervening in a complex and rapidly changing situation.

When in early October 1989 Honecker moved toward a show of force against the growing oppositional protests centered in Leipzig, he was ousted by his colleagues with the active support and probable encouragement of Gorbachev. The Soviet armed forces allowed the hardline Stalinist regime to collapse and did not subsequently intervene in the political struggles which determined the fate of the DDR. This produced an exceptionally open situation for Trotskyist political intervention in this deformed workers state in the period between October and the decisive victory of the German imperialist bourgeoisie in the 18 March 1990 DDR elections.

After Honecker’s fall, the Stalinist order rapidly unraveled. In a demonstration of a million people in East Berlin on November 4 there were numerous anti-bureaucratic, pro-communist slogans. To let off pressure, the DDR authorities opened the Berlin Wall four days later. Worried about imperialist pressure to impose capitalist reunification, leftist intellectuals and reform elements published an appeal, “For Our Land,” which sought to preserve a “socialist” DDR. A massive exodus of workers from the SED sparked a revolt in the ranks which in December swept out the entire old leadership. A new “reform” team came to the fore represented by Gysi as head of the party and Hans Modrow as DDR premier. To the old party name of SED

was appended Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).

The initial impulse of the East German masses was *not* for reunification with the Frankfurt bankers and Ruhr industrialists but rather to build a decent socialist society on the foundations of the DDR’s nationalized economy. In this respect the situation in November-December 1989 resembled that of Czechoslovakia in 1968, when the “liberal” Stalinist Alexander Dubcek’s slogan of “socialism with a human face” captured the aspirations of the working class and intelligentsia. However, the *international context* was radically different from that facing Czechoslovakia in 1968. The powerful West German imperialist state was able to apply enormous political and especially economic pressure toward the dissolution of the DDR. And the Kremlin bureaucracy under Gorbachev was no longer committed to maintaining Soviet military and therefore political dominance in East Germany.

But while a political revolution was unfolding, there was crucially little organized working-class participation during this period. Had there been mass workers mobilizations, a potential focal point for proletarian dual power existed in the Betriebskampfgruppen (factory militias). Comrade Albert-St. John wrote: “Particularly since the in-plant party and trade-union organizations disappeared after November, this national internal structure of a factory-based militia had the very real potential to become the organized political/military locus of the political revolution” (“For Marxist Clarity and a Forward Perspective,” September 1990, reprinted in *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 45-46, Winter 1990-91). Beginning in late December the Betriebskampfgruppen were quietly demobilized and disarmed by the “transitional” Gysi/Modrow regime.

While some Western leftists claim that the situation in the DDR was inherently counterrevolutionary from the outset, the reality was that a developing political revolution was steamrollered flat by the power of West German imperialism, which rammed through capitalist reunification. Only in December was the West German flag raised, and the slogan of the weekly Leipzig demonstrations changed from “We are the people” to “We are one people.”

This is not the first time in history that the forces of counterrevolution have overwhelmed a brewing revolution; Engels’ articles on 1848 collected in the book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* document such a transformation. Or as the quote on the cover of Part I of the “Documents and Discussion on the Collapse of Stalinism” in our *International Internal Bulletin* noted: “A little political revolution is a chancy thing; at bottom the workers take power or capitalist counterrevolution is ascendant.”

The Stalinist usurpation of the working class and decades of Stalinist rule in the deformed and degenerated workers states did untold, lasting damage to the international working class, undermining its consciousness of its own social power and destroying the organization necessary to bring its power to bear on society. Thus when the Stalinists abandoned the field, as they did in Germany, the working class was *disarmed, paralyzed* and infused with the *false consciousness* fostered over the course of decades (particularly popular-frontism and a profound disbelief that class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries is possible). Furthermore, the working class is conservative in transferring political loyalties, especially to an unproven, tiny propaganda group. Or as Trotsky wrote in 1940: “Workers in general do not easily break with the party that awakens them to

conscious life." The revolutionary party must wage a fight to capture this authority.

The working class was conflicted but continued to follow the SED, seeing it, falsely, as all that stood between them and capitalist restoration in the manner described by Trotsky. With the single exception of Treptow, which blew up in their faces, the Stalinists above all sought to avoid "chaos," i.e., avoid any mobilization of the workers. Furthermore, the whole spectrum of political parties and tendencies avoided the factories, assuming counterrevolution to be inevitable or even desirable and seeing the working class as merely the *passive object* of these events; in the manner of the parties of the Popular Front in Spain, they lulled the working class with their reassurances.

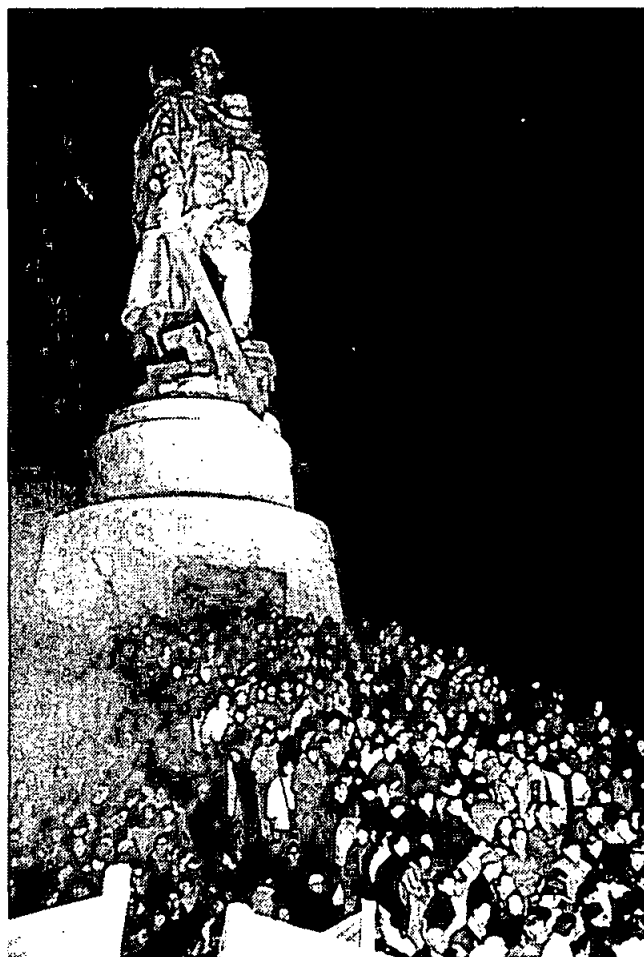
But as Treptow later showed, from the beginning we were in a political struggle with the abdicating Stalinist regime over the future of the DDR. While we were calling for a government of workers councils, the Stalinists were consciously acting to prevent a workers' insurrection by demobilizing all army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

The International Communist League undertook the biggest sustained mobilization in the history of our tendency, drawing upon the personnel and other resources of all sections to intervene in Germany. Beginning in early December we established a daily newsheet, *Arbeiterpressekorrespondenz* (Workers Press Correspondence), which circulated in thousands of copies in the DDR—the first time Trotskyists had ever attempted regular mass propaganda in a deformed workers state.

A central lesson of our intervention in Germany, both in the period of incipient proletarian political revolution and in the drive toward counterrevolutionary capitalist Anschluss, is a reaffirmation of Trotsky's point in *The Lessons of October*: a party that lacks a leadership capable of abrupt shifts, both in appreciation and tactics, threatens to run the locomotive of the revolution off the tracks. Of the various mistakes made in carrying out the correct and vital struggle in Germany, the most serious was our failure to intervene early on when the situation was open.

To intervene effectively in the DDR we had to overcome a propaganda-circle mentality within the TLD, which was rather slow to reorient to the tasks and hyperaccelerated pace of a revolutionary situation, exacerbated by a debate which had not been completely resolved nor digested in the section on separate parties in East and West Germany. This deprived us of potential recruits in the initial, very open period, significantly limiting our effectiveness later on. Thus the first of the Spartakist Gruppen, transitional organizations for recruiting socialist militants in the DDR, was not formed until mid-December.

To emphasize the need for internationalism, as opposed to narrow DDR nationalism, we published greetings in their own language to Soviet soldiers and Cuban, Mozambican, Vietnamese and Polish workers in East Germany. Our central programmatic line was to establish in the DDR a government based on workers councils (soviets) as a springboard to a unified German proletarian state within a Socialist United States of Europe. We called for a Leninist-egalitarian party, in sharp counterposition to the manifestly bankrupt Stalinists.



Spartakist

**East Berlin, 3 January 1990: 250,000 rallied in Treptow Park following Spartakist-initiated call to protest desecration of memorial to Red Army soldiers who died liberating Germany from Nazis.**

Our extensive sales and distribution of literature during the crucial months were received with satisfying degrees of curiosity, interest and sympathy in factories, universities and army units in East Berlin and elsewhere in the DDR, as well as among Soviet officers and soldiers stationed there. We later learned that our call for workers and soldiers' councils had been widely discussed within units of the East German National People's Army (NVA), leading to the formation of incipient soldiers' committees particularly in the northeast, where we eventually recruited a number of NVA officers. But we were not able to become and be seen as an effective, widely based organizing nucleus for an immediate struggle against counterrevolution.

The question of our influence among working-class leaders was not abstract. Throughout December we had numerous political discussions with some Betriebskampfgruppen leaders and assisted them in drafting and producing two leaflets protesting plans to sell their factory to German capitalists. They spoke of these leaflets as "joint actions with the Spartakist Gruppen" because, they said, they still had a party of their own, the SED. They sought out the Trotskyists because "their" party was selling them out, a fact they understood but refused to criticize publicly. Our intense discussions with them often ran into the stone wall of Stalinist false consciousness. But the contradictions expressed in these "joint actions," writ large, undoubtedly explained the pressure felt by the SED tops in the period

before Treptow. This pressure was generated by *our* intervention, *our* propaganda and *our* agitation.

Our intervention had an impact on the political situation in the DDR exceeding by orders of magnitude our own relatively small forces. The exodus from the SED in November and the collapse of its central leadership created an organizational vacuum in the factories as party and trade unions disappeared. Our agitation and propaganda to a significant degree filled that vacuum by offering a fighting socialist perspective against capitalist reunification.

## II

Our growing political impact led to the Treptow demonstration of January 3, the most historically significant mobilization ever initiated by our international tendency. When in late December fascists desecrated the Soviet military memorial in Treptow Park in East Berlin, we hand-carried a statement protesting the desecration of the memorial addressed to the commander of the Soviet forces in East Germany and brought a copy to the SED tops. We initiated and widely circulated a call for a united-front workers mobilization on January 3 against this outrage. Under pressure from their base to counter the growing rightist provocations, the SED-PDS leadership decided to build this demonstration.

A quarter of a million people turned out in East Berlin to express their solidarity with the Red Army against German fascism, cutting directly against the social-democratic (and nationalist/fascist) crusade for "Occupiers Out." This huge, pro-Soviet workers mobilization also reflected anger and frustration about the increasing talk of "unity" with West Germany. Participants and those listening via radio and TV heard two counterposed political programs: that of the Stalinists represented by Gregor Gysi and that of the revolutionary Trotskyists Renate Dahlhaus and Toralf Endruweit. Treptow posed for the first time the possibility of organized working-class resistance to capitalist reunification from the worker base of the SED-PDS.

It was the spectre of organized working-class resistance to reunification that created the alarm and the ensuing anti-communist furor and mobilizations. German imperialism and its Social Democratic agents responded to Treptow with a furious campaign to break the authority of the SED-PDS. The West German bourgeois media, the Social Democrats (SPD) and their local satellites (e.g., the New Forum, the United Left), echoed by much of the Western pseudo-Trotskyist left, claimed that both the desecration of the Soviet military memorial and the protest against it were "Stasi tricks" designed to re-establish a Stalinist police state. In the government's semi-advisory "Round Table," a popular front including right- and left-wing groupings, pro-reunification politicians lambasted the SED for associating with Trotskyist revolutionaries. They were particularly incensed that we had accurately described the SPD as the "Trojan horse of counterrevolution."

The Stalinists quickly buckled under to the rightist offensive. In mid-January the governing coalition was expanded to include eight parties of the Round Table opposition, rendering the SED-PDS a minority in the cabinet. The scheduled elections for the Volkskammer (parliament), which the SED-PDS was expected to lose, were moved up from May to mid-March. The Volkskammer passed legislation allowing foreign capital to buy up to 49 percent ownership of the

DDR's nationalized enterprises. At the same time, the Stalinists dropped SED from their party name, symbolizing a severing of its historic association with the DDR.

In January, the SpAD was formed through a fusion of the TLD and Spartakist Gruppen. The SpAD subsequently announced it would run in the elections on a program of "No to capitalist reunification" and "For a red Germany of workers councils in a socialist Europe."

In late January Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would accept the dissolution of the DDR into a unified capitalist Germany, a position seconded by Modrow. These announcements were a bombshell for workers and intellectuals who wanted and expected a revitalized socialist society. The independent existence of the DDR could now be maintained only against the declared policy of all world powers and its own government.

The lines of political polarization shifted almost immediately from opposition vs. support to reunification to differences over the terms of reunification. A number of our comrades working in the DDR were disoriented by the abrupt rightward shift in the political climate. As comrade Nelson noted in his report to the Berlin CC meeting on 17 February 1990:

"Something happened politically here—in East Germany, and to our organization—after January 3. And this is now with the benefit of hindsight. At the time, what we saw was that two contacts at the Narva plant didn't want to talk to us anymore. And there were some problems about whether *we* were trying to get hold of *them* or whether there was a problem in *our* organization. Except what was really happening is that after the Treptow demonstration the SPD launched a ferocious propaganda attack against the SED combined with anti-communist mobilizations that forced the SED into a rapid motion to the right. Under the impact of the SPD's criticisms, the Modrow government simply collapsed and capitulated politically. And then Gorbachev said, 'Go ahead, have a unified Germany.' At that point the imperialists began to have a consensus. Earlier the United States was not so anxious for a unified Germany. Now they all agree that they'll never get a chance like this again. This has caused a broad demoralization among the population of the DDR....

"The problem is, I think that demoralization found its way into our organization."

This disorientation was expressed in the proposed slogan "For the Unity of the SED," reflecting an unrealistic expectation that the decomposing East German bureaucracy would resist incorporation into West Germany. This was quickly corrected through intervention by the International Secretariat. But from virtually the founding of the SpAD in mid-January up to mid-February, the section was gripped by near-paralysis, so that nothing was done in this period on the election campaign. This cost us valuable time in our efforts to marshal working-class resistance to capitalist reunification.

During the campaign for the 18 March 1990 Volkskammer elections, the SpAD was the *only* party to unambiguously and forthrightly oppose capitalist reunification, even offering a no-contest pact with any other party taking this stand. No other party, however, took this minimal principled stand. The "D-mark election" was won in a landslide by the East German appendage of Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the ruling West German bourgeois party. East Germans, both workers and petty bourgeois, calculated that by voting for the dominant party of German capitalism, rather than the oppositional Social Democrats or erstwhile Stalinist PDS, they would get the

best deal from the ruling class of the new reunified state. This illusion was quickly and brutally exploded.

The wide impact of our intervention in the DDR testifies not only to the power of the Trotskyist program but also to the strong affinity for socialist values among the working class there. The subsequent growth of the German section is primarily from the former DDR. Our new eastern German recruits are mostly young workers and soldiers. The SpAD has won recognition, and our Trotskyist propaganda continues to receive a more sympathetic hearing from workers in eastern Germany (e.g., regular readership of our press) than anywhere else in the world. The work in the DDR was a springboard for our work in East Europe and the Soviet Union.

### III

While there were numerous serious problems and errors which undercut the effectiveness of our work in the DDR, what was outstanding was the marshaling of the forces of the entire ICL (and of many sympathizers, who gave generously to the Lenin-Liebkecht-Luxemburg Fund) to fight tooth and nail against counterrevolution. Something over one-third of the entire membership of the ICL traveled to the DDR in this period (the overwhelming majority managing to get there on their own steam), which also had the effect of greatly internationalizing the membership. Many of those who stayed behind were engaged in indispensable support work, e.g., German-language *Spartacist* and an issue of *Spartakist* were produced in New York to free up German-speaking cadre for work in the DDR. This extraordinary mobilization also had inherent weaknesses. For example, at least half the comrades on site at any given moment could not speak German.

The intervention of the International Communist League in the DDR was a testimony to how the struggle for Trotskyist clarity and principle prepares for the sharp tests of the class struggle. More than a decade of fighting the anti-Soviet war drive—as for example with our years-long propaganda campaign to expose KAL 007 as an imperialist provocation—and confronting the capitulation of the Stalinist tops, as over Afghanistan, had prepared the comrades to go into battle in Germany. *The workers of the world, and we among them, suffered a grave defeat with the victory of the Fourth Reich. But we fought.*

Internationally, the ICL's widely recognized campaign against capitalist reunification drew a hard line against the pseudo-Trotskyist groups, all of whom supported or accepted imperialist Anschluss (annexation) of East Germany. The importance of our principled struggle and intense intervention against capitalist reunification is underlined as the ravages of the Fourth Reich make themselves felt throughout Europe, not least in Germany itself.

### IV

The decisive victory of the Christian Democrats in the March 1990 elections sealed the destruction of the DDR at the political level. The currency union inaugurated on 1 July 1990, which established the deutschmark as the medium of exchange, and the takeover of nationalized enterprises by the West German Treuhandanstalt (Trusteeship Agency) dissolved the East German deformed workers state at the economic level. However, capitalist reunification was marked neither by civil war nor by mass working-class resistance. As the first counterrevolution in a deformed workers state, this raised theoretical questions which the Marxist movement had not yet faced. These issues were

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taken up in discussion within the ICL on the collapse of Stalinism. Two of the most synthetic contributions were published in *Spartacist* (English edition) No. 45-46, Winter 1990-91.

Did recognizing that there had been "peaceful" counter-revolution in East Germany amount to "reformism in reverse," as Trotsky wrote about those who argued in the 1930s that the Soviet Union had become capitalist? In the discussion, it was noted that Trotsky's observation concerned not the question of violence but rather the conception of gradual, incremental changes in the class character of the state. As Trotsky wrote in "The Class Nature of the Soviet State" (October 1933): "He who asserts that the Soviet government has been *gradually* changed from proletarian to bourgeois is only, so to speak, running backwards the film of reformism."

Trotsky's *prognosis* was that a civil war would be required to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union and undo the deepgoing proletarian revolution. But as Trotsky noted in *The Third International After Lenin*: "If an army capitulates to the enemy in a critical situation without a battle, then this capitulation completely takes the place of a 'decisive battle,' in politics as in war." The East German deformed workers state, which had been established largely from the top down and from without, was swallowed by more powerful West German imperialism. Lacking any viable perspective, the bureaucracy simply collapsed. There was nothing gradual about it: The DDR state apparatus was not *reformed*, but purged and dismantled by the victors.

This raised the more general issue of the role of consciousness in the building of a workers state. In his article "The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism" (February 1935), Trotsky emphasized the differences between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions:

"While the bourgeois state, after the revolution, confines itself to a police role, leaving the market to its own laws, the workers' state assumes the direct role of economist and organizer.... *In contradistinction to capitalism, socialism is built not automatically but consciously.*"

While resting on and deriving its privileges from proletarian property forms, the Stalinist bureaucracy was not irrevocably committed to their defense. In the absence of working-class resistance under a conscious revolutionary leadership, the destruction of a workers state without a cataclysmic civil war is not precluded.

## V

In the aftermath of reunification, the German bourgeoisie deliberately dismantled the manufacturing base of what was the tenth leading industrial country in the world. Industrial output has plummeted by 75 percent since 1989. A year after the establishment of the currency union, almost 5 million workers out of a labor force of 9.5 million were either unemployed outright, on "short-time work" or forced out of the labor market. The mass unemployment especially victimized women, whose condition was further degraded by the closure of day-care centers and attacks on abortion rights. The closure of eastern Germany's industrial enterprises was not based on calculations of capitalist profitability. It was politically designed to *atomize and demoralize* the traditionally socialist proletariat of the DDR, and to wreak vengeance for Germany's defeat at the hands of the Red Army in World War II.

Under the shock of mass unemployment, angry and des-

perate strikes and worker protests broke out in eastern Germany in the spring of 1991. The protesters demonstrated a special hatred for Helmut Kohl, who was pelted with vegetables when he spoke in Halle in May. The very desperation of these actions revealed the workers' lack of strategic economic power. Nevertheless, this highly class-conscious proletariat has now been incorporated into the strongest bourgeois state in Europe. The Fourth Reich's strength lies not only in its military/police apparatus and economic resources but also in the tight control of the Social Democratic bureaucracy over the western German labor movement, the strategic core of the European industrial proletariat. And this control has now been shaken.

Our strategic perspective must be to direct the struggles of the volatile, socialist-minded working class in eastern Germany as a lever to break the stranglehold of the Social Democratic bureaucracy over the powerful western German labor movement. However, this perspective cannot be realized through the spontaneous extension of economic struggles; it must include breaking the residual political authority of the PDS. We must recruit a core cadre of eastern German worker militants to a Marxist, i.e., Trotskyist, understanding of the catastrophe which Stalinism has brought upon them. Comrade Al Nelson wrote to the SpAD in July 1991:

"The workers in what was formerly the DDR are being driven by sheer desperation and fear into elemental struggles for some kind of survival. Some level of illusions about the 'good life' that was to accompany 'unification' are being shattered. But do the workers understand any more about how and why this is happening to them than they did in 1990 when 85 percent voted for the CDU or SPD coalitions? It is the task of the SpAD to bring this historical, theoretical, communist consciousness into the proletariat. If instead we treat these protests and strikes as trade-union struggles...we necessarily assist in maintaining their present low level and narrow scope."

The economic attack on the eastern German working class has been paralleled on the political plane by an anti-Communist witchhunt against former DDR officials. This is represented in its most grotesque form by the prosecution of the 84-year-old former head of DDR State Security, Erich Mielke—on charges brought by Nazi prosecutors!—for the shooting of two Berlin policemen in the late Weimar Republic *over 60 years ago*, when he was a young Communist Party militant. And former DDR chief Erich Honecker has been imprisoned by the Fourth Reich—accused of ordering defense of the borders of the DDR—in the same jail where he was held by the Gestapo during the Third Reich.

The aim of this anti-Communist witchhunt is to portray the DDR as a criminal state, thereby delegitimizing any popular struggles, especially in the name of socialism, against the bourgeois order. The SpAD's defense of former DDR officials persecuted by the bourgeois state is thus a vital component of a revolutionary proletarian perspective in Germany. As we have written, they are being tried by the wrong class for the wrong crimes; a victorious proletarian revolution would have its own scores to settle with the Stalinist bureaucrats. We have defended the PDS against witchhunting attacks, while these born-again social democrats turn over their treasury and their treasurers to the vindictive bourgeois state.

Defense of immigrant workers and asylum seekers has taken on added importance in Germany, as a wave of fascist attacks has targeted foreign workers. In the fall of 1991, this reached the level of pogroms in the economically depressed east German lignite mining town of





Spartakist



Financial Times

**Trotskyists intervene in mass protests against escalating fascist terror in Europe with call for proletarian-centered mobilizations. Left: Spartakist contingent in August 1992 demonstration against Nazi attacks on refugee hostel in Rostock, Germany carries banner reading "Workers/Immigrants: Stop the Nazis Now!" Right: Jewish students among 30,000 workers and youth demonstrating against anti-Semitism in Rome, 9 November 1992.**

Hoyerswerda, where fascist-led mobs terrorized immigrant hostels for several nights with the complicity of the police. Now the state-authorized pogrom in Rostock has set off a wave of racist atrocities around the country. This underscores the organic connection between the rise of violent anti-immigrant racism and resurgent German nationalism, with the added element in eastern Germany of economic despair and the lumpenization of youth. This is fueled by open state racism, as all the major parties, from the CDU to the SPD, PDS and the Greens, join in calling for one form or another of restricting immigration. Small fascist parties have made striking electoral gains campaigning on anti-"foreigner" racism.

While resurgent German chauvinism primarily targets dark-skinned immigrant workers and refugees, the sharp rise in fascist and state-organized anti-Semitism symbolizes the German bourgeoisie's ever more arrogant flouting of world outrage over its perpetration of the Holocaust. Thus we see today endless Nazi desecrations of Jewish cemeteries and concentration camp memorials; the membership in the SPD of a prominent politico who killed five Jews in the Ukraine in 1941; the horrendous months-long SPD-led campaign against Orthodox Jews demonstrating to prevent the final destruction of an ancient cemetery in Hamburg; and the recent move of Rostock's district attorney to lock two French Jews away for five years for hanging a sign on city hall commemorating the Roma and Jewish victims of the Nazis.

A central aspect of the SpAD's work in the present period has been agitation for full citizenship rights for foreign workers and those seeking asylum, and for labor/immigrant mobilizations to stop fascist terror. This has sharply counterposed us to the PDS as it shifts rightward in adapting to the present political climate of the Fourth Reich. These erstwhile Stalinists turned social democrats echo the anti-Semitism and racism of the bourgeois parties (e.g., toward Gypsies) and call for more cops. The PDS' latest attempt

to make itself useful to a bourgeoisie that wants to destroy it is Gysi's co-sponsorship of a popular-front "Committee for Justice" together with prominent east German right-wingers, seeking to divert popular discontent into safe channels.

## VI

In Germany today, long complacent social-democratic workers in the west are facing a capitalist drive to reduce consumption levels and social benefits which the workers have come to regard as their right. The working people of eastern Germany, who retain strong egalitarian values, are deeply antagonistic to the present political leadership of the Fourth Reich. And a large fraction of the two million foreign workers (Turks, South Slavs, etc.) in Germany are integrated at the bottom into the strategic unionized industrial proletariat. These foreign workers are alienated from the German bourgeois order and can act as a militant counterweight to the conservative, nationalistic Social Democratic bureaucracy.

The right-wing political climate that accompanied the counterrevolutionary destruction of the DDR received a dramatic jolt in May with the public service and transport workers strike in western Germany. This was the first major battle between the strongest trade-union movement in the capitalist world and the masters of German imperialism, a manifestation of a fundamental contradiction of the Fourth Reich. The German bourgeoisie is pushing to increase the rate of exploitation of its own proletariat in order to extract the economic surplus necessary to re-integrate the former DDR and to establish a neocolonial sphere of influence in East Europe, the Balkans and the former Soviet republics.

During the Cold War, West Germany's international role, despite its growing economic strength, was severely circumscribed by U.S. imperialism and the Soviet Union.



The German bourgeoisie saw in the annexation of the DDR and the collapse of Stalinist rule in the Soviet sphere an opportunity to obtain through economic means the goals of the Nazi Third Reich. For the Fourth Reich to achieve political domination in East Europe (comparable to U.S. imperialism's domination of Latin America), Germany would have to buy out and prop up the governing and military/police apparatuses from Tudjman's Croatia to Yeltsin's Russia. This requires an enormous expenditure of economic surplus, and it will be years before there is any economic return on such neocolonial political investment.

The German bourgeoisie is thus scrapping the system of "social partnership" (i.e., class collaboration with the Social Democratic bureaucracy) which prevailed since World War II and is moving toward the program associated with Reagan's America and Thatcher's Britain—driving down wages, breaking the power of the unions and slashing social benefits (e.g., public health care). But there are big obstacles in the way of applying the Reagan/Thatcher program in Germany today.

The western German labor movement is far stronger organizationally and more class-conscious in an economist sense than the U.S. unions in the 1970s. Unlike Britain, Germany has not suffered a long period of industrial decay leading to mass unemployment and lumpenization which would undercut union power. And unlike the British and American bourgeoisies, which were mainly interested in looting cash-rich sectors of their economies, the German capitalists are seeking to expand internationally, for which they must maintain a productive industrial base.

On balance, the Fourth Reich is unlikely to achieve through economic means what the Third Reich failed to do by military means. The attempt to do so will intensify the class struggle in Germany itself, increase tension between the German and other European bourgeoisies (witness the doubtful outcome of the Maastricht Treaty ratification), and perpetuate chaos in East Europe.

## VII

Conditions in Germany appear favorable for the growth of a Trotskyist party. The Spartakist Workers Party is today just about the only political organization which spans east and west Germany precisely because we fought against capitalist reunification. The better to suppress the working class east and west, the social democrats (SPD and PDS) and Greens maintain *separate* organizations, as do even pseudo-Trotskyists like the Mandelites. The contradictions on which these inveterate opportunists are impaled have been acutely sharpened by counterrevolution: While some Mandelites internationally *hailed* capitalist reunification, their West German comrades (buried in a common organization with Stalinists) did nothing; the East German Mandelites set up their own group, which continues its separate existence two years after reunification!

A major and urgent task for our German section has been to achieve a genuine fusion of comrades coming from very different political cultures with very different standards of living. This led to a crisis and a political fight in the SpAD this year over maintaining and strengthening the local in Halle, situated in the industrial heartland of the former DDR. As one of the comrades from the east wrote: "So we still have in Germany our two sections, which are divided by a social-democratic line in the heads of many comrades,

East and West." The document for the SpAD's July 1992 national conference noted:

"There is a social-democratic bulge in the organization that is unwilling to confront head-on the hardships engendered by counterrevolution, which has destroyed the livelihoods of millions.... Halle is not just an organizational problem but a *political challenge that illuminates all the tasks and perspectives facing our party.*"

Through this struggle a number of comrades from the former DDR established themselves as leaders of the party.

But the difficulties to be overcome are also objective. Because the SL/U.S. remains the largest section of the ICL, and our lingua franca is English, the most frequent organ and main line press is the English-language *Workers Vanguard*. For the same reason, internal documents are often first composed in English. Yet most of our comrades from eastern Germany do not have English language capacity (although their Russian capacity has proved invaluable). Consequently, a concerted effort must be made so that those comrades acquire at least a reading knowledge of English. Moreover, as a result of the devastation wrought by capitalist reunification, great attention must be paid to a host of material factors (housing, day care, transportation) in order for the Halle local to function as a regional center.

The opportunities for fruitful intervention in Germany far exceed the capacities of our section: major economic struggles west and east, defense of foreign workers and asylum seekers against fascist terror and government attacks, opposition to the anti-Communist witchhunt, as well as political struggle against "far left" opponents and the PDS. We can also foresee and should intervene in resistance by women who feel bitterly their loss of jobs, childcare and security under reunification. The SpAD must avoid the symmetric pitfalls of mindless activism and phony mass agitation on the one hand, and a retreat into passive propaganda on the other. Systematic and thoughtful opponent work is necessary to arm the party against these two pitfalls so effectively polemicized against by Lenin in *What Is To Be Done?* Given the disparity between our organizational resources and the level of political and social struggle in Germany, it is especially important to conduct and follow up our activities so as to maximize recruitment.

In the post-Anschluss period the SpAD has substantial political capital to its credit, from initiating anti-fascist united fronts in Halle and elsewhere to its opposition to the witchhunt against every symbol and vestige of the DDR. It has also made an invaluable internationalist contribution with comrades recruited in the DDR who are now playing a key role in our Soviet work. The biggest abiding weakness of the SpAD remains the need to cohere an authoritative leadership collective and a stable programmatic footing on the terrain of a united capitalist Germany.

## 6. Nationalism and Counterrevolution in East Europe

Contrary to Western anti-Communist propaganda, the Soviet military occupation of East Europe after World War II and the ensuing destruction of the old bourgeois order were not opposed by the mass of the population. Large sections of society welcomed the Red Army as liberators

from the nightmare of the Nazi occupation, while class-conscious workers had hateful memories of the right-wing bonapartist, fascist and monarchical dictatorships which dominated interwar East Europe.

The initial postwar Stalinist regimes had degrees of proletarian support ranging from significant in Poland and Hungary to massive in Czechoslovakia and traditionally pro-Russian Bulgaria. However, with the exception of Titoist Yugoslavia, the East European Stalinist regimes were imposed from without in the power vacuum left by the collapse of fascism. Thus the social order in the new "People's Democracies" was highly volatile, as growing opposition to Stalinist rule was reinforced by nationalism directed against Moscow and its perceived local agents.

The breakdown of the Stalinist order could lead toward either proletarian political revolution or capitalist counter-revolution, depending on the conjunctural political consciousness of the working class—the relative strength of socialist aspirations as against bourgeois-democratic illusions and anti-Soviet nationalism. The temporary breakdown of the Stalinist order in Poland and Hungary in 1956 and later in Czechoslovakia in 1968 led to actual or incipient political revolutions, not capitalist counterrevolutions. Hungarian workers did not want a return to a Horthyite-type dictatorship. In the fall of 1956 they set up workers councils, consciously understood as organs of workers power, which pledged to defend socialized property.

In Poland, in 1956, 1970 and again in 1976, proletarian upheavals were headed off as the bureaucracy put forward a new leader who promised a new and better deal. Both Gomulka and Gierek initially enjoyed popular authority, especially among the industrial proletariat. But having been disillusioned three times with "national-liberal" Stalinism, by the late 1970s the Polish working class was susceptible to being organized by clerical-nationalists under the direction of the Western imperialists and their social-democratic lackeys.

## I

In 1980-81, Solidarność was able to mobilize significant sections of the working class against the bureaucracy in the name of the Polish eagle, the Vatican cross and "free elections." Solidarność' counterrevolutionary bid for power was checked in December 1981 by General Jaruzelski's coup, strongly backed by Brezhnev's Kremlin. While virtually the entire non-Stalinist left (and some lily-livered "Eurostalinites" as well) were backing Walesa & Co., the Spartacist tendency fulfilled its class duty to defend the Polish deformed workers state against CIA-backed capitalist restoration:

"Solidarity's counterrevolutionary course must be stopped! If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily to stop it, we will support this. And we take responsibility in advance for this; whatever the idiocies and atrocities they will commit, we do not flinch from defending the crushing of Solidarity's counterrevolution."

—*Workers Vanguard* No. 289, 25 September 1981

Our banner, "For the revolutionary unity of Russian, Polish and German workers," raised in the fight against German counterrevolution, was a strong point of attraction for the future comrades of the Spartakusowska Grupa Polski (SGP). The May 1990 "Letter to Polish Workers" issued by the SpAD made its way into the hands of these militants from the RML (Young Left Movement). Moving leftward



ICL mobilized its forces in struggle to promote proletarian political revolution in East Germany in 1989-90. Spartacists distributed internationalist greetings in Russian to Soviet soldiers and in Vietnamese, Polish and Spanish to foreign-born workers.

from the official Stalinist youth group, they were repulsed by the reactionary clericalism of Solidarność and were actively searching for a program of authentic communism. Having already arrived at programmatic conclusions largely in accord with the views of the ICL, they came into sharp conflict with the pro-Solidarność Mandelites and Morenites who masquerade as Trotskyists. The SGP was founded through a fusion with these comrades in October 1990.

Various ostensible Trotskyists sought to amnesty their support to Solidarność by claiming that a movement based on the working class could not be counterrevolutionary. But had the Solidarność call for "free elections" been implemented, given the strength of anti-Soviet nationalism and illusions in bourgeois democracy—the outcome of decades of Stalinist bureaucratic rule—the result would have been a capitalist-restorationist government, as indeed occurred in 1989.

In the aftermath of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Shane Mage, a founding leader of the Spartacist tendency, laid out the theoretical framework and probable dynamic of a "bourgeois-democratic" counterrevolution in East Europe. In his post-1956 writings (excerpted in *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 30, Autumn 1980, under the title "'Pure Democracy' or Political Revolution in East Europe"), Mage predicted that "free elections" to a sovereign parliament would likely bring to power pro-Western, petty-bourgeois "democrats," who would subordinate the nationalized economy to the world capitalist market.

After the failure of reform Stalinist regimes, in the late 1970s and '80s the rightward motion in East Europe was reinforced and accelerated by imperialist economic and political pressure. Mounting debt service to Western banks forced governments from Warsaw to Belgrade to depress the living standards of working people. When in 1989-90 the Kremlin bureaucracy under Gorbachev abandoned the East European Stalinist regimes to their fate, the petty-bourgeois "democrats" and nationalists were politically ascendant, with a corresponding shift in popular consciousness. The signal exception was the DDR.

There has been a characteristic difference in the political dynamic of counterrevolution in the northern tier of East

Europe and in the Balkan countries. In Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, where anti-Soviet nationalism was strongest, the Stalinist bureaucracies were completely shattered and replaced by staunchly pro-Western and openly anti-Communist regimes—Walesa's Solidarność in Warsaw, Havel's Civic Forum in Prague, Antall's Democratic Union in Budapest—and former Communist officials are being witchhunted.

In the Balkans (where Moscow's control was always looser) the former Stalinists, now claiming to be Western-style social democrats, have sought to ride the crest of the counterrevolutionary tide by placing *themselves* at the head of reactionary nationalist forces. Leading apparatchiks of the old regime like Iliescu and Milosevic are striving to build a "Greater Romania" and a "Greater Serbia," respectively. In Bulgaria, the erstwhile Stalinist party remains a strong force in opposition, pushing anti-Turkish chauvinism.

But whatever their origins and ideological postures, from the Baltic to the Balkans today the new East European regimes have capitalist-restorationist governments, directly serving the interests of Western finance capital and striving to consolidate fledgling bourgeois states.

The question of the class character of post-1989 Poland was a subject of discussion with the comrades of the SGP. Was the continued existence of nationalized property evidence that there was still a deformed workers state? Trotsky addressed this question in 1937:

"Should a bourgeois counterrevolution succeed in the USSR, the new government for a lengthy period would have to base itself upon the nationalized economy. But what does such a type of temporary conflict between the economy and the state mean? It means a *revolution* or a *counterrevolution*. The victory of one class over another signifies that it will reconstruct the economy in the interests of the victors."

—"Not a Workers' and Not a Bourgeois State?,"  
November 1937

The issue could not simply be reduced to nationalized property. The decisive question was: Whose class interests did the economy and the machinery of state and the armed bodies of men—the core of state power—serve? The ascension to power in 1989 of the Solidarność-dominated Mazowiecki government, openly committed to restoring capitalism, was followed by the dissolution of the secret police, replacement of the army command, a deep purge of the officer corps and attachment of Catholic priests to all units. Taken together with the election of Walesa as president in late 1990, a fledgling capitalist state had been established.

Another subject of discussion within the ICL was over the nature of the Yugoslav civil war which broke out in the summer of 1991. Was the federal army and the Belgrade regime headed by Slobodan Milosevic defending the Yugoslav workers state against the imperialist-backed Croatian secessionist regime of Franjo Tudjman? While Milosevic was regularly referred to as a "Communist" in the Western bourgeois press, this former international banker was no less committed to introducing a market economy than the openly pro-capitalist Tudjman. The army high command had dropped its earlier talk of defending "socialist Yugoslavia" and had been subordinated to Serbian nationalism in a fratricidal war—leading to the elimination of all non-Serbs from the military and the purging of officers who remained loyal to the Titoist legacy. This could only lead to the destruction of the Socialist Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia, formalized in the creation of a new Yugoslav (Greater Serbian) state this spring which dropped the designation "socialist."

## II

The nascent bourgeois states of East Europe are, however, *extremely weak and fragile*. They have brought untold misery to the working people of the region without as yet generating a new class of capitalist proprietors. Economic "shock treatments," dictated by Western bankers, have produced massive unemployment and hyperinflation. The new East European regimes face a fundamental contradiction of trying to restore capitalism without capital. The petty entrepreneurs—taxi drivers; shopkeepers, household repairmen—out to make a fast buck in Warsaw and Budapest hardly have the money to buy and operate the nationalized steel mills, textile factories and coal mines now up for sale.

Without the social base of a genuine bourgeoisie, aggressive nationalism has been both the driving force for capitalist restoration in East Europe and a product of the counterrevolutionary drive. From Walesa's Poland to Milosevic's Serbia, nationalist demagoguery—usually linked to religious reaction—is being used to turn working-class anger over economic immiseration into hatred of neighboring peoples and minority communities. This was analyzed in the two-part series "East Europe: Nationalism and Counterrevolution" (*Workers Vanguard* Nos. 547 and 548, 20 March and 3 April 1992).

East Europe now faces wars of territorial aggrandizement, bloody border conflicts, intercommunal massacres and monstrous forced population transfers among the region's heavily interpenetrated peoples. In Czechoslovakia, impoverishment imposed by the Prague government's Thatcherite "shock treatment" has devastated Slovakia, whose economy was heavily dependent on Soviet trade, fueling a secessionist movement and the breakup of the country.

The fundamental contradiction of the capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe lies in bringing unprecedented economic immiseration for the working masses on the *political basis of weak parliamentary governments*. In Latin America and other Third World countries, even less severe IMF-dictated austerity programs generally require military-bonapartist regimes to suppress the resistance of the workers and peasants. The present counterrevolutionary regimes in East Europe rely on nationalist demagoguery and illusions in parliamentary democracy.

In the late 1920s Trotsky projected that the *initial phase* of a counterrevolution in the Soviet Union, which he then identified with the term "Thermidor," might take a parliamentarist or even a soviet constitutionalist form; however, this situation could not last long:

"But there would inevitably be resistance by the proletariat; it would attempt to hold on to its positions or win back those it had lost. To beat back these attempts and to consolidate their hold in a genuine way, the bourgeoisie would soon need, not a transitional, Thermidorian regime, but a more serious, solid, and decisive kind—in all probability, a Bonapartist or, in modern terms, a fascist regime."

—"At a New Stage," December 1927

However, such a transition is by no means an automatic process. In his polemics against the early 1930s Stalinist line in Germany of "After Hitler, us," Trotsky insisted that the bourgeoisie cannot install a bonapartist or fascist government at will. The replacement of parliamentary democracy by a more reactionary and repressive form of

bourgeois state involves a *political struggle* which the bourgeoisie can lose, leading even to its overthrow: "the passage from one system to another signifies the *political crisis* that, with the concourse of the activity of the revolutionary proletariat, may be transformed into a social danger to the bourgeoisie" ("Bonapartism and Fascism," July 1934). While Trotsky was here writing of long established bourgeois states (Germany and France), the same analytical principles apply to the nascent bourgeois states of East Europe.

These brittle and shallowly rooted bourgeois-restorationist regimes can be shattered by an explosion of working-class struggle. In parliamentary elections this spring, the Communist Party received 15 percent of the vote in both Czech and Slovak regions (and undoubtedly a much higher percentage of the working-class vote). In Bulgaria, 40,000 miners organized by the "independent" union struck this spring against mine closures ordered by the right-wing capitalist government of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) which it helped put in power. The regime was forced to retreat. In Romania, Jiu Valley miners, who had already struck in 1977 against the Ceausescu regime, have twice taken over the streets of Bucharest, the first time supporting the Iliescu-Roman government against right-wing opposition, the second in September 1991 demanding the ouster of the same government, whose market reforms were driving them to ruin.

### III

Especially in Poland, massive economic immiseration has generated working-class resistance. Many of the factors which placed Poland, with its clerical-imperialist counter-revolution, in the forefront of the "bourgeois-democratic" capitalist restoration in Europe in the 1980s have produced the strongest backlash against its effects. Elsewhere in East Europe, the anti-Communist "democrats" consisted of a small stratum of the intelligentsia, who replaced the Stalinists under conditions of working-class passivity. In Poland, however, the highly politicized working class has turned against the Solidarność government the same weapons—strikes and protests—which they had used against successive Stalinist regimes. Since early 1990, Poland has experienced a high and fairly constant level of labor struggle, while Solidarność has splintered into bitterly hostile, anti-Communist political parties.

The backlash against the counterrevolution within Polish society is not limited to the economic sphere. The Catholic hierarchy's drive to outlaw abortion and generally establish a clericalist state has provoked significant opposition. Opinion polls last year showed that 60 percent of the population favored legalized abortion and believed the church has too much influence in public life. A strong sentiment of popular anti-clericalism has re-emerged in Poland for the first time in decades. In the elections to the Sejm (parliament) in October 1991, the erstwhile Stalinist parties received a higher vote than the parties of either Walesa or his prime minister. Also symptomatic in this regard is that our small number of comrades in Warsaw sold 500 pieces of literature to a recent May Day demonstration of 15,000.

In a situation where right-wing reactionaries like Solidarność 80 seek to place themselves at the head of popular protests and working-class strikes, opposition to Pilsudskite nationalism is key to building a Trotskyist party. Our comrades of the SGP have established a track record as

consistent defenders of women and homosexuals and as opponents of anti-Semitism and anti-Gypsy racism. Yet our toehold is tenuous, and a small group must seek opportunities to recruit subjective revolutionaries out of the turbulent social struggles pervading Polish society. Within the framework of their limited capacities, the comrades must strive to produce timely, thoughtful propaganda.

## 7. France: End of the Mitterrand Popular Front

In France, the pro-Moscow Communist Party (PCF) was the principal reformist party of the working class during Cold War II. Despite the Stalinist PCF's betrayal of the May-June 1968 general strike/student revolt, the French bourgeoisie and its NATO allies regarded the hegemony of a pro-Soviet party over the historically combative French working class as a serious weakness in the Western imperialist order.

Hence, the election of the Socialist Party-dominated government of François Mitterrand in 1981 was welcomed by a significant section of the French bourgeoisie and especially in other NATO capitals for offering an opportunity to destroy the authority of the French Communist Party. The Mitterrand regime pursued a more bellicose anti-Soviet policy, in line with Reagan and Thatcher, than its Giscardian and Gaullist predecessors.

Unlike their American and British allies, for the French Socialists the Communist enemy resided not only in Moscow but also in the working-class "red belt" around Paris. Paris rather than Washington or New York became the ideological center of Cold War II. The prominent liberal historian François Furet and right-wing "new philosophers" condemned the entire tradition of the European left, originally forged in the crucible of the Great French Revolution, as responsible for Stalinism. The relatively large pseudo-Trotskyist groups in France (Lutte Ouvrière, Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, and Lambert's PCI, now called Parti des Travailleurs) served as spear carriers for Mitterrand.

### I

The sharp realignment of French politics created a favorable situation for our French section, the Ligue Trotskyiste de France (LTF), which doubled its membership between 1980 and 1989. The LTF stood out as Trotskyists who defended the USSR against imperialist attack, especially on the hottest fronts of Cold War II—Afghanistan and Poland. The LTF recruited from among Stalinist youth and enhanced its authority among pro-Soviet elements in the PCF, who to a degree saw us as disconcerting allies against the rightists, social-democrats and pseudo-Trotskyists, and also the Eurocommunist current of their own party.

Our successful tactical orientation to the "anti-opportunist" layer of the pro-Moscow Stalinists culminated in the 1988 fusion with the Tribune Communiste (TribCo), a small subpropaganda group on the fringes of the PCF which had its remote origins in the Pabloite liquidationist tendency of the French Trotskyist movement led by Michèle Mestre in the mid-1950s. However, in 1989 with the Soviet Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Polish Jaruzelski regime's abdication in favor of Solidarność, the "anti-opportunist" Stalinists, whose *raison d'être*

was to be a pressure group on the Kremlin bureaucracy, had the rug pulled out from under them. This factor contributed to the uncoupling of the TribCo fusion in early 1989 in a context where the necessary post-fusion fights had not been carried out inside the section.

Significantly this came in opposition to our proposal to organize an international military brigade to fight for the Kabul left-nationalist regime against the U.S.-organized *mujahedin*. This fight underscored a fundamental programmatic difference between left Stalinists and Trotskyists. The former were prepared to support the Kremlin bureaucracy when it acted against imperialist-backed counterrevolution. They were *not* prepared to fight imperialist-backed counterrevolution when it went against the policies of the Kremlin bureaucracy, for this requires the perspective of proletarian political revolution *within* the Soviet Union.

The PCF under the old-line Stalinist leadership of Georges Marchais accepted the increasing capitulations of the Gorbachev regime to Western imperialism without visible internal opposition or dissent. At the time of the August 1991 Kremlin coup attempt, Marchais & Co. proclaimed, "Our differences [with the coup plotters] are total," and have since emphasized that their party has no association whatsoever with the USSR.

Given its deep roots within the working class, and given that the Socialist Party is a faction-ridden electoral machine and not a party of rank-and-file activists, it is likely that, barring a major split, the PCF will remain a mass reformist party competing with the "Eurocratic Socialists" on a nationalist-populist basis. The PCF's break with Moscow has coincided with a more open adaptation (foreshadowed by the Vitry atrocity in 1980) to anti-immigrant racism, the burning political issue which polarizes France today and which has affected the "far left," for example Lutte Ouvrière. To build a Trotskyist party in France, it is necessary not only to split the Communist Party's working-class base from the bureaucratic tops but also to seek to win that base. More immediately, the advanced workers with a semblance of communist consciousness may be won. In the longer term, through intervention in the struggles of the working

class, the party as "tribune of the people" must win workers away from every aspect of political and social backwardness.

## II

The economic deterioration of France under the decade-long Mitterrand Socialist regime, given the demoralized and discredited state of the Communist Party, has fueled the emergence of a significant fascist movement centered around Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front. The Front now presents itself as the only "radical" alternative to a status quo that is increasingly intolerable. Persistent mass unemployment is running around 10 percent. The perspective of European "unification" in a single market next year (which will subject the weakened French economy to increased competition from its powerful German neighbor) has driven layers of the petty bourgeoisie and small capitalists to despair, seeking salvation among the fascist demagogues.

The striking gains of the National Front over the past few years reflect as well the diminution of French imperialism. The Cold War division of Germany allowed France to play a role in European and world politics grossly disproportional to its real economic weight, exemplified by the Gaullist regime of the 1960s flaunting its "independence" of Washington. Such posturing by French imperialism is no longer possible in the Europe of the Fourth Reich. French nationalist frustrations have vented themselves on North Africans and black Africans.

In the regional elections in March, the National Front received the second-highest vote, ahead of the ruling Socialists, in the three most populous regions. However, the National Front's gains have thus far been limited to the *electoral* arena. Should fascist groups launch military attacks on the trade unions, or the Socialist or Communist parties, this would likely provoke a massive defensive response on the part of class-conscious workers, repolarizing French society along class lines.

## III

Over the past two decades, the Ligue Trotskyste de France has also made a reputation on the French left as the party

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by Damien Elbot, editor of *l'Égalité*, newspaper of the JCR, youth group of French section of the United Secretariat, August 1992

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Numéro 1

Introduction

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par Damien Elbot, éditeur en chef de *l'Égalité*, journal du JCR, organisation de jeunesse de la LCR, section française du Secrétariat Unifié, août 1992 (26 pages)

**"Lettre ouverte aux JCR-*l'Égalité*"**  
de la Ligue trotskyste de France, 27 juillet 1992  
le *Blackout* n° 130 (septembre 1992)

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that never called to vote for Mitterrand. Our comrades warned that the anti-Soviet popular front would bring anti-worker austerity and racism, as indeed it has. The popular front was a key issue in recruiting a layer of young leftists, notably from Lutte Ouvrière. As the Mitterrand regime breaks up, there have been a number of bitter labor struggles directly against government strikebreaking and union-busting. The LTF's intervention into the 1991 strike at Renault-Cléon enhanced its authority in this key section of the workforce, despite initial weaknesses in presenting the party's broader program to the strikers.

Since 1989 the LTF has lost a third of its membership. The evident demoralization behind this hemorrhaging appears to reflect four interrelated developments: the ascendancy of capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet sphere; the resulting shrinking of the pro-Moscow Stalinist milieu; the increasing inroads in French society of anti-immigrant racism and its main political expression, the fascist National Front, including among traditionally pro-Communist sections of the working class; and perhaps a crisis of expectations based on the growth of the earlier period.

The adaptations in the section to the particular social pressures in France during the period after Gorbachev came to power were thrashed out at the LTF's 11th (December 1989) and especially 12th (March 1992) conferences. The repeated failing of the central leadership in this period was to not pursue internal debates after an initial round or two and then to be "surprised" by the eventual appearance of a full-blown deviation or resignations, instead of seeing internal struggle as an ongoing striving for political cohesion which will arm the party and provide the best chance to avoid losses. As the document voted by the LTF's 12th Conference states: "Internal debates and fights are the Leninist means of achieving the clarity necessary to maintain the revolutionary will to fight for and win to our program." In particular there was virtually no systematic attempt to generalize from the particular debates, which would have shown that the political demoralization, disorientation and quits were essentially challenges to our program on the Russian question and—particularly after the defeat in Germany—represented an abandonment of the perspective of the working class as the agent of revolutionary change. It was necessary to "put the Russian question back in the center of the debates in the LTF."

The LTF's conference document states that "*for the moment* we are facing a bad conjuncture." Running counter to that pressure are the rise in labor struggle (work stoppages against the Gulf War, dockers strike), turmoil in the sizable pseudo-Trotskyist milieu, and a large layer of disaffected minority youth.

For the past few years the LTF has sought to develop a strategic orientation toward the "second generation" of the North African (Maghrebi) Arabs and Berbers and the black African immigrant communities, whose parents represent a strategic sector of the industrial working class. These youth, born and raised in France, have adapted to a secularized, advanced bourgeois culture and in general do not share the traditional or reactionary attitudes and practices (e.g., Islam) of their parents. At the same time, they are impoverished, segregated, subject to racist terror by the French state, and now face the increasing danger of fascist attacks.

The "second generation" thus constitutes a large pool of volatile, potentially radical plebeian youth, who are alien-

ated from the French bourgeois order and its reformist defenders, the latter unsuccessfully scrambling currently to cohere a refurbished popular front to replace the thoroughly discredited regime. A hard line for the equality and liberation of women (e.g., opposition to the veil among Islamic Maghrebis, opposition to female sexual mutilation among black Africans) is programmatically and strategically central to winning over and cohering a Trotskyist cadre within these communities.

The LTF has made efforts over a period of years to introduce our Trotskyist propaganda to the countries of North Africa. This included dissemination of our press there and Arabic translations of a number of key articles in *Le Bolchévik*.

## 8. Italy: Stalinist Crisis and Demands for "Strong State"

Of the countries in which the ICL has smaller sections and groups, Italy is where the events in the Soviet Union have had the greatest impact, leading to a big split in the Communist Party between the now openly social-democratic Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) and Rifondazione Comunista (RC). Initially differentiated from the PDS by its classically Stalinist "defense" of the Soviet Union and its opposition to the Persian Gulf War, RC then leapt to support the Yeltsinite reactionary counter coup in Moscow and now vies with the PDS for inheritance rights to the history of popular-frontist betrayals in Italy. Most of the "far left," including the pretenders to Trotskyism, have entered RC.

Keeping an eye toward regroupments with subjectively revolutionary militants in the rather unstable milieu of Rifondazione Comunista, the Lega Trotskista d'Italia (LTd'I) has developed a national audience for our press in Italy. Having developed numerous sympathizers in other regions, the LTd'I hopes to expand beyond the single city of Milano. Still, the LTd'I remains a small sub-propaganda group in a country where hundreds of thousands of working-class militants see themselves as communists. A central weakness of the LTd'I's intervention in the ferment in the Italian left has been an inability to generate polemics and a crippling ignorance of the activities of our opponents (e.g., the Grisolia tendency in the USec and RC).

In the past period, Italy has shifted from a country of emigrants to a country of immigrants, above all from North African countries. Virulent racist attacks by bona fide fascist organizations are mounting daily, as the fascists grow alarmingly. Meanwhile the repressive machinery of the state is brought to bear against "foreigners," as seen in the brutal treatment of the Albanian refugees in 1991. In the context of a contracting economy, the reformist leaders of the workers movement have tacitly supported racist reaction against the immigrants, who are scapegoats for the bankruptcy of Italian capitalism.

The Italian bourgeoisie, hit hard by the international economic recession and under pressure in view of European unification, is demanding a "strong state," seeking to break the combativity of the Italian working class, discipline the mafia, inject a modicum of efficiency into the state apparatus and increase profits by selling off state industry. The "death of communism" lie, hammered incessantly by the bourgeoisie with the active participation of the PCI/PDS,

**Militant miners battled cops in Yorkshire during heroic year-long 1984-85 British miners strike, sharpest class struggle in Britain in decades.**



has by now partially influenced and demoralized worker militants. This has allowed the capitalists to carry out an all-out assault on the *scala mobile* (the cost-of-living escalator), the most important gain won by the workers' struggles which began in the "Hot Autumn" of 1969. But the Italian proletariat is anything but definitively defeated. The outcome of the expected struggles by the workers against this attack will be important in determining the future course of class struggle in Italy.

## 9. The British Isles After Thatcher

### I

The central domestic goal of the bourgeoisie during the Thatcher years—as it had been for decades, largely unsuccessfully—was to break the power of the trade unions. The jingoism whipped up in the dirty Falklands/Malvinas War, which salvaged Thatcher's sagging popularity at the time, also helped lay the basis for attacking the unions as "the enemy within." The betrayal of the 1984-85 coal miners strike, and the continuing cowardice and defeatism of the bureaucracy, have led to an orgy of union-busting and a dramatic decline in union membership. The current level of strike activity is the lowest in a century.

The yearlong miners strike was the sharpest class battle in decades, defeated by the treachery of the trade-union and Labour bureaucracy, "lefts" as well as rights. The strike sharply demonstrated the interlinking of the Russian question with the question of revolution at home: The red-baiting of Scargill by the TUC, initiated by the Gerry Healy organization, for Scargill's correct statement that Polish Solidarność was anti-socialist, prefigured the trade-union bureaucracy's scab policies during the strike.

The miners strike resolved the Cold War divide in the Labour Party (BLP) between Bennite "Little Englanders" and the pro-CIA right wing. Their tactical differences were buried in the interests of defending British capitalism, in

a context where massive proletarian struggle posed the fundamental question of class power. Since then the Bennites have been marginalized. Indeed, in terms of *policy* there was little to distinguish the Kinnockites from the more mainstream Tory party of John Major in the recent elections. Meanwhile Ted Grant was overthrown by the majority of the Militant group, who despaired at continued efforts at deep entrenchment in the BLP. However, it would be foolish to write off future leftward or centrist developments within the BLP. The Spartacist League/Britain reasserts its strategic perspective that the forging of a Leninist vanguard will include splitting the base from the top of this bourgeois workers party.

Support for capitalist counterrevolution in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has been the motor force that has driven fake-Trotskyists deep into the camp of Kinnockite social democracy. The once myriad number of centrist groups is no more: At the time of the Yeltsin counter-coup, only the small Revolutionary Internationalist League (RIL) organization was able to approximate a centrist position. The Healyites have imploded, removing one historic enemy (while the Northites remain a factor internationally). Several of the British ostensibly Trotskyist organizations have a presence in the Soviet Union, generally striving to be advisers to a would-be trade-union bureaucracy.

After years in which the Spartacist League/Britain (SL/B) alternately ignored or simply jeered at our main centrist opponent, Workers Power, in the last few years our propaganda, centered on the Russian question, has been much more effective. Workers Power and its "League for a Revolutionary Communist International" (LRCI) have shifted sharply to the right, landing squarely on the Yeltsin barricades, with little apparent internal differentiation. The recruitment to the ICL in 1990 of the comrades of the Dublin Spartacist Youth Group (now the Dublin Spartacist Group—DSG), who over East Germany chose the Trotskyist program of political revolution against Workers Power/LRCI's soft-core support to capitalist counterrevolution, greatly weakened the LRCI's Irish Workers Group.

The Stalinophobic, pro-Labour fake-Trotskyist milieu has exerted constant pressure on the SL/B, exemplified in the near faction fight following the Yeltsin counter-coup, where the minority held a position for abstention had a civil war developed between the forces of Yeltsinite counter-revolution and their opponents.

Integrally related was the minority's advocacy of defense of nationalized property per se in Poland, which by common consent at that time was no longer a deformed workers state. Echoing the important debate on Chrysler at our First International Conference, the comrades argued the social-democratic line that under capitalism, state ownership of the means of production is inherently progressive over private ownership. This position obliterates the class line between the capitalist state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It would therefore tend to mislead the Polish proletariat to abandon the revolutionary struggle to regain power, in favor of reformist concerns over which type of capitalist austerity is preferable.

The rapidly disintegrating, already splintered British Stalinists seem in the main to be integrating into social democracy, with the increasingly national-parochial "Leninist" group apparently headed in the same direction. An important priority is contacting work among émigré Stalinists, particularly from South Africa and South Asia. The black and Asian immigrant communities—which at least in London and the Midlands intersect some important sections of the proletariat—receive the SL/B's communist propaganda very favorably. The fascists are not now large, but that could change, particularly with sharply higher unemployment levels.

## II

The Thatcher years have wrought a dramatic change in the economic/social landscape. The earlier social-democratic framework encompassed a substantial but obsolescent manufacturing sector. The bourgeoisie invested its profits abroad with the inefficient nationalized industry subsidized by the working class, via low wages and high taxes on consumption. Under Thatcher the industrial base was devastated (and with it the economy in Scotland, South Wales and the North). What capital investment there is was largely concentrated in financial and other services, in the Tory-dominated South East.

The divisions in the British ruling class, between advocates of D-mark denominated austerity (through participation in the Exchange Rate Mechanism—ERM) and the U.S.-oriented "anti-Europeans" blew up in the Tory faction fight that led to the ousting of Thatcher by John Major. The universally hated poll tax engendered a wave of elemental social protest that helped grease the skids under Thatcher (although the SL/B was slow in recognizing its scope and therefore in ensuring the section's involvement in a fight which helped further shake the credibility of the Labour Party). The ERM has added forceful deliberate deflation to the cyclical downturn of the already weak economy. Britain is on the brink of an outright slump, living standards have been rapidly squeezed, and the bourgeoisie's disarray over Europe has further increased.

Four years ago the SL/B undertook a geographical redeployment, dissolving the Sheffield and Birmingham branches and establishing a beachhead in Scotland. Subsequently it recruited a small student-centered sister organ-

ization in Dublin. Particularly given the centrifugal tendencies within Britain, this trinocular vision stands the section in good stead to intervene in the social struggles of these isles. The SL/B seeks to incorporate the historically more militant and combative traditions of the working people of the Celtic lands, while noting that no proletarian revolution can be successfully achieved without destroying capitalism in England, where the bulk of the populace is concentrated.

There has been a sharp resurgence of nationalism in Scotland, where the Tories are a relatively small minority. In part this is reflected in the growth of the bourgeois nationalist Scottish National Party (SNP). The SNP, junior imperialists in training, admire among other things the Nazi-infested counter-revolutionary regimes in the Baltics. But nationalism has also made inroads in the labor movement. One index is that the majority of the Militant tendency, once among the most staid of Unionists, has formed a separate Scottish organization.

The results of the general election were greeted with particular dismay in Scotland. Subsequently sections of the Scottish trade-union and labor bureaucracy have opted for an anti-Tory "patriotic front" with SNP and Liberal Democratic politicians. Such a popular front is not a step forward—however contradictory—as its fake-left enthusiasts claim; any "leftist" or populist rhetoric notwithstanding, it is a dangerous and even more explicit chaining of the working class to the class enemy than even the wretched class collaboration of the conservative Labour Party leadership. South of the border as well, Labour's electoral defeat has prompted renewed calls from some quarters for "tactical voting," i.e., for petty-bourgeois parties and other anti-Tory popular fronts.

It is necessary to stress that Labourite betrayal of social struggle, as much as Tory policies of economic devastation, have stoked the fires of nationalism. Because of the deep treachery of British social democracy, such issues as the national question involving semi-assimilated peoples in the British Isles—which would have been easily resolved within the context of proletarian revolution—have not diminished but become inflamed. The SL/B upholds the right of self-determination for the Scottish and Welsh nations—while not advocating separation at this time—and fights for a working-class revolutionary resolution in Ireland.

Our slogan "For a federation of workers republics in the British Isles"—an extension of our earlier slogan "For an Irish workers republic within a socialist federation of the British Isles"—is counterposed to Labourite Unionism and English chauvinism, as well as to the pro-monarchy SNP nationalists and Irish green nationalists.

Following the miners strike, the government has pursued an economically irrational policy of massive pit closures, motivated by a desire to marginalize the most militant section of the proletariat, which it was unable to crush decisively. Combined with a phasing down of nuclear energy, this has made North Sea oil (and Scottish oil workers) even more central to the British economy.

The "United Kingdom" is not doing well—not very united, with the monarchy undergoing a sharp drop in popular support. It is increasingly resented as the acme of venal privilege by those who suffer discrimination or disadvantage, which by now includes (but is not limited to) almost everyone outside the Home Counties. The marital disintegration of the royal family has produced not a crisis but something of a new political alignment. The recent



attacks on the monarchy have been spearheaded by a section of the Tory party and press alienated from the South East-centered establishment. It is noteworthy that the mainstream Labour leaders have been among the most supine defenders of the royal order.

Unlike the Labourite left, the Spartacists do not trivialize the question of the monarchy. Trotsky scored the "conservative stupidity" of the Labour Party's defense of royal power, noting that in a time of political crisis it would become the rallying point for social reaction. The officer corps is explicitly loyal to "King and Country." The monarchy, House of Lords and established churches are integral props to the maintenance of capitalist class rule in Britain; they will be swept away by proletarian revolution.

III

The situation in Northern Ireland has not qualitatively changed over the past two decades. The 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement was negotiated in the context of Cold War II, when the American imperialists and their British partners were anxious to secure Ireland as a reliable strategic outpost. The Spartacist "Theses on Ireland," published in 1977, are a rigorous application of the Leninist approach to the national question, notably on the question of interpenetrated peoples. The "Theses" have stood the test of time well.

In the South, the church's grip on society has been eroded by urbanization and partial industrialization, and there has been a sharp escalation of struggle centering on women's rights. In response a wing of the Irish bourgeoisie has sought to give the clerical state a liberal face-lift while strengthening their ties with imperialism, in the context of "Europe 1992." However, the illusions in President Mary Robinson are now wearing thin among a section of her erstwhile supporters, and the DSG's principled opposition to her popular-front candidacy and our championship of "free abortion on demand" should stand us in good stead.

Our highlighting of the demand for immediate unconditional withdrawal of the British army from the North has also attracted attention from left-wing nationalists, dis-

gusted by Robinson's open wooing of Paisleyite Unionist bigots (whose own backwardness on the woman question parallels that of the Catholic hierarchy). A recent development in the South is the formation of fascistic bands tied to anti-abortion forces.

The proletarian internationalism of the ICL cuts across the capitulations to both green nationalism and Irish social democracy rife among our fake-left opponents. Thus the Irish Workers Group in the past has simultaneously given electoral support to the petty-bourgeois Sinn Fein in the North and to right-wing Labourites in the South. In opposition to the reformist tinkering of our opponents, we have emphasized that the glaring democratic demands arising in relation to the oppression of women and the role of the Catholic church can only be won in the context of organized working-class struggle for socialist revolution. The advance of such a perspective would also qualitatively shake the stranglehold of communalism on the North.

On the June 1992 Irish referendum over the Maastricht Treaty, the Spartacists opposed this plan for the capitalist economic integration of West Europe, declaring: "Smash the bosses' Fortress Europe!" An important component of the ICL's propaganda in Ireland must be to highlight our opposition to capitalist restoration in Eastern Europe, where social counterrevolution is palpably worsening the condition of women.

10. The Decay of American Capitalism

The United States remains the pre-eminent imperialist power in the world today. Events there, from presidential elections to ghetto upheavals, have immediate impact around the globe. It is also where our tendency originated and where the ICL has by far its largest section, the Spartacist League/U.S. (SL/U.S.).

Events in the Soviet Union have had a less profound effect on general political attitudes than in West Europe, mainly reinforcing the common view that communism is utopian and accelerating a shift of the main target of American chauvinist hysteria: Japan rather than the Soviet Union is now designated "the evil empire."

The strategic question driving our work in the U.S. is the black question. The special oppression of blacks is simultaneously a factor manipulated by the rulers to divide the proletariat and the Achilles' heel of capitalist rule.

In 1946, the United States accounted for over half the industrial output of the capitalist world. This preponderance derived from both the destruction of productive capacity in Europe and Japan during WWII, and the wartime expansion and renewal from the depths of the Great Depression of productive capacity in the U.S., which received an additional boost with the Korean War boom of 1950-53. This postwar global dominance of U.S. imperialism—dubbed the "American century" by Washington propagandists—was bound to be eroded by both international and internal developments. The economic recovery of Germany and Japan provided these countries with an industrial plant more technologically advanced than that in the U.S. At the same time, the rapid capital accumulation in the U.S. in

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The cover of the journal 'Women and Revolution' features several headlines: 'Family Values' Crusade Targets Women, Blacks, Teens; 'L.A. Racist Cops Walk: There is No Justice in the Capitalist Courts!'; 'Break with the Democrats—Build a Workers Party!'; 'Free Abortion on Demand!'; '80 Million Women Attributed The Crime of Female Genital Mutilation'; and 'Roots of Bolshevism: The Russian Revolutionary Tradition'. The journal is published by the Spartacist League of the United States.

the 1940-53 period drove down the rate of profit, thereby constraining further productive investment.

The decline of American imperialism was accelerated on both the economic and political levels by the Vietnam War of 1964-75. War-generated inflation undermined the fixed parity between the dollar and gold which formed the basis of the postwar international monetary system (the Bretton Woods system). In August 1971, U.S. president Richard Nixon announced a "New Economic Policy" whose main components were the devaluation of the dollar in terms of gold, which soon led to fluctuating foreign exchange rates (i.e., international monetary anarchy); increased trade protectionism; and an attempt at state control over wages and prices. This signaled the end of American hegemony in the capitalist world, with the United States reduced to only the most powerful of a number of rival imperialist countries. Currently its share of industrial output is down to about one-half that of 1946.

At the political level, the long, losing colonial war in Southeast Asia dissipated domestic support for Cold War militarism in general and for the role of the U.S. as "policeman of the world." The increasingly pacifistic mood of the American populace was a major factor behind Washington's "détente" maneuver with Brezhnev's Russia in the early 1970s. The demoralized and semi-mutinuous condition of the armed forces in the last Vietnam War years induced the government to end conscription, leading to a volunteer army disproportionately composed of poor black and Hispanic youth. Today the U.S. armed forces are over 20 percent black, and more than 20 percent of the U.S.' front line troops in the Persian Gulf War were Hispanic.

The American ruling class perceived its evident weakness in the early 1970s as primarily due to a loss of internal political will—the so-called "Vietnam syndrome." The "human rights" crusade proclaimed by the new Democratic president Jimmy Carter in 1976 was designed to restore domestic support for an aggressive anti-Soviet foreign policy, which developed into Cold War II. Beginning in the last Carter years and greatly accelerating under his successor, Ronald Reagan, the Pentagon undertook a massive buildup of military hardware, intended to regain nuclear first-strike capacity against the USSR and produce new "high-tech" conventional weapons, which would supposedly enable the U.S. to win Vietnam-type colonial wars while suffering few casualties.

However, this vast expansion of the military sector took place on a *weakening industrial base* with an accompanying decline in the living standards of the American working class. U.S. industrialists responded to the significant losses experienced during the 1974-75 world depression by shifting their operations to low-wage countries in Latin America and East Asia. By 1983 imports into the U.S. from *American-owned* factories abroad had increased *tenfold* from the late 1960s. This overseas ownership necessarily gives U.S. imperialism its predatory and bloated militaristic cast. Over the past 20 years the number of industrial workers in the U.S. has declined from 26 to 17 percent of the labor force, with an absolute loss of two million manufacturing jobs over the past decade. The Midwest has become a giant "rust bowl"; the population of Detroit, the historic capital of the U.S. auto industry, dipped below one million at the time of the 1990 census.

The military buildup of the 1980s not only diverted resources from productive investment but was accompanied

by unprecedented *financial parasitism*. The Reagan government combined the massive increase in Pentagon spending with tax cuts of up to 40 percent for the wealthy, which tripled the federal budget deficit between 1981 and 1983, equaling total domestic private savings. So the deficit was heavily financed by foreign borrowing, especially from Japan, which displaced the U.S. as the world's creditor nation in the mid-1980s. Meanwhile, in the private sector, "raiders" borrowed huge sums at high interest to buy corporations which were then dismantled to pay the debt service.

The October 1987 stock market crash marked the beginning of the collapse of America's financial house of cards. With increasing corporate defaults and bankruptcies, the high-yield ("junk") bond market collapsed in 1989 as did real estate values. The savings and loan debacle, which became a public scandal in 1990, threatens to bring down that house of cards. The "bailout" is part of the massive redistribution of income during the past decade and a half from working people to financial parasites. Since 1990 the U.S. economy has been in a recession prolonged by financial retrenchment by debt-ridden corporations as well as private households. Japanese money-capital has been withdrawn from all but short-term, highly liquid assets.

## II

The fall in living standards inherent in the decay of productive capacity was intensified by a concerted ruling-class attack on labor. Reagan's breaking of the air traffic controllers strike a few months after taking office in 1981 ushered in a decade of union-busting and giveback contracts with little resistance from the reactionary American labor bureaucracy. Hence, the American working class suffered a sharp rise in the rate of exploitation. Currently, only 16 percent of the nation's workforce is unionized.

Real wages for non-managerial workers in the U.S. peaked in 1973 and had fallen 17 percent by 1990. Young workers have been subjected to two-tier wage systems and other forms of superexploitation. In 1992, the pay of corporate presidents climbed to 160 times that of the average worker. The decay and deindustrialization of America has been especially devastating for the black population, since unionized industrial workers (e.g., Detroit auto, Chicago steel) were central to the fragile economic base of the segregated black communities. Fifty-one percent of all black children under six now live below the poverty line, and a majority of black youth are either unemployed or working at marginal jobs paying poverty-level wages.

The American ruling class regards the growth of the black "underclass" as both economically burdensome and politically dangerous. Hence, ghetto communities are subject to intense state repression. The U.S. jails by far the highest percentage of its population of any country in the world. Blacks make up 45.3 percent of inmates in state and federal prisons, and 47 percent of those awaiting trial or serving short terms in local jails—overall, more than one million blacks are currently behind bars, on parole or on probation. Racist police act as occupation armies, and the Reagan/Bush courts have brought back the death penalty with a vengeance. Blacks make up 40.1 percent of death row prisoners while 12.5 percent of the population of the United States is black.

Meanwhile there is an astronomical death rate from malnutrition, exposure, disease and lack of medical care. The

infant mortality rate in America among blacks is 16.5 per 1000, twice that of whites, and a black man living in Harlem is less likely to reach 65 than a resident of Bangladesh. Diseases of poverty such as tuberculosis have reached epidemic proportions while AIDS has become a plague of the ghetto. The millions of homeless now living in the streets have transformed American cities. The stark fact is that American capitalism has condemned a whole generation of ghetto blacks to an early death.

To enforce American capitalism's racist "law and order," in addition to using raw force the country's rulers have been dismantling democratic rights wholesale, seeking to achieve something approximating a "democratic police state." Defendants are now "guilty until proven innocent," stripped of their assets upon indictment, tried by racist juries on vague conspiracy laws for which no act need be committed in order to convict. As in the days of "criminal syndicalism" laws, unions are a favorite target. The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) laws are, a particularly sinister tool, having been used most recently to bring the AFL-CIO's largest union, the Teamsters, under direct government control.

It is an apparent paradox that within the framework of formal bourgeois democracy, a period of open attacks on the labor movement, general impoverishment of the masses and a flagrant increase in economic inequality has nonetheless been marked by the continued political dominance of the right, represented by the Republican presidencies of Reagan and Bush. The key to understanding this development lies in the unique intersection of race and class in the United States.

During the 1930s, Democratic president Franklin Roosevelt forged an American version of the popular front, welding together the party's traditional base in the white-supremacist South with the newly mobilized and unionized working class in the North. The social base of the American popular front was eroded with the large-scale emigration of blacks from the rural South to Northern and also Southern cities during and after WWII. The "Jim Crow" system, based on intimidation of isolated, impoverished rural sharecroppers, was undermined by urbanization and proletarianization. The mass struggles for black equality known as the civil rights movement—first in the South, then in the North—exploded the Democratic Party coalition.

In the absence of a workers party and given the racist and conservative character of the labor bureaucracy, American electoral politics in the 1960s became centrally defined by the black question. Beginning with Nixon's victory in 1968, the Republican Party gained ascendancy as the party of the white backlash. The so-called "tax revolt" of the late 1970s—a rightist movement against social programs seen as especially benefiting the black and Hispanic poor—helped propel Reagan into the White House. The right was able to maintain its political dominance through racist demagoguery.

The glaring lack of alternatives to the two partner parties of racist capital led to a sense of hopelessness among the ghetto poor and apathy in the population at large. In 1988, George Bush won the presidency in an election in which 50.1 percent of the eligible voters participated—the lowest number since records have been kept (1932). The distrust and disgruntlement of much of America in the current presidential election year was shown graphically by the fact that one Ross Perot (a right-wing capitalist kook whose bid

for the presidency strikingly recalled the candidacy of the racist, labor-hating Henry Ford back in 1923) almost precipitated a first-rate constitutional crisis until he was finally "persuaded" to withdraw his candidacy the first time.

The intensely anti-Soviet and racist political climate of the Reagan/Bush years encouraged more aggressive activity by American fascist organizations. A central and effective area of mass work for the American section during this period has been organizing united-front labor/black mobilizations to prevent Klan and Nazi demonstrations in major cities, notably in Washington, D.C. in 1982 and Philadelphia in 1988. These *successful* anti-fascist actions exemplify the key element for progressive social struggle and ultimately proletarian revolution in the U.S.—unity between the multiracial working class and the black plebeian masses, between the factory and the ghetto, under the leadership of the revolutionary vanguard party.

Following the 27 November 1982 anti-KKK demonstration in Washington, D.C., a number of people, primarily black and facing the deep oppression typical of that city, came around us. As a result, we decided to found a transitional organization, the Labor Black League for Social Defense. This was meant to be an organization for people we attracted through struggles we initiated or intervened in but who, because of their present circumstances, were not yet able to join the Trotskyist party. We took this decision facing the Reagan years and recognizing that black and other minority people who wanted to effect real change had nowhere else to go—the Democratic Party's black elected officials (BEOs) had nothing to offer as they presided over the demise of American cities. There is very little "black leadership" in the gulf between us and the BEOs—only the virulent anti-Semitic and anti-Asian nationalists, whose "black business" rhetoric is directly in the tradition of Booker T. Washington. Among this current, the Farrakhanites are the most visible.

While the Washington LBL fared poorly, similar organizations were founded in other parts of the country with better results. The membership of the LBLs has ebbed and flowed with the level of social struggle. Over the past several years we have not had the level of social struggle to attract those people for whom the LBLs were meant. Thus we are in the position of holding an organizational place for a future content. Insofar as we have black sympathizers working with us on a regular basis, it has been for the most part around defense issues.

In 1985, the most heinous racist atrocity in recent American history occurred: the Philadelphia MOVE massacre. Despite our distance from the outlook of MOVE, the SL/U.S. was virtually the only organization to stand with MOVE supporters in their grief and righteous anger. Today, MOVE supporters make up the bulk of the class-war prisoners who receive monthly stipends from the Partisan Defense Committee in the tradition of Cannon's International Labor Defense.

The party's legal/defense work has undergone impressive expansion, including internationally. First and most important has been its successful defense, during the Reagan years, of the workers party's right to organize, through our successful lawsuits against the FBI, the *Washington Times* and other attempts to brand our Marxist organization as criminal or terrorist. International labor defense, from support for the British miners strike in the face of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy's opposition, to support for jailed Ravenswood



Workers Vanguard

Spartacist League/U.S. initiated united-front labor/black mobilization of 5,000 to stop Ku Klux Klan march in Washington, D.C., November 1982.

striker Robert Buck, also abandoned by his International union leadership, has been one of our top priorities.

Perhaps one of the most significant decisions we have ever made in our defense work was to take up the case of death row prisoner, former Black Panther and MOVE supporter Mumia Abu-Jamal. Our defense of Jamal, who faces death for his political beliefs, is the spearhead of our fight to "abolish the racist death penalty." We anticipate the filing of a major legal challenge to the conviction and the death sentence, at which point an international campaign of major scope will be posed.

In general, our PDC campaigns have augmented the presentation of our program: e.g., defense of former Black Panther Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt); defense of courageous Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu; defense of the Louisiana Board of Education against the forces of creationism; labor/black mobilizations to stop the fascists; and the Jalalabad Civilian Victims Aid Fund.

### III

Over the 1980s, a major social development has been the dramatic increase in the Hispanic population, now numbering over 25 million, rivaling the black population in size and making the U.S. the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. In Los Angeles and Miami, Latinos are now the largest single ethnic group, outnumbering whites as well as blacks. This has spawned a racist backlash in the form of "English only" bigotry and hysteria against "illegal aliens," particularly in the Southwest. Nativist chauvinism is found even among blacks, with Latin American (and Asian) immigrants accused of "stealing jobs." Thus defense of the foreign-born, notably our call for full citizenship rights for immigrant workers and opposition to privileges for any language, is a key part of the program for proletarian revolution in the U.S.

The Republican Party has appealed to Hispanic voters as a "swing group" to be used against blacks. Also, racist police have instigated riots by Latino communities in a number of cities with black mayors (notably Washington,

D.C. and New York). But with the extreme impoverishment of the immigrant Latin American communities, social struggle has brought together blacks and Hispanics, as was dramatically shown in the May 1992 Los Angeles upheaval. With a heavy presence in service, garment and construction industries, Latino workers (many with experience in militant battles in places like El Salvador) have played a major role in recent labor struggles. The SL/U.S. has sought to intersect these struggles with communist propaganda, emphasizing the centrality of the black question and that Hispanic workers can serve as a human bridge to the combative working classes of Latin America.

Recognizing recent demographic and economic shifts in the country, the SL/U.S. has determined to build a strong branch in Los Angeles. We had to give up our Detroit local and recognize our nonviability in Cleveland in favor of our Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Los Angeles branches.

### IV

The anti-black demagoguery of the right has been complemented by agitation for anti-Japanese trade protectionism by the "liberal" Democrats and especially the trade-union bureaucracy. Plant closures and giveback contracts are blamed on "unfair" competition from Japan and other East Asian countries. There is a growing propaganda campaign which presents America's economic decline as the result of a deliberate plot on the part of Japan's rulers. With the collapse of the Soviet Union as a perceived enemy "superpower," anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S. has intensified, leading to an increase in violent attacks on Asian Americans. We oppose trade protectionism not only because, it is, a diversion from working-class struggle against the exploiters and is associated with racism. We recognize as well that the development of a world market for commodities is historically progressive and constitutes a *precondition* for a global communist society.

However, in the epoch of capitalist decay, the pattern and terms of world trade perpetuate the exploitation by the imperialist countries of North America, West Europe and

Japan of the backward capitalist countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. World trade is additionally manipulated and distorted by monopolies and cartels, such as the extortionate pricing of oil by the OPEC/Seven Sisters operation. Now a "North American Free Trade Zone" is being formed. The Grupo Espartaquista de México, Spartacist League/U.S. and Trotskyist League of Canada last year issued a joint statement of *internationalist* opposition to this plan for a "Fortress North America," denouncing this pact as "U.S. imperialism's answer to the Fourth Reich and Japan Inc.," which would facilitate the looting of Mexico's resources by more powerful U.S. (and Canadian) capital and assault labor rights in all three countries ("Stop U.S. 'Free Trade' Rape of Mexico," *Workers Vanguard* No. 530, 5 July 1991).

The answer is not a retreat into national economic autarky, which finds its most extreme form in the fascist corporate state, but the communist program to expropriate the productive resources from the capitalists and to restructure the international division of labor on a rationally planned and globally egalitarian basis.

## V

In the most recent period there has been a certain shift in the mood of the American masses compared to the conservative political climate of the 1980s. Witness the widespread revulsion over the spectacle of the sexist Clarence Thomas U.S. Supreme Court confirmation hearings. The increasing gulf between government policy and people's desires is clearly demonstrated by the issue of defense of existing abortion rights. The political right wing, under the influence of religious fundamentalism, has overreached itself by pushing for the complete illegalization of abortion. Such a prohibition is strongly opposed by a majority of women in all social layers and ethnic groups as an attack on their democratic rights. The abortion issue has provoked a popular backlash against the far right, especially its religious component, split the ruling class and even divided the Republican Party. Our intervention in the abortion rights movement and participation in clinic defense, under the central slogan of "Free Abortion on Demand," calling for breaking with the Democrats and building a workers party, is a conjuncturally important aspect of our broader struggle against the forces of social and political reaction.

The December 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama and arrest of Manuel Noriega was both a brazen assertion of U.S. "supersovereignty" and a military and political trial balloon for further imperialist adventures. The Pentagon denied the press access to the field of battle and then grossly lied about the casualties—most likely up to 3,000 dead. The media's acceptance of censorship conditions such as the "approved" reporters pool foreshadowed their willingness to "do our part" in the subsequent Persian Gulf massacre; thereby retroactively pleading guilty to the charge of having "lost" Vietnam by their occasional pretenses to "objective" reporting.

The Persian Gulf War, despite the rapid U.S. victory with practically no casualties on its own side, nonetheless indicated that the Vietnam experience remains deeply embedded in the American political psyche. Protest demonstrations, largely by student youth, before the outbreak of the war and even after it was clear the U.S. would achieve an easy victory, were larger than in the first stages of the Vietnam War. The leadership of the "antiwar movement," which sup-

ported UN sanctions against Iraq, catered to patriotic moods in the population to the point of wearing yellow ribbons in memory of U.S. troops! The SL/U.S. became a visible and energetic pole against the entire social-patriotic reformist left through our central slogan, "Defeat U.S. Imperialism! Defend Iraq!"

Washington may imagine it has created a "New World Order," going after "rogue states" (those who don't have nuclear weapons but want them) and acting as world gendarme, arrogating the "right" to kidnap "suspects" at will. But if U.S. imperialism engages in a war involving any significant level of American casualties, one can expect massive domestic opposition.

Defense of the Cuban deformed workers state against Yankee imperialism will be posed sharply in this period. Republicans and Democrats alike have threatened the destruction of "Castro Communism" in the next four years and to achieve this are tightening the screws of the brutal economic embargo (now far more effective with the cutoff of Soviet aid). In the besieged and defiant island, the mass of the population, enduring tremendous hardships, still supports the revolution which has brought them immense social gains. The Castro regime, however, has hunkered down into a bunker mentality, epitomized by the Stalinist show trial and execution of General Ochoa in 1988. This was part of a grotesque effort to appease the U.S., as Castro offered to join Bush's "war on drugs." The bureaucratic Stalinist regime that shoots its generals is criminally undermining defense of the Cuban Revolution. Trotskyists in the U.S. have a particular obligation to mobilize opposition to the Yankee counterrevolutionary threat from "within the belly of the beast."

Patriotic euphoria over the Gulf War was quickly dissipated as the recession brought a flood of popular economic discontent to the surface. There is a widespread and growing recognition that the rich have become filthy rich (in 1989, the richest one percent of the population held 36.3 percent of the wealth), the workers have become poor and the poor have become homeless. It has become commonplace for older, socially conservative white workers, such as those who recently struck the huge Caterpillar construction equipment company in the Midwest, to declare that "the American Dream is dead." They have seen their own living standards fall sharply over the past generation and expect their children will have it even worse. While sabotaged and knifed by the trade-union bureaucracy, strikes of Pittston miners, Eastern Airlines machinists and isolated Midwest meatpackers were enormously popular among and watched closely by U.S. workers.

The change in the political climate was highlighted by the Los Angeles "riot" in early May, the first such ghetto explosion since the 1960s. This was triggered by the acquittal of four white policemen who brutally beat a black motorist, Rodney King. This atrocious picture of the domestic face of Bush's "New World Order" was captured by an eyewitness on videotape and flashed around the world. Unlike the ghetto rebellions of the 1960s, the L.A. upheaval and its sympathetic echoes across the country were conspicuously *multiracial*. Outrage over the acquittal of the sadistic, racist cops by a white suburban jury was widespread throughout American society, as was sympathy for the plight of the black and Latino poor. "This is just as much about class as about race" was not an uncommon refrain. The ruling class, given an unexpected fright,

responded with a massive exercise in police-state repression, orchestrated from the Bush White House to the black Democratic mayor of Los Angeles. The SL/U.S. called upon Los Angeles-area labor, especially the powerful longshore union, to shut down the ports and mobilize in defense of the ghetto and against the police/army occupation. Also key in our propaganda was this truth: "The point is not to seize articles of consumption but to expropriate the means of production. *And that takes a leap in consciousness and organization to do away with the capitalist order.*"

The spontaneous character of the L.A. conflagration and its effective suppression by the bourgeois state points to a fundamental contradiction in American society. The U.S. is the only advanced capitalist country without a political party based on the working class, even of a reformist character. The unique political backwardness of the American working class (and its consequent weakness even at the level of economic struggle) derives centrally from the ability of the bourgeoisie to exploit national, ethnic and racial divisions. Since the mid-1960s the manifold ethnic differences within the American working class have been concentrated along the white/black divide with the growing Hispanic population representing an intermediate layer. The largely white Caterpillar workers in the Midwest and rebellious black and Latino youth in South-Central L.A., both victims of American capitalist decay, are currently deeply politically and socially alienated from one another. This lack of class consciousness and the resulting sense of hopelessness on the part of so many people in this country are a large objective obstacle for us.

It is the *indispensable task* of a multiracial communist vanguard party to link the extremely diverse and presently divided elements of the American working class and plebeian masses in revolutionary struggle. The *political unity* of the American proletariat requires a struggle against the oppression of the black and Hispanic populations outside the point of production (e.g., against racist police brutality, for the integration of schools and housing, for social programs ben-

eficial to the impoverished ghettos and barrios). A workers party cannot develop in the U.S. simply through the politicization of trade-union struggle, such as occurred in Britain with the formation of the Labour Party at the beginning of this century. It is difficult to envision the American working class going beyond economist trade unions and political support to the bourgeois parties, except through the instrumentality of a multiracial communist vanguard party.

To date our main instrument for intersecting both labor and blacks in this country is our biweekly *Workers Vanguard*. We seek to intervene in struggle when and where we can, using our paper, special publications like the extremely popular *Black History* series begun in 1983, and special supplements. For example, our manifesto on militant class struggle published in 1984, "Labor's Gotta Play Hardball to Win!" is still being distributed and well received. At the time of the First International Conference, *WV* averaged a press run of 10,800 copies per issue and had a domestic subscription base of 2,425. In 1982, the point of the SL/U.S.' highest membership, the press run was 17,208 and the sub base 2,789. In 1991, with fewer members, the press run was 19,000 and the sub base 2,524. Since the last international conference, our sub base for *Women and Revolution* has doubled. Over the past year this unique journal has finally become international in contribution as well as content. Bookstores and distributors have helped increase single-issue sales and, in general, sales per comrade-hour have increased substantially over the years—our best street sales are among blacks.

In October 1986, one of the most powerful unions on the East Coast, with a significant black component, the International Longshoremen's Association, struck the Northeast. The SL/U.S. produced a special supplement, "From PATCO to Hormel—Too Much!—Let's Win This One!", and within three days comrades, including cadre from other ICL sections, distributed a quarter of a million supplements to striking longshoremen and others in 36 cities including all three coasts. Unfortunately, the ILA tops called off the strike after those three days.

The SL/U.S. recognized the importance of the breakthrough we had made and has consistently followed up the contacts in the Southeast ports. This work has fallen mainly to our two very small but vitally important Southern local committees, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. This work has paid off—when L.A. blew up in May of this year, our special supplement, "Outrage Over Racist Acquittal of Cops in Rodney King Case," was distributed to the members of four Southern ILA locals by union members through the union halls.

## VI

It is not simply a geographical accident that our international tendency—the sole organized expression of authentic Trotskyism in the world today—originated in the United States. The American Trotskyist organization, whose leadership around James P. Cannon went back to the early Communist International, was the strongest section of the Fourth Internationalist movement in the mid/late 1930s. The Socialist Workers Party leadership, although imprisoned, preserved its continuity during World War II while the European Trotskyist cadre were decimated by the Nazi occupation and Stalinist vengefulness. The slow degeneration of the SWP during the 1950s, culminating in uncritical political support to the national-Stalinist Castro regime

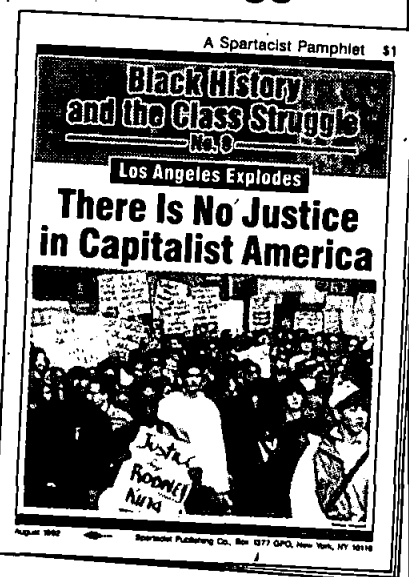
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in Cuba, led to the formation of a left opposition which developed into the SL/U.S. in the mid-1960s.

While the political roots of the U.S. section go back to Cannon's SWP, the majority of its cadres derive from the New Left radicalization of the 1960s, centered around the struggle for black equality and opposition to the imperialist war in Vietnam. The sharp rightward turn in the political climate since the late 1970s led to stagnation and then a substantial decline in the membership of the SL/U.S. From a peak in 1982, membership has now fallen by one-third. In the early '80s we lost a fair number of middle-level cadre, many of whom remain sympathizers. However, a few renegades formed the totally repulsive, anti-Spartacist, politically dubious, questionably funded "Bolshevik Tendency" nest of provocateurs. At least 20 American comrades are working outside the U.S., to the International's benefit. The rest of this decade-long loss can be attributed to "normal" attrition. However the "normal" replacement one would expect has not taken place. Throughout the '80s we noted that our authority in the U.S. was vastly out of proportion to our size and ability to recruit.

The SL (like the rest of the U.S. left) was largely wiped out of industry by the mid-1970s layoffs, sharply reducing the number of active fractions. While it has maintained the level of unionized members, this has shifted to more secure jobs, particularly in municipal transport and skilled trades. Additionally, we have seen a shift of a number of comrades' work situations to petty-bourgeois, white-collar (i.e., non-union) jobs, primarily in the computer industry, where the necessity to guard against the erosion of communist consciousness is constant.

As a result of a substantial reduction in the number of youth members in the context of the sharp rightward political turn in the U.S., the Spartacus Youth League was liquidated as a national organization by decision of the SL/U.S. Central Committee in the spring of 1986 in favor of local youth clubs under the direction of the respective party branches. The CC established a Youth Commission with the right to publish up to four *Young Spartacus* pages in *WV* every month. In a period of low campus political activity and with fewer than two dozen non-party youth members, the party could not justify maintaining a separate youth organization with its own newspaper when the more pressing need was to solidify our geographical expansion. The task remains to build youth fractions to work the campuses.

Over the past several years, U.S. campuses have seen increasing eruptions of raw racist violence—even in traditionally liberal and erstwhile radical enclaves. This, along with declining financial aid and tuition hikes, has resulted in a decline in black enrollment in American colleges and the growth of black nationalist influence, especially at traditionally black institutions.

While our campus fractions have had some small success in recruitment, primarily in the Midwest, the fact is that the SL/U.S. currently has eight students. There are many conservatizing influences at play upon American youth today. Perhaps the starkest example is that never before in the history of the world has a generation of youth reached the age of majority with the knowledge that sex can equal death by AIDS.

In addition to the quantitative decline in SL/U.S. membership, there is the problem of the aging of its cadre. At the time of the last national conference of the SL/U.S. in

1987, the average age of the membership was 34 and the average time in our tendency was 10.5 years. At the present time, both these indices are certainly substantially higher. The coming of middle age usually brings an increase in personal conservatism, which to a degree is necessary for a lifelong professional revolutionary. However, the American section must guard against the possibility that some members will respond to a sharp upturn in social struggle as a disturbance of their settled routine and the lifestyle to which they have become habituated during a prolonged reactionary and quiescent period. A cofactor complicating this potential problem is that the vast majority of the layer of comrades recruited following the generation schooled in the civil rights and antiwar era have virtually *no* experience on the front lines of social struggle.

Thus far, the American section has weathered the Reagan/Bush years rather well. But as comrade Robertson recently pointed out, there are three ways we can wreck ourselves unless we make a conscious effort otherwise. We could degenerate into: (1) Menshevism, (2) Stalinism (i.e., become some sort of bureaucratic organization) or (3) De Leonism (i.e., drift into abstract propagandism, concomitantly withdrawing from struggle). The recent fight in the New York local centering on a flinch over the arrests of several supporters at an abortion rights march touched (1) and (3) above. It was good to have had this fight early on, as we look to be facing the possibility of both increased repression and augmented class struggle in the U.S. as inter-imperialist rivalries continue apace.

Despite its reduced membership, the SL/U.S. has maintained a high level of activity and has increased its weight in the left and the broader radical milieu. Many of our major competitors during the 1970s have disappeared entirely, especially the Maoists and most of the Trotskyoid centrists, while others have moved far to the right. The Communist Party has fractured, and it is likely that a large chunk of the social-democratic "Committees of Correspondence," containing many of the former CP leading black cadres, will wind up attempting (unsuccessfully) to become the left wing of the Democratic Party. The SWP has largely disappeared as a competitor due to loss of members and its shift toward backwater areas where we don't exist. The Workers League, the sinister North organization in the U.S., while lately putting on a more orthodox face, has devoted much of its energy to keeping the SWP's Mark Curtis in jail for the rest of his life. Of the various remaining fragments of the Healyite implosion, the Northites are the most dubious and, with some international scope, the most nettlesome. It is not surprising in this period that the Third Campist International Socialist Organization, which openly trumpets the "death of communism," has become our main competitor on the campuses. We must be vigilant in sterilizing the political atmosphere against the centrists, especially the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL) and Sollenberger's split-off, despite their small size, or they will grow.

Thus the public profile of the SL/U.S. is appreciably higher than a decade ago. However, the aim of a revolutionary party is not to hold out during a slow, reactionary period. The American section must anticipate winning to Trotskyism a new generation of radicalized workers, intellectuals, youth, black and Hispanic activists, immigrant students and workers, whose political consciousness, shaped by the post-Cold War world, will be very different than that we have previously encountered.



## 11. Canada: Regroupment and Quebec

In Canada, the effects of the Free Trade Agreement have intersected the worst economic downturn of all the "Group of Seven" imperialist powers. Both the primary resource sector (forestry, mining, fishing) and the manufacturing base have been devastated with closures. Massive hatred for the federal Tory government translated into populist support for the right-wing social democrats of the New Democratic Party, who now rule the key provinces of Ontario and British Columbia.

Meanwhile, the country itself may be about to fall apart. The relatively new Québécois bourgeoisie is seeking extensive autonomy, with some sectors hoping to form an independent mini-imperialist state in Quebec, a North American Austria or Belgium-based on supplying raw material to the U.S. Pro-"sovereignty" parties lead in Quebec opinion polls. Unlike the 1960s/early 1970s, when Quebec nationalism was cloaked in "socialist" verbiage and opposition to national oppression helped fuel labor militancy, now the nationalist "movement" in Quebec overtly expresses the appetites of the indigenous Québécois bourgeoisie to be "masters of their own house," and has fueled racist xenophobia.

The once militant Quebec labor movement is hamstrung by its leadership, which champions the bourgeois nationalists. The union bureaucrats in English Canada who promote Maple Leaf nationalism have engineered a series of splits from the U.S.-based international unions, notably in auto. Nonetheless, the rate of unionization has actually slightly increased in the last decade (to 38 percent), and there have been several major strikes, mainly in the public sector where there has been binational class struggle. Against the nationalist labor tops and their "left" hangers-on we stand out for our internationalist perspective of class-struggle unity of the working class of North America—expressed in our unconditional defense of Quebec's right to self-determination and simultaneous opposition to Quebec nationalism. We have recently changed the name of the section to Trotskyist League/Ligue Trotskyste to emphasize that Canada is a bilingual country.

The federal and provincial governments have now produced a so-called "constitutional package," which they are putting before the electorate in a referendum. The campaign for a "yes" vote in this referendum is explicitly designed to rally the population to "save Canada," i.e., to endorse the status quo of a "united" Canadian imperialist state. We call for a "no" vote in this referendum, while sharply demarcating our proletarian internationalist line from those other forces calling for a "no" vote, whether it be the Quebec nationalists or deeply reactionary English Canadian chauvinists like the Reform Party. At the same time, we are opposed to the disintegration of English Canada which at present could only strengthen the power of U.S. imperialism.

While still relatively small, the Canadian section has seen substantial growth in the past four years. This followed significant losses in the early 1980s, in which the future "Bolshevik Tendency" showed their mettle by quitting in the face of the anti-Soviet Cold War drive. In addition to linear recruitment of youth, the TLC regrouped young members of the USec who were won to the ICL centrally on the Russian question. This was a blow to the pathetic

remnants of Mandelism in Canada, who operate as ineffectual satellites of the NDP in English Canada and strident nationalists in Quebec. We also recruited a seasoned cadre from the Communist Party, which has terminally disintegrated with the collapse of Stalinism in East Europe and the Soviet Union. The issue of *Spartacist Canada* documenting our recruitment from the CP and regroupment with a USec faction can be and has been used to good effect internationally. With the decline of the Stalinists, the state-capitalist International Socialists has become a major opponent on the campuses.

A branch has been re-established in Vancouver, important for our general West Coast perspectives in North America. A couple of young comrades are now stationed in Montreal, where a breakthrough by recruitment or regroupment remains a key task. There have been problems with cohering a collective leadership in the Toronto center, which have begun to be addressed. Production of *Spartacist Canada* has been regularized and professionalized, but the section should strive toward increasing its frequency.

The TLC has also recruited a number of comrades from important Third World countries, notably in Asia. The population of once lily-white Toronto is now more than one-quarter non-European minorities, which was reflected in what was likely the largest anti-racist demonstration in the city's history—called in solidarity with the L.A. upheaval over the Rodney King verdict and spurred by the racist murder of a young black by the Toronto cops. Close to half the school-age population of Vancouver is from Pacific Rim countries. Like other sections with significant immigrant/refugee populations, the TLC must continue to pay great attention to recruiting and integrating foreign-born leftists.

## 12. Mexico: Bridgehead to Latin America

### I

Mexico City Station was established by implantation in 1988, at a time of considerable labor and political turmoil. It was the first Spartacist group functioning in Latin America. In the face of nationalist left support for the bourgeois presidential candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, including indirectly from the Mandelites and Morenoites, our tiny group has been unique in its unflinching proletarian opposition to this popular-frontism and its exposure of the left's capitulation to it. While support for the Cardenista popular front crested in the '88 elections and has since considerably ebbed, it has played a key role in derailing class struggle. The subsequent demoralization has meant that negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. and Canada have been completed with no real opposition from the Mexican working class.

A decade ago Wall Street declared Mexico a "basket case" and imposed draconian austerity to squeeze billions out of the impoverished population. Now the Salinas government is praised for having produced an "economic miracle" as it privatizes the heavily state-owned economy wholesale, selling off banks, phone company, steel plants, mines and airlines at bargain prices. Recently passed constitutional "reforms" are eliminating gains of the Mexican



Revolution, notably seeking to "modernize" agriculture by eliminating collectively owned peasant land. The Mexican bourgeoisie is squeezing the workers ever harder as it ties itself more closely to its imperialist masters. Tens of thousands of unionized jobs are being eliminated while hunger and disease spread. Next on their agenda, demonstrated by the recent smashing of the Volkswagen strike, is to enforce "labor peace" with a whip in order to attract investors.

The powerful and class-conscious Mexican proletariat cannot and will not indefinitely tolerate this situation. The bankruptcy of the popular-front nationalist left is patently evident. Our revolutionary internationalist program to link struggles in Mexico with the class struggle in the United States is crucial. The first three issues of *Espartaco*, which has coverage of and is circulated in both the U.S. and Mexico, and the successful forum in Mexico City on the L.A. upheaval, have served to underline this connection, which will become all the more vital as labor struggles extend across the border and internationally. The attention of the SL/U.S. to recent strikes in Southern California and El Paso also strengthens this.

Mexico City Station was able to achieve some youth recruitment, while losing one of the implanted members out of demoralization. Key to establishing the Grupo Esparquista de México (GEM) was a fusion with longtime leading cadre of the Morenoite organization, the Trotskyist Faction, who broke with that current over its support to imperialist counterrevolution in East Germany. The fusion highlighted the centrality of the Russian question, as the Mexican left succumbs to the bourgeoisie's "death of communism" offensive.

We continue to have a number of contacts in the Morenoite milieu, as that tendency fragments. However, increasingly the GEM's propaganda intervention and recruitment opportunities are focused on sectors where there have been mass struggles, such as the student struggles this past spring. The tiny Mexican outpost of the ICL remains tenuous and reversible. The biggest achievement is the real integration of comrades recruited from the Morenoites into the work and norms of the International. A few recruits will go a long way toward stabilizing a section working in close collaboration with the U.S. section.

## II

The fusion documents, published in the GEM bulletin, "From Morenoism to Trotskyism—The Russian Question Pointblank," are a powerful weapon for intervening in a Latin American left that has gone into total crisis over the counterrevolutionary wave in East Europe and the Soviet Union. A continental forum of the left (including Stalinists, nationalists and pseudo-Trotskyists), which met first in São Paulo, Brazil in 1990 and then in Mexico City last year, practically declared its own bankruptcy. Now the Argentine MAS, the main party of followers of Moreno (who died in early 1987), once several thousand strong, has had its second major split in four years, losing its major parliamentary figures. While the remnants of Morenoism will remain among the flora and fauna of the Buenos Aires political scene, internationally this current, whose hallmark was perpetual maneuverism, seems mortally wounded.

In this context, the ICL came into contact with a split-off from the Argentine Partido Obrero of Jorge Altamira, long associated with the Bolivian centrist Lora and once linked

to the Lambertistes. This group, formerly the Partido de Trabajadores, now Partido Bolchevique por la Cuarta Internacional, has undergone leftward motion over the last couple of years. Beginning with strong workerist tendencies, they re-examined and came to reject the popular-frontist "anti-imperialist united front" in light of Trotsky's writings.

In July 1991, the PT joined with a small left split from the MAS to form the PBCI. Immediately after the August 1991 coup in Moscow, the group called for taking a stand "in the military camp of the Stalinists." While it declares that with the Yeltsin victory the workers state was destroyed, it continues to call for political revolution. Their idiosyncratic and contradictory line reflects the relative isolation of Argentina, where "national Trotskyism" has held sway for four decades. The GEM has worked closely with the I.S. in discussions with the PBCI.

## 13. Japan: Drive Toward a New "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere"

### I

Japanese imperialism sits upon mountains of yen, but the collapse of Soviet and East European Stalinism has also exposed numerous contradictions within Japan Inc. Japanese capitalism's post-World War II recovery and expansion flowered under the Cold War military hegemony of the United States. In later years, as the rusting U.S. economy declined, Japanese capital for a time was willing to prop up the American market, its largest export outlet for manufactured goods. The Cold War suppressed for a time the inherent conflict of interests between Japanese and U.S. imperialism. But those days are over.

Since the 1985 Plaza Accord, which nearly doubled the value of the yen against the dollar, investors have been shifting their capital to the low-wage countries of Southeast Asia and buying minerals from Australia. Today, Japan is the major trading partner of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam, and its trade with and investment in the Philippines equals that of the U.S. Continued expansion of Japanese capital will eventually put it on a collision course with the U.S. as the drive to create a new Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere trade bloc compels Japan to police its own interests.

Japan now has the world's third-largest military budget (soon to be second if the former Soviet Union's military power is dismantled). The long-ruling bourgeois Liberal Democratic Party recently pushed through the Diet (parliament) a bill which will enable the government to dispatch its military forces overseas (although deep pacifistic sentiments in the population remain an obstacle). This peace-keeping bill (PKO), however, was immediately implemented and Japanese military personnel were sent to Cambodia. As trade tensions heat up, xenophobic racism is escalating on both sides of the Pacific. A new Japanese word, *kembei*, meaning hatred of Americans, has come into vogue, and top-level Tokyo officials continually blame blacks, Hispanics and "lazy" workers for the U.S. economic decline.

At the same time, internal fissures are being ripped in the wall of Japan's supposed economic superiority, the most serious being the Tokyo stock market crash which began

in 1990. The Nikkei index has fallen by more than 60 percent since December 1989. Japan's new "bubble economy," spurred in part by the dramatic strengthening of the yen after 1985, was based on skyrocketing real-estate values and fueled by stock market speculation. This speculative boom drove up interest rates, and Japanese capital found it more lucrative to invest overseas. Japan's postwar economic boom has peaked and the 1990s will see a much slower growth rate, with investment in plant and equipment decreasing.

Japan Inc.'s economic expansion has been sustained through the sweat and blood of a highly efficient workforce that has been horrendously overworked for nearly a generation. In the aftermath of the militant postwar strike wave, which was betrayed by the then powerful Communist Party, the bourgeoisie sought to buy off the proletariat in the strategic industrial sectors with relatively high wages and benefits. The supplier and small shop end of the economy, however, retains its prewar character, and is the main employer of a rapidly expanding immigrant labor population (from Asia, Africa and South America), who have been tracked into these low-paying, dirty and dangerous jobs.

The screws of exploitation were tightened after the "oil shock" of the 1970s, when the six-day workweek was expanded through unlimited overtime. Today, the industrial proletariat in Japan works over 200 hours more per year than their American counterparts and 500 hours more than European workers. The industrial accident rate is growing, and *karoshi* (death from overwork) is increasing among the general working population.

With the current economic downturn, the Japanese bourgeoisie, which cannot physically work its proletariat more, is aiming at driving down wages. This was the issue behind the militant but truncated commuter rail strikes in Tokyo and Osaka this past spring, which paralyzed the major urban centers, if only for a few hours. Propaganda directed at the rail workers by the Spartacist Group/Japan (SGJ) has emphasized the need for industrial unionism and a Leninist revolutionary party that will fight for power.

A proletarian revolution must create a workers republic to eradicate the many remaining vestiges of feudalism, centrally the oppression of women which is perpetuated through the maintenance of the emperor system. The Meiji economic transformation did nothing to change the Confucian Edo-period dictate for women, "When young, obey your father; when married, obey your husband; when widowed, obey your son," and sanctioned the oppression of women by tying it to the patriarchal emperor system. As Japan moves to re-establish its military prowess, women will increasingly be targeted by reactionary ideology to again be seen as no more than "borrowed wombs," expected to produce sons for the empire. Today, in light of the declining birthrate, the government scapegoats women seeking higher education, bans the low-dosage birth control pill and ominously whittles away at abortion rights.

The SGJ has a strong orientation to minority and immigrant workers. The minority population (Ainu, Burakumin, Koreans and Chinese) and newly arrived immigrant labor are not a strategic part of the industrial proletariat and their percentage of the population is still small. But politically the minority question far outweighs this numerical weakness. The SGJ has not only demanded full citizenship rights for all minorities living in Japan, but has also called for the integration of minority, "arbeiter" (part-time or sea-

sonal) and women workers into the present unions to break the institutional barriers that deny them permanent employment status in basic industry. Our slogan for a workers republic is taking more concrete form with the emergence of open challenges to the racist denial of citizenship rights for non-Japanese residents. The creation of the Korean-led *Zainichi-to* (party of foreigners), which is demanding bourgeois democratic rights to vote and run for office, is indicative of Korean aspirations to fight for a better life in their Japanese homeland. This could spark other minority groups into political consciousness and activity.

While the oppression of women is expressed in the Confucian conception of the family, the workplace is where the fight for women's liberation intersects the proletariat's fight for emancipation from wage slavery. Because of cyclical labor shortages, women now comprise 37 percent of the workforce but are exploited as second-class part-time workers with no benefit of union protection. They face degrading sexual harassment on the job and are subjected to enormous social pressures to find a husband and quit. Our demand to organize the thousands upon thousands of women into common unions with the industrial proletariat is a key component of a Japanese proletarian revolution. Militant Japanese women workers will prove to be tenacious fighters for socialism.

While the SGJ has been able to issue timely propaganda and stabilize a level of functioning allowing the International to recognize it as a sympathizing section, it remains at the organizational level an unstable subpropaganda group. It is distinguished from the rest of the Japanese left above all by its defense of proletarian state power in the Soviet Union and East Europe. Both major reformist parties—Socialists and Communists—have lined up with Japanese imperialism against the Soviet Union, most clearly in demanding the return to Japan of the Kuril Islands occupied by the Red Army after World War II. The large Japanese New Left milieu, including its pseudo-Trotskyist component, are vocal cheerleaders for "bourgeois-democratic" counterrevolution in the former Soviet bloc. In contrast, from the outset the Spartacist Group/Japan has identified itself with the tradition of Richard Sorge and Ozaki Hotsumi, heroic defenders of the Soviet Union against world imperialism.

## II

A growing militant mood among Koreans in Japan can play a significant role in establishing ties between the enormously powerful Japanese proletariat and the combative working class of South Korea. In the recent period, the South Korean proletariat, especially the workforce at the giant Hyundai industrial complex, has engaged in the sharpest class struggles in Asia. Under heavy repression, these workers have built genuine unions which stand opposed to the government-sponsored (and "AFL-CIA" advised) company unions. South Korean workers have readily joined the traditional spring student protests, an indication that they are not confined to a narrow economist consciousness. A determined struggle to topple the bonapartist regime in Seoul could spur the workers in North Korea to struggle for political revolution.

World imperialism would like to replicate a German-type Anschluss in reunifying Korea on a capitalist basis. However, the South Korean bourgeoisie is a weak, narrow and corrupt ruling class totally lacking the economic clout of

the West German capitalists. The Seoul bonapartist regime depends on the U.S. army to shore up its rule militarily and relies economically on increasing investment by Japanese capital. We call for reunification of the peninsula through socialist revolution in the capitalist South and proletarian political revolution in the North, against a weird Stalinist regime which proclaims *juche* (self-reliance), a cultist version of "socialism in half a country." The missing ingredient in this volatile situation is a Leninist-Trotskyist party to lead the struggle for the revolutionary reunification of Korea, which would have a profound impact on the consciousness of the working masses of the Far East, not least in Japan, the industrial powerhouse of Asia. We have produced our first Korean-language offprint for distribution in Japan and elsewhere.

### III

The main historic target of Japanese imperialism in Asia is China. Indeed, it was above all for control over China that the Japanese *zaibatsu* (cartels) fought the rulers of Wall Street during the Pacific War of 1941-45. However, the Stalinist-led, peasant-based Chinese Revolution of 1949—itsself in good part propelled by national resistance to the racist and brutal Japanese occupation—unexpectedly deprived American imperialism of its biggest prize in Asia.

After pursuing a policy of militant hostility to Communist China for two decades, Washington did an about-face in the early 1970s and effected a strategic alliance with the Mao regime against the Soviet Union. Mao's successor, Deng Hsiao-ping, deepened the reactionary alliance with the U.S. (e.g., invading Vietnam with Washington's backing in 1979) while pursuing aggressive market reforms domestically. Under the slogan of "building socialism with capitalist methods," the Beijing Stalinists decollectivized agriculture, promoted private entrepreneurs in retail trade and handicrafts, and established industrial "free trade zones" for foreign, especially Japanese, investment.

The rampant official corruption and emergence of nouveau riche petty capitalists along with rising inflation and unemployment fueled a growing popular discontent which came to the surface in the 1989 crisis. While the student-based "democracy" movement had illusions in Western-style parliamentarism, the working masses who took to the streets wanted a return to economic equality and security, a restoration of the "iron rice bowl."

The Deng regime moved to suppress the mass protests by ordering loyal army units to carry out a massacre. Contrary to Western imperialist propaganda, the main victims of this bloodbath were not the student activists, most of whom withdrew from Tiananmen Square unscathed, but rather young workers in Beijing and other cities. In the days following the Beijing massacre—when the attitude of the army as a whole was still in question—China was poised on the brink of a proletarian political revolution.

The conditions which led to near civil war in 1989 have in no way been mitigated. China is today a seething cauldron of contradictions and discontents barely suppressed by an octogenarian Stalinist regime. While there are riots in the southern city of Shenzhen to get stock coupons, there are numerous reports of workers attacking their bosses for "Western management practices" such as ordering layoffs. When Deng dies, if not before, the succession crisis likely will lead to a situation in which proletarian political



Beijing workers enter battle during 1989 mass demonstrations under banner "Students: The Workers Have Arrived." Spectre of nascent proletarian political revolution was posed as Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy launched bloody crackdown.

revolution or capitalist counterrevolution are posed point-blank, thus determining the fate of the most populous country on earth.

### IV

A serious defeat for our tendency was the collapse of our small organization in Lanka and the attendant inviability of an Indian perspective. Our comrades had established a reputation as outspoken defenders of Tamil rights. In conditions of semi-clandestinity under a right-wing bonapartist regime, they managed to maintain a semblance of organizational and political cohesion, intervening in particular among students and the superexploited women workers of the Free Trade Zone.

The lack of effective bilingual capacity, on top of a vast cultural gulf, together with the horrendous situation resulting from the 1983 government-instigated anti-Tamil pogroms and ensuing civil war, produced severe political erosion of the group. Subsequently a number of individuals in the area have maintained communication with the ICL and consider themselves our supporters, and some have managed to work with the International elsewhere.

## 14. Australia: Between Yankee Imperialism and Japan Inc.

The post-Cold War period of intensifying interimperialist rivalry has left the Australian bourgeoisie deeply conflicted

and fearful. Rising winds of trade-war protectionism have them caught between Japan, their biggest trading partner but also target of their deepest xenophobic fears, and their big brother U.S. "protector." This contradiction will give us fertile political terrain for our propaganda: Australia is part of Asia; Japanese and American imperialism are both bitter enemies of the working class; we must fight for the only realistic solution—a socialist federation of Southeast Asia.

More than just a lackey partner, Australia is a willing and ambitious jackal regional power, from sending troops to aid the U.S. war on Vietnam to dispatching "UN peace-keeping" troops to Cambodia today. It is angling for greater U.S. presence in the region and on its own shores (U.S. bases) while lording over its deeply exploited and oppressed Pacific neocolonies.

At home this has meant stepped-up cop terror against the deeply oppressed Aboriginal population, and the roundup and incarceration of "illegal" immigrants by the Labor government. Earlier this year, after significant student demonstrations, the Victorian state Labor government launched an anti-communist witchhunt which included the arrest of leftists and re-establishment of the notorious "red squads."

Faced with rising unemployment and an economic slump, the nationalist Laborite—"left" union bureaucracy has been pushing vitriolic anti-Asian protectionism accompanied by anti-immigrant racism, in an attempt to shore up the ALP's base. The foundation of nearly ten years of Labor government rule has been the anti-labor Accord (social contract) delivered by a compliant union bureaucracy.

Repeated and often hard-fought strikes throughout 1991 offered numerous opportunities for an aggressive class-struggle intervention by our party. These culminated in the powerful October 1991 24-hour general strike in New South Wales which, despite the treacherous union misleadership, united the state's multiracial working class in opposition to draconian anti-union laws.

In part due to its extreme isolation from the rest of the International, comrades of the Spartacist League of Australia (SL/A) were particularly vulnerable to the bourgeois lie that "communism is dead." This political demoralization led to an egregious betrayal of the elementary union principle of "One out, all out!" during the October general strike and to tailing the most backward elements of the union bureaucracy.

This was first taken up by the I.S. and led to a sharp fight culminating in an emergency national conference in 1992. The conference underlined that the significant immigrant component of the working class in Australia presented an opportunity to concretize our propaganda for integrated class struggle against "White Australia" laborism. Key to our propaganda in the coming period will be the fight for democratic rights for immigrants and agitation for trade-union mobilizations against racist reaction. The section's social-democratic drift had its corollary in a sterile internal political life and the development of Menshevik organizational practices. In the aftermath of the political fight the section was confronted with a series of quits, which amounted to desertion on the part of CC cadre in the face of the bourgeois offensive.

The SL/A remains a tiny propaganda group with a weak leadership confronting the challenge of forging a real Bolshevik collective. The SL/A is one of our oldest sections,



Gubb/JB Pictures

**Black South African workers look to communism in struggle for social liberation. But reformist ANC/ Communist Party betrays their aspirations through popular-frontism.**

containing highly experienced and talented cadre. A number of comrades have played a not insubstantial role as émigrés in other sections. There are real opportunities, of which the eruption of youth and student struggles this year is the most immediate opening. The challenge for the SL/A is to "Meet Youth, Recruit Youth and Consolidate Youth."

## 15. South Africa: Nationalism and Class Collaboration Straitjacket Power of Proletariat

If there is any place on the globe where there are hundreds of thousands of subjective communists, it is South Africa. It is the one country where the old Stalinist party continues to grow. The South African proletariat is one of the most class-conscious and well-organized in the world. By virtue of its power and strategic role in the economy of Africa and the world, the black proletariat of South Africa can and must be the motor for socialist revolution throughout the continent. Over the past decade, the union movement, with its concentrated social strength, has emerged as a central force in the anti-apartheid struggle. Time and time again, the South African masses, particularly the working class, have risen against their oppressors. And time and time again, the racist ruling class has responded with vicious repression.

The power of the black proletariat remains politically straitjacketed by nationalism and the politics of class collaboration, as embodied in the African National Congress (ANC)/South African Communist Party (SACP). These reformists have made it clear that they want a "power sharing" deal with the apartheid bosses, the aspirations of the masses for justice and equality be damned. The nationalist Pan Africanist Congress, which opposed the August general strike and met secretly with De Klerk in Nigeria, pursuing its own "negotiations" with the apartheid regime, is also a dead end for the black masses. But there will be no popular-frontist "post-apartheid" state with the *verligte* capitalists. South African capitalism is built on the bedrock of

white supremacy. The ANC leaders and the SACP are the greatest obstacles to black freedom, chaining the black masses to their capitalist masters. As Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution holds, in the imperialist epoch, the bourgeoisie is incapable of achieving democratic tasks. And South Africa is the permanent revolution writ large. It will take a workers revolution, led by a Trotskyist party, to accomplish those democratic tasks.

Agitation on the question of South Africa has been an important component of our work internationally, particularly in the U.S., where blacks see in the oppression of South African blacks a reflection of their own oppression. It is also a subject of polemical combat with our reformist and centrist opponents, who all want to tail after the ANC, directly or at one remove, as with the USec-linked Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) group. Despite a great physical distance, our propaganda has had an impact in the exile milieu, on activists traveling abroad and to a small degree in South Africa itself. We look forward to the day when the banner of the reborn Fourth International is raised on South African soil.

## 16. The International Secretariat and the Center

Our international center, whose resident membership has decreased by 30 percent in the last ten years, is located in the U.S. During this period the expansion of the International and the work connected with that expansion has been substantial. The I.S., as well as the U.S. section, has keenly felt the transfer of a leading comrade out of the center, although modern telecommunications equipment has facilitated timely input. The I.S. is also quite strapped in personnel and language capacity, in particular with the imminent out-transfer of a native Spanish-speaking cadre. Recent cadre reinforcement will surely help alleviate the problem.

The International has been able to maintain our quadrilingual theoretical journal, *Spartacist*, with a very rich historical and archival content, though not at a regular frequency in any language. With the publication of the major synthetic documents from our discussion around the collapse of Stalinism, *Spartacist* has really functioned as the ICL's theoretical and documentary repository, as well as serving as a tool of intervention in the context of the disarray in the rest of the ostensibly Marxist movement.

The irregular production of *Spartacist* in French and German reflects in large part the stabilization of regular sectional presses in both languages. Spanish-language *Spartacist* has had a hybrid quality—it functioned both in lieu of a regular Spanish-language sectional press and as the theoretical organ of the IEC. With the regularization of the Mexican section's *Espartaco*, which we anticipate using as a vehicle for intervention into the increasingly important Latino component of the North American working class, Spanish *Spartacist* will come into line with our other language editions.

The editorial team which took over English-language *Spartacist* in late 1985 with the intention of increasing the journal's frequency overlaps with that of the Prometheus Research Library (PRL). Productions of *Spartacist* have therefore tended to alternate with those of the *Prometheus*

*Research Series*. In the immediate past *Spartacist* production has been delayed by the production of *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*. The book is an important contribution to the study of communist history and an assertion of our continuity with Lenin's Communist International, as well as representing a step forward in our publishing capacity.

The editorial overlap with the PRL has resulted in English-language *Spartacist* tending to take the lead in producing significant "new" historical and archival material. The library has evolved since 1979 into a major resource for the entire international tendency. Especially notable in this regard was the international effort which went into the production of the IEC statement which introduces *Prometheus Research Series No. 2* on the Proletarian Military Policy.

The library has developed ties with individuals and archives concerned with communist history around the world, and it has tended to serve as our entry into the international academic "communist" milieu. The PRL coordinated our tendency's collaboration with the archival journal *Revolutionary History*, which lasted over three years (rather a long time as these things usually go). When we withdrew from the editorial board in March 1991 it had been clear for some time that the increasingly intrusive anti-Sovietism of the rest of the editorial board would necessitate such a step, but while it lasted the collaboration resulted in the publication of significant new historical material, which we distributed internationally.

## 17. The International Communist League: Entering a New Period

The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) stands on the basis of the first four congresses of the Communist International and the founding documents of the Fourth International. From our inception as a tendency, we have been keenly internationalist. We lay claim to the revolutionary political continuity of Trotskyism through the fight against Pabloist liquidationism, a fight that was led by James P. Cannon's Socialist Workers Party, albeit partially, belatedly and inconclusively. Early on, we came to see that an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International had to be reformed through programmatic struggle, not just "reconstructed" from the moribund fragments which called themselves the Fourth International. Thus we recognized the need for "the tactic of regroupment to unite subjective revolutionists in the vanguard party" ("Document of the First Delegated Conference of the iSt," 1 August 1979), and foresaw a process of splits and fusions among ostensibly revolutionary organizations.

The first conference of the international *Spartacist* tendency noted that we remained "a tendency in the process of consolidation." Over the 13 years since then, we have evolved an authoritative international leadership, and consolidated a politically cohesive communist organization functioning on the basis of international democratic centralism. We have broken out of the "Anglo-American-centeredness" which characterized our tendency before 1979, with the strengthening of the French and German sections and recent significant international extension. We have established a toehold in the Far East with the formation

of the Spartacist Group/Japan, but have meanwhile lost our organization in South Asia. We have a presence in Latin America through the Grupo Espartaquista de México, and for the first time we have a group in East Europe, the Spartakusowska Grupa Polski, as well as a station in Moscow with contacts throughout the former Soviet Union.

But many of the tasks we set ourselves at our first conference remain unfulfilled. While tackling head-on the pressures of the rightist ideological offensive accompanying the anti-Soviet war drive of the 1980s, we have not grown numerically. We still have not achieved any significant extension into the semicolonial countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia.

## I

The collapse of Stalinism in East Europe and the Soviet Union has hit the left with the force of a tsunami. Some organizations, like the Canadian CP, have simply been washed away. Others, like the once hegemonic Italian Communist Party, have broken up into big, roughly defined blocs. Others continue the degenerative slide foreseen by Trotsky from Stalinism to social democracy.

Around the globe, thousands of people who consider themselves communists are now rethinking their political beliefs and their organizational loyalties. This is why we founded the International Communist League: to win communist cadres to the banner of authentic Trotskyism. The ICL's prominent intervention in the DDR in the winter of 1989-90, as the *only* political party that fought unambiguously against capitalist reunification, led rather directly to regroupments that have significantly broadened our tendency—with left Mandelites in Canada, left Morenoites in Mexico, the recruitment of young Irish comrades who established the Dublin Spartacist Group, and the founding of the Spartacist Group of Poland.

The ICL is known for our position on the "Russian question" and the struggle to crystallize an independent Trotskyist vanguard. From Iran to El Salvador, Poland, Afghanistan and Nicaragua, wherever the class struggle raged, our tendency has fought for defense of the Soviet Union and for the political organization of the proletariat independently and in its own class interest.

For the past year, the Russian question has been posed pointblank in the former Soviet Union itself. While the manifold tendencies falsely claiming the mantle of Trotskyism vicariously clambered onto Yeltsin's barricades, *only* the ICL called for mobilizing the working class as a conscious and independent political force to smash those barricades. The ICL's perspective is to forge a Leninist-Trotskyist party to fight capitalist counterrevolution in the homeland of the October Revolution. With the disappearance of the Soviet degenerated workers state, the "Russian question" is going to become less immediate and operational although it will remain vitally important in demonstrating the bankruptcy of Stalinist and reformist politics.

In no country can we develop into the vanguard party of the proletariat if a majority of politically advanced workers and leftist intellectual activists believe that the successes of capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe and the Soviet Union demonstrate the fundamental invalidity of the communist program as developed by Marx and Engels and extended by Lenin and Trotsky. Even though the remains of the workers state erected through the October Revolution have vanished, that does not lessen the programmatic

gulf that separates us from our opponents. As a Trotskyist international propaganda tendency, a central and immediate task is to explain the responsibility of the Stalinist bureaucracy for the historic defeat suffered by the international proletariat in the Soviet sphere and to discredit the pseudo-Trotskyist cheerleaders and abettors of the "bourgeois-democratic" counterrevolution in East Europe.

The manifestly reactionary consequences of the counterrevolution in East Europe are an acute embarrassment for the fake-Trotskyists, who are in considerable internal disarray. Although the largest of these tendencies, the United Secretariat of Ernest Mandel, has already lost several of its main affiliates (the degenerated American SWP and the Latin American followers of the late Nahuel Moreno), a left opposition centering on the Russian question has recently emerged in the West European USec sections, the first such development in almost two decades.

The veteran political maneuverer Franco Grisolia seems to be attempting to build a new anti-Spartacist League, with successive entries into Democrazia Proletaria and Rifondazione Comunista. His centrist verbiage has gained him a hearing among leftward moving USec youth (the USec followed the same path of entrism/liquidationism), who buy his pretension to Trotskyism as good coin. A centrist group we had not engaged in years (mainly due to their geographic isolation), Peter Sollenberger's American Revolutionary Workers League, popped up in the Persian Gulf antiwar movement with a left-wing "Victory to Iraq!" line—and a good number of youth. Now Sollenberger, after splitting with a minority from his own organization, is lashed up with Grisolia. (The other side of the RWL split is with the British Revolutionary Internationalist League.) These two professional anti-Spartacists, Sollenberger and Grisolia, have recently won the adherence of Damien Elliott, leader of the JCR-*l'Égalité*, the expelled youth group of the USec's premier section, the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire. This international lash-up defines itself politically by where *we* stand. Their documents refer repeatedly to the ICL's positions. They seek to carve out a niche for themselves between the ICL and the popular front by blunting our program's hard edge.

We must guard against complacency toward the various pretenders to Trotskyism. Despite decades of tailing whatever "mass movement," however reactionary, was popular at the moment, these political chameleons retain the capacity to put on a left face when convenient. Now is a *critical moment* to inflict a decisive political defeat on the heirs of Michel Pablo before the impact of their support to imperialist-backed counterrevolution in the Soviet sphere is dulled by new political maneuvers and the passage of time. We cannot afford to let the centrist Sollenberger/Grisolia/Elliott lash-up present themselves as a credible alternative to the ICL.

We will soon encounter a new political generation whose consciousness has been shaped by a post-Stalinist world, both at the level of state powers and mass workers parties. This will likely express itself in the formation of new leftist currents which do not claim the authority of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Communist International. One can anticipate a re-emergence of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, especially in the advanced capitalist countries and East Europe, and the proliferation in the Third World of nationalist-populist groups which make no pretensions to "Marxism-Leninism."

While aggressively pursuing leftward moving currents and polemicizing against the centrists, it is necessary also to be vigilant against attacks from the right. One reaction to the "death of communism" propaganda has been an increase of violence against and exclusion of the communists by ostensible leftists in headlong flight to the right. The ICL has recently been excluded on political grounds from the Moscow Workers Congress and the annual Lutte Ouvrière fête in France, and was subject to a bloodthirsty attack by the "state-capitalist" International Socialists in Toronto. Workers Power has mounted a ludicrous campaign painting the ICL as an accomplice of Russian fascism, in order to cover up their own sponsorship of a speaking tour by a fascist-connected Russian reactionary and their own conciliation of nationalist/Stalinist anti-Semitism in Russia itself. The latest outpouring, from their German group, is a demented incitement to anti-communist violence.

## II

The sections of the ICL in the developed capitalist countries will continue to have a concerted orientation toward the immigrant populations. As the result of the need for cheap labor and/or because of the obscene immiseration of most of the "Third World" countries and the gruesome upsurge of communalist feuds in the former workers states, more and more of the better-off capitalist countries are experiencing an influx of immigrants.

The particular immigration trends may be different from country to country, but our sections are generally confronted with a surge of racist atrocities often led by openly fascist forces, while the ruling parties, social-democratic or bourgeois, enforce ever more stringent racist and segregationist measures against the immigrant and refugee populations. This has been most dramatic in Europe and nowhere more so than in the German Fourth Reich. The four-day anti-foreigner pogrom in Rostock at the end of August is a ghastly example. These horrifying events are a direct product of the vengeful destruction of the DDR, but in the former West Germany or in countries like France or Great Britain, the immigrant populations have been subjected to murderous racism for the last 15 years.

In countries like Italy or Spain, the immigration is a new development, but the recent homicidal attacks on African workers and the rapid rise of the Lombardy League, for example, in Italy (against immigrants and southern Italians) indicate that no European country will be immune from rampant racism.

Our responsibilities are not only those of a tribune of the people but also to recruit in the imperialist metropolitan centers cadres from colonial or semicolonial countries. In countries like France or Germany large concentrations of foreign workers in the strategic industries give us a valuable tool to make the necessary, even if only propagandistic, link between the proletarians of advanced capitalist countries and those of less developed ones. Historically, leaders of the Vietnamese and Chinese CPs were recruited as workers in Europe.

Moreover, defense of the rights of immigrants is a vital question for us to bring to the domestic working class. Immigrants have become the scapegoat for the impoverishment of domestic workers. In the absence of a revolutionary struggle for working-class unity against capitalist attacks, there is a real risk of workers being

won to nativist fascism, as seen in the alarming growth of Le Pen's group in France.

## III

Despite our small size, the ICL has over the last period initiated a number of significant international campaigns. During the 1984-85 British coal strike, the Partisan Defense Committee in the U.S. launched a fund-raising drive that appealed in particular to American unionists and union locals to demonstrate solidarity with this crucial class battle, in the face of virulent opposition from the AFL-CIO tops.

As the Pentagon war machine bore down on Sandinista Nicaragua, Libya and Afghanistan in the 1980s, we campaigned against U.S. imperialism, seeing this also as part of our defense of the USSR. In 1985 the Spartacus Youth League of the U.S. organized a "Nicabucks" campaign to raise money to defend the embattled Nicaraguan masses against Yankee guns. We encouraged young comrades to participate in work brigades and called to "Defend, Complete, Extend the Revolution." The next year, raising the slogans "U.S. Hands Off Libya! Defend the Soviet Union!", we sent a journalistic team to Tripoli to physically demonstrate our internationalist solidarity with the Libyan people, who were lined up in the cross hairs of U.S. imperialism. The team was present in the immediate buildup to the terror bombing carried out by U.S. imperialism with British and French assistance, prefiguring our military defense of Iraq in 1990-91. Following the ignominious Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and in response to a request from the Kabul government, in 1989 the PDC initiated an international campaign to raise funds for the civilian victims of the *mujahedin* siege of Jalalabad. It was during this campaign that fraternal legal/social defense organizations were founded by a number of ICL sections.

In January 1989 we initiated united-front protests against the execution of Iranian leftists, bringing out Iranian leftist groupings in exile. While most of the Iranian and international left hailed the mullahs' rise to power in 1978-79, we uniquely raised the call "Down with the shah, Down with the mullahs—Workers must rule in Iran!" Tragically, the earlier generation of Iranian leftists has now largely been destroyed at the hands of the bloodthirsty Islamic regime or has collapsed in demoralization. Yet today signs of a new wave of struggle are visible in Iran, notably strikes by the strategically powerful oil workers, amid an evident vacuum of leadership. We must seize the opportunity to intervene with our propaganda among the new generation of Iranian leftists, including the large exile communities in Europe and North America—hammering home the lessons of the 1979 defeat, our defense of women, Kurds and other national minorities, our program of permanent revolution and our line on the Russian question and on the Gulf War.

In the summer of 1990 the PDC and its international affiliates undertook united-front actions in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Most recently, in response to the foot-dragging by Moscow authorities in investigating the murder of our comrade Martha Phillips, sections of the ICL held demonstrations in a dozen cities worldwide to draw attention to this heinous crime and demand a thorough investigation. This produced a considerable number of stories in the major newspapers, some quite extensive, but the obstructionism of the Moscow officials continues unabated.

Imperialism in its decay excites and manipulates the



demons of obscurantism and bigotry, and tries to obliterate the most elementary democratic rights. Right-wing fundamentalism has been fueled by the collapse of Stalinism, obviously in Afghanistan where the *mujahedin* won, but also, e.g., among Palestinian militants, where the secular nationalist forces are widely seen as bankrupt and many are turning to the Islamic fundamentalists.

Against nationalism, chauvinism and religious fundamentalism, we fight for the right of decent health care and quality education, for free and safe abortion, for such advanced birth control as the RU 486 pill; for the abolition of the barbaric death penalty; against the imposition of the veil; against the poison of anti-Semitism and racism; for the right of those who entered a country other than their native land to stay, work and live a decent life with full citizenship rights. Ironically, it is only we—the communists—who are committed in principle to defense of these rights, understanding that they are not divisible. We must win the masses to our side in these struggles.

## 18. Toward a Communist Future: Mankind Makes Its Own History

To revive an international communist movement, it is not enough to expose the historic crimes and betrayals of Stalinism, the global immiseration wrought by capitalist-imperialism and the danger of a nuclear world war. It is also necessary to re-emphasize the liberating goals of communism as the culmination of the rational humanism of the Enlightenment—the integration of humanity on a global scale, the attainment of social and sexual equality and the freedom of all individuals to maximize their capabilities on the basis of mankind's collective control over the forces of nature. This could never be achieved by the Stalinist lie of "socialism in one country"—it requires the combined forces of all and the most developed productive forces of the planet.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Stalinist regimes across East Europe and the USSR, many former CPers are trying to present themselves today as "democratic socialists." But since this niche is already occupied by rotten-reformist social democracy, these ex-Stalinists have sought to distinguish themselves by adopting utopian socialist plumage. Thus the German PDS now puts out a magazine, *Utopie kreativ*. They write off Stalinism as a "failed model of socialism," and are shopping around for a better one. This absolves them of the need to make a materialist analysis of Stalinism. And most utopian of all was the PDS' idea that they could reunify under West German imperialism and have some semblance of democracy; instead they got a deepgoing witchhunt by a ruling class whose motto is *vae victus* (woe to the conquered).

Marxists do not invent "models" of socialism. Rather, as Karl Marx wrote in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme*:

"What we are dealing with here is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society, which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges....

"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other.

Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*."

Emerging from the tsarist empire, the dictatorship of the proletariat in Soviet Russia showed the workers of the world that the Marxist program could be put into practice. With imperialist invasion and a bloody civil war, continued isolation and conditions of extreme scarcity, a conservative bureaucracy, balancing parasitically atop the gains of October, took the reins of political power away from the workers. Rather than the state "withering away"—as Marx had foreseen would occur as a result of international proletarian revolution—it hypertrophied under the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

Yet in spite of the monstrous distortions this produced, the organized energy of the multinational Soviet working class was able to work wonders, transforming a backward peasant country into the second power of the world in a matter of a couple of generations. As Trotsky wrote:

"Even if the Stalinist bureaucracy should succeed in destroying the economic foundations of the new society, the experience of planned economy under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party will have entered history for all time as one of the greatest teachings of mankind."

—"Stalinism and Bolshevism," August 1937

Through the overturn of capitalism and the introduction of a planned economy, even given tremendous bureaucratic distortions, the Soviet Union was able to construct an advanced industrial economy almost from the ground up. And they did it *twice*, first overcoming the ravages of the 1918-20 Civil War and then again a scant generation later, evacuating more than 1,500 plants by train beyond the Urals after the outbreak of World War II; developing whole new industries such as aircraft construction, then rebuilding after losing 27 million Soviet lives in pushing back the Nazi invaders with their "scorched earth" policies.

Despite imperialism's economic squeeze—and the constant sabotage and undermining of the planned economy by the Stalinist bureaucracy—the proletarian dictatorship was able to construct an industrial society in which certain sectors (mainly military-related) were on a par with or more advanced than the imperialist powers, while providing popular access to quality education and classical literature, art and music on a scale far beyond that offered by capitalist class society. Characteristically for the Soviet Union, this was fraught with contradiction, as the Stalinist authorities clamped down the heavy hand of censorship, starting with Trotsky's works and extending to broad areas of modern thought.

Likewise with Soviet science. Despite the stupid bureaucratic dictates which could produce Lysenkoism, the USSR could also achieve spectacular achievements, in many areas far surpassing the U.S., such as in materials research, which is key to the successes of Soviet rocketry. Another example: The Germans recently abandoned development of a state-of-the-art "Eurofighter" (Jäger 90) because by taking over the DDR they had inherited a fleet of Soviet MIG-29 fighter-bombers which were *superior* to the plane they hadn't even built yet.

It is a Stalinist crime that the tremendous advantages of computers have served capitalism rather than the planned economy. The basic development of a system of balances that is key for planning—what became known as "input-output analysis"—was done in 1924 by the émigré economist Wassily Leontief, basing himself on Soviet economic



New York City, January 1992: While Wall Street bankers fête Yeltsin, Spartacists protest against counterrevolution in USSR.

statistics, at a time when Gosplan was considered a nest of Trotskyists. The fundamentals of linear programming, enabling planners to find an optimal distribution of resources, was developed by the Leningrad mathematician L.V. Kantorovich, but again was never used. The Stalinist bureaucratic regime could not tolerate freely available information, even in the hands of its own bureaucrats. To hide the toll of forced collectivization, the 1937 census was never published, and its authors were shot in the purges.

Propagandists for capitalism always claim that a market is necessary to avoid bottlenecks and to match supply and demand, asserting that a planned economy is inherently bureaucratic, producing inferior products that people don't want and long lines because of shortages of what they do want. Yet information about consumer desires can be gathered without a market, using technology that has already been developed under monopoly capitalism. Computerized "product codes" can allow production planners to quickly react to changes at the cash register. But under capitalism this is done to produce profits, not supply human needs. An example of how grotesque this is under a market economy was seen in the 1989 hunger riots in Buenos Aires, where starving mobs attacked the Carrefour "hypermarket." This giant store was so modern that it took account of the raging hyperinflation by adjusting prices for the bar-coded products on the shelves *hourly*. And yet when working people stormed into the aisles to get milk for their babies, they were shot down.

One of the major problems afflicting mankind today is AIDS, for which there is now no known cure. A workers government would mobilize vast social resources to fight this epidemic—in contrast to the bourgeoisie, which treats it as a problem of "deviants" and outcasts, spending puny sums while the plague races through Africa, South Asia and the impoverished inner cities of America. Meanwhile, millions of people around the world are dying every year of *preventable* diseases. In the U.S. today, hepatitis B is common in ghetto areas; far more contagious than AIDS. "For many of the poor, hepatitis B vaccine is out of reach," reported one newspaper. Yet the tiny Cuban deformed work-

ers state has developed a hepatitis B vaccine, which like all medicine will be provided free to the population.

Health care and medical technology in Cuba are prime examples of the possibilities opened by the planned economy. At the most basic level, infant mortality in the poor island has fallen to 10.6 per thousand, compared to almost 20 per thousand in Harlem and over 30 in Washington, D.C. Cuba has sent more than 15,000 medical personnel to aid other countries from Nicaragua to Angola. And they have developed a flourishing biotechnology sector that has produced a host of advanced treatments, including a vaccine for meningitis B, the only one in the world for this common disease of poor countries. But at the same time the ingrained backwardness fostered by the Stalinist bureaucracy led to the scandalous quarantining of AIDS victims.

With the replacement of the dictatorship of capital by the liberating dictatorship of the proletariat on a global scale, unencumbered by a deforming, parasitic bureaucratic caste that feeds off scarcity, the way will be open to socialism. Instead of four-fifths of the world's population being ground down in the struggle for personal survival, this will make modern technique, science, culture and education available to all, with a corresponding explosion in creative human energy.

As Frederick Engels wrote in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880):

"Man's own social organisation, hitherto confronting him as a necessity imposed by Nature and history, now becomes the result of his own free action. The extraneous objective forces that have hitherto governed history pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history—only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom."

—Draft adopted by the International Executive Committee, 6 September 1992. Adopted as amended by the Second International Conference of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist). Final version completed in English on 10 December 1992 by the editorial committee mandated by the Conference. ■

## James P. Cannon...

(continued from page 56)

gave the American Trotskyists a more solid grounding in Communist tradition and practices.

The selection of material in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* is designed to shed light on the origins of American Trotskyism. To provide as complete a documentary record as possible of the evolution of Cannon and the group he pulled together in the factional wars which wracked the American party during the 1920s, the book is heavily weighted toward major factional documents and statements, including some material that was probably not written by Cannon but was coauthored or signed by him. The book does not include many of the popular agitational pieces Cannon wrote in the 1920s since the best of these were selected by him for his *Notebook of*



Labor Defender

From left to right: Bill Dunne, Tom O'Flaherty, Big Bill Haywood and James Cannon, probably in Moscow, spring 1925.

*an Agitator*, published in 1958 and still available from Pathfinder Press. A sense of how selective the PRL had to be in choosing material for the book is provided by the bibliography of Cannon's writings and speeches for the period, which appears at the end of the volume.

Also included is an appendix containing material written in the summer of 1928 by some of Cannon's key factional collaborators, as well as a letter by Antoinette Konikow—also expelled for Trotskyism in 1928 but not a supporter of the Cannon faction—who led a small Boston grouping into the CLA. Another appendix contains Jack Stachel's December 1928 report to the Workers Party's Political Committee on "The Right Danger and Trotskyism." The report, based on correspondence stolen from Cannon's apartment by party leader Jay Lovestone's henchmen, details the support and interest the expelled Trotskyists had generated within the Workers Party.

In collecting material for inclusion, the PRL searched the bulk of the American archives likely to contain material by Cannon, as well as the available publications of the Communist movement in the 1920s. Not surprisingly, this search uncovered few items by Cannon from the early "underground" period of American Communism (1919-21); nor did the PRL find many documents from the seven

months Cannon spent in Moscow in 1922 as the American representative to the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), though the archives of the CI in Moscow may contain such material. However, all other major portions of Cannon's career as a Communist leader are covered.

Taken together, the material assembled in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* provides a powerful documentary record which confirms, as it supplements, Cannon's *The First Ten Years of American Communism*. As the introduction notes, "Such a documentary record—even a highly selective one—cannot be said to exist for the accounts of many leading ex-Communists, to say nothing of the official histories penned by Stalinist hacks" like William Z. Foster and Earl Browder.

This book is a must for anyone who considers himself a communist and for any serious student of American communism and the Communist International, and of interest to many students of social history. The introduction provides a comprehensive overview of Workers Party history in the 1920s, and the PRL has also provided a 29-page glossary of names and terms, as well as footnotes giving extensive background information on the party's trade-union work, disputes within the Comintern, and other subjects raised in the documents. The volume is fully indexed and includes 16 pages of rare photographs, including one from the CI's Fifth World Congress (1924) showing Trotsky with a Vietnamese delegate, Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh). Both cloth and paperback editions are Smyth sewn, and printed and bound by union labor (Allied Printing Trades). The result is an attractive, sturdy volume which is easy to open, read and consult.

### Cannon's Papers and Cannon's Party

One of the book's dedications is to George Breitman. It was comrade Breitman, the general editor for the Socialist Workers Party's Pathfinder Press series of Trotsky and Cannon writings, who in 1984 prodded the Prometheus Research Library staff to begin compiling material for this book, though he bears no direct responsibility for the end result. Breitman had been expelled from the SWP in 1983, along with a number of others, for opposing party leader Jack Barnes' open attacks on Trotsky and the theory of permanent revolution. He was a founder and leader of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT) until his death in 1986.

Barnes' party had long since ceased to be Trotskyist, having in 1963 formalized a "reunification" with Ernest Mandel's European Pabloists explicitly around a program of political support to Cuba's Fidel Castro. Declaring that experience since World War II showed a Trotskyist proletarian vanguard to be no longer necessary for the overthrow of capitalism, the SWP (under the regime of the stodgy Farrell Dobbs and the up-and-coming Jack Barnes) joined with Mandel & Co. in seeking to reduce "Trotskyism" to a force for cheerleading insurgent Stalinists, Third World nationalists and other "revolutionaries of action." In the U.S. this political liquidationism was accompanied by accommodation to the illusory program of black nationalism: positing a separatist "road" to black liberation, the SWP—which had earlier been impermissibly passive and legalistic in its response to the civil rights struggles—relieved itself of any responsibility to fight to win black cadres to the Trotskyist program and party. The Spartacist League originated as the SWP's Revolutionary Tendency, expelled in 1963 for

opposition to the party's centrist course.

The SWP's centrist phase was soon shown to be a brief way station in the plunge into outright reformism, as the party emerged as the "best builder" of the right wing of the Vietnam antiwar movement, competing successfully with the reformist, Stalinist CP. Reveling in social-patriotism, the SWP worked hard to keep newly radicalized youth under the sway of Democratic Party politicians and pro-Democrat labor bureaucrats, in opposition to the New Leftists like SDS and the Black Panthers who hated imperialism and whom the SWP baited as "violent" and "ultraleftist."

Jim Cannon, though no longer the party's central administrator, remained as its national chairman through its degeneration into full-blown reformism; he died in 1974. Many longtime cadres remained members of the SWP Central Committee, and it was only when Barnes explicitly repudiated Trotsky as an irrelevant sectarian that a layer of party veterans was impelled into opposition. But it is to the credit of George Breitman and others that they refused to spit on the tradition of Trotskyism as they understood it, and thus they were expelled from the party they had served for so long. Comrade Breitman in particular—whom we had known in the SWP mainly as an antagonist, a spokes-

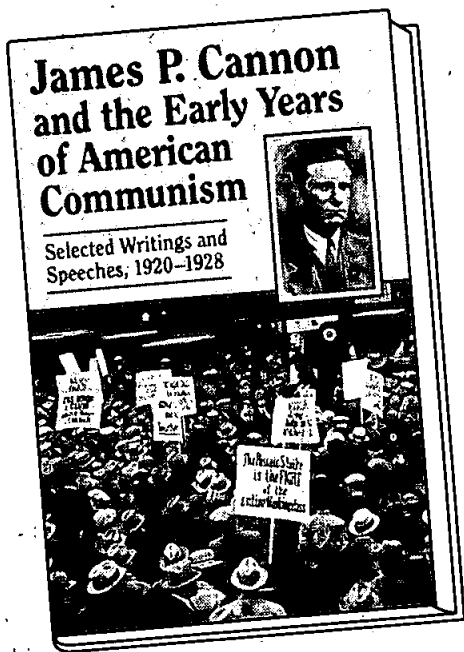
man for the orientation to black nationalism—had spent many years overseeing the work of selecting, editing and annotating Trotsky's writings for publication by Pathfinder. Expelled from the SWP, hampered by ill health and the limited resources of the FIT, Breitman learned of the PRL's interest in the documentation on Cannon's career as a Communist leader and was willing to encourage and collaborate with us on archival matters.

Barnes' SWP completed the process of (literally) "junking the old Trotskyism" just as the PRL was finishing the editorial work on *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*. Barnes removed from his party headquarters most of the papers and documents from the SWP's revolutionary years under Cannon's leadership. The files on the work of Trotsky's Fourth International were given to the Hoover Institution at Stanford; papers and documents relating to the party's domestic work were given to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, where the SWP had long maintained an archive.

Included in the latter deposit were the personal correspondence files and papers of Cannon and his longtime companion, Rose Karsner. The papers were opened to researchers in July 1992, and PRL staff members were able to review them, finding a few items by Cannon unavailable

## Just Out!

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from other sources. These items are included in the bibliography, and some are quoted in the introduction, which also makes use of quotations from previously unpublished correspondence between Cannon and Theodore Draper.

### Factional Gang Warfare in the Workers Party

In addition to material from the Cannon papers, the PRL's introduction makes extensive use of documents and interviews from Theodore Draper's research files, as well as of newly available autobiographical manuscripts by American Communists prominent in the 1920s. This previously unpublished material adds color to the introduction. For example, Alexander Bittelman, a Russian-born Jewish Communist who was William Z. Foster's chief factional collaborator, throws some revealing light on the factional lineup in the Workers Party in 1923-25, when Cannon and Foster led a grouping centered on the party's trade unionists. The Cannon-Foster group split in two in August 1925, after a cable from the Comintern upset their elected majority at the Workers Party's Fourth Convention. But from late 1923 until August 1925 this group had a majority on the party's Central Committee, leading the party in opposition to the C.E. Ruthenberg-Jay Lovestone-John Pepper factional bloc, which was based primarily on the party's Eastern European language federations. Bittelman recalls:

"Most of the Cannon-Foster circle were a rather rough-and-ready group of individuals. There was among them much camaraderie, plain spoken talk and few niceties in mutual relations. In group discussions they would use what they chose to call 'trade union language,' in which variations on 'damn it' were of the more innocent expressions. And candor compels me also to say this: in our own circle four-letter exclamations were a dime a dozen and sometimes

cheaper. Whereas Ruthenberg, in circumstances which tempt one to resort to some such exclamation, would merely say: 'Goodness gracious.' I can never forget the expression on the faces of some of my comrades in the Foster-Cannon circle on such occasions."

—Alexander Bittelman, *Things I Have Learned* (unpublished, written in 1963)

Both Cannon and Foster had been syndicalists before joining the Communist movement. They had real connections and experience in the labor movement, Cannon as an organizer of revolutionary unions in the IWW, and Foster as an American Federation of Labor-backed organizer, leading major class battles in the steel and meatpacking industries in Chicago in 1919. (In the Workers Party they differed in their approach to labor, Foster being the leading advocate of exclusively "boring from within" the existing AFL unions, while Cannon favored a more flexible policy.) In contrast, Ruthenberg had been a straight SP party man, though one with an honorable record as a leader of the left wing and militant opponent of World War I. Lovestone and his cronies were neophytes, recruited from New York's City College.

In contrast to this diversity, in Britain the sectarian inability of the CP to regroup substantially from revolutionary syndicalist, Celtic and left-feminist currents attracted to Communism by the Russian Revolution rendered the British Communists, narrowly drawn from former Socialist parliamentarists, pretty much sterile (see "British Communism Aborted," *Spartacist* No. 36-37, Winter 1985-86).

Differences in political culture made for a political vitality in the early American party, and they underlie the factional dogfights which plagued it in the 1920s, but do not explain them. The machinations of political adventurers



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Group of delegates to second conference of International Labor Defense, September 1926.

like Jay Lovestone (who went on to become a CIA operative) lent the situation a particularly venal character. In an unpublished letter to Draper cited in the introduction, Cannon described Lovestone's "will, ruthless driving ambition, to say nothing of his diabolical passion for intrigue and his indefatigable energy in setting men against each other and fouling things up generally." But if Lovestone and his mentor, the Hungarian John Pepper, who arrived in the United States in 1922 as a self-proclaimed "representative" of the Communist International, did much to keep the factional pot boiling, it was the increasingly Stalinized Comintern which provided the heat.

### The Degeneration of the Communist International

As Leninists and Trotskyists, we also consider ourselves Cannonists. This is not because of the American origins of our tendency, but rather because of our "Russian" origins, the Bolshevism which James P. Cannon taught us. In his fine speech on the "Russian question" from October 1939, in the heat of a faction fight against those who flinched from defending the Soviet Union on the eve of World War II, Cannon said: "We are, in fact, the party of the Russian revolution. We have been the people, and the only people, who have had the Russian revolution in their program and in their blood."

Trotskyists have always claimed for themselves the record of the revolutionary Communist International from 1919-23, and stand on the record of the opposition which fought from within in 1924-33 to reverse the degeneration of the Soviet regime and the International, and which went on to found the Fourth International. Trotsky's powerful analysis identified the cause of the degeneration in the failure of the Russian Revolution to extend itself internationally, resulting in the rise of a bureaucratic caste within the young, economically backward Soviet republic. This privileged, conservative caste headed by Stalin, accepting isolation, came to espouse a program of "building socialism in one country" and attempting to deflect the hostility of imperialism by eschewing the struggle for world revolution.

Trotsky's insistence that the fate of the Soviet regime depended, in the final analysis, on the extension of the revolution to the industrialized imperialist countries is fully borne out in the negative today by the final cowardly col-

lapse of the regime of Stalin's heirs, both within and outside the ex-USSR. Today, it is more important than ever for those who continue to fight for Lenin's communism to examine the history and experience of the early Communist International. *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* provides some key documentary material for such a study.

During the period covered by the book Cannon was in Moscow five times for various Comintern congresses and ECCI plenums, and some of his speeches to Comintern bodies are included in the volume. Cannon spent seven months there in 1922, when the CI leadership still retained a revolutionary perspective, and the experience served to make of Cannon a confirmed "Cominternist," who was slow to realize later in the decade that things had fundamentally changed with the ascendancy of Zinoviev, Stalin and Bukharin in the Russian party.

The material contained in the new volume graphically illustrates the correctness of Trotsky's perspective of fighting from inside the Comintern during the 1920s. Cannon tried to chart a perspective for the Workers Party based on revolutionary communism, even as the International lost its revolutionary perspective and the weight of an expanding and self-confident American imperialism bore down on the American party. After Lenin's final stroke, followed by his death in January 1924, most other American Communist leaders bowed to the Stalinizing Comintern, waging unprincipled power struggles in the Workers Party. Cannon, though on the basis of an incomplete understanding, built a "faction against factionalism" which sought to push the party in a revolutionary direction.

Cannon was sorely disillusioned when the sudden death of C.E. Ruthenberg in March 1927 precipitated an orgy of unprincipled factional warfare resulting in the patently opportunist and corrupt Jay Lovestone assuming the mantle of party leadership with Comintern support. Having reached a dead end in the internal factional wars, Cannon was predisposed, when he received a copy of Leon Trotsky's critique of the draft Comintern program at the CI's Sixth Congress in 1928, to make the leap to Trotsky's internationalist understanding of the communist program and the Stalinist degeneration of the Third International. Amid much else, that seminal document contained Trotsky's opposition to the anti-Marxist construct of a "two-class workers'



Workers Monthly

**New Cannon book contains 16 pages of rare photographs. Communist demonstration in Washington, March 1925, protests counterrevolutionary terror in Poland.**

and peasants' party," which gave Cannon and the American Communists so much trouble in the incarnation of the "Farmer-Labor" movement.

### The Labor Party Question

The PRL's introduction notes that it would be a mistake to look at the material in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* as "simply the prelude to Cannon's later emergence as an authoritative Trotskyist leader. For Cannon was also one of the most able Communist leaders in the 1920s, a period when the party was not yet homogenized into a rigid Stalinist orthodoxy. This was a time of real, necessary and inevitable debate about the tasks facing Communists in the United States."

The 1920s was a period of bourgeois reaction in the United States, as the post-World War I revolutionary wave receded and the bourgeoisie succeeded in stabilizing the capitalist world order. Inaugurated by the landslide victory of Republican Warren Harding in 1920, these years were marked by a rise in Klan terror and an all-time high in anti-immigrant sentiment. The state embarked on a major assault on the trade-union movement: AFL membership fell from almost 20 percent of the non-agricultural workforce in 1920 to just over 10 percent in 1930. The American ruling class was smugly confident that the working class was cowed and an era of U.S.-dominated imperialist prosperity was at hand. A short while later, the U.S. stock market crash and the ensuing world depression ushered in a new period, marked in this country by widespread radicalization and the turbulent struggles for industrial unions. Many parallels can be drawn between America in the 1920s and today, and today's communists will find much of relevance in Cannon's writings.

The book brings together material from Cannon on the Workers Party's brief bloc with the John Fitzpatrick leadership of the Chicago Federation of Labor in the effort to build a national "Farmer-Labor Party"; the Workers Party's subsequent adaptation to the petty-bourgeois Farmer-Labor movement; the party's work in building an opposition to

John L. Lewis in the miners union; the role of party supporters in the leadership of the New York garment workers unions; and the party's activities in defense of class-war prisoners, in particular the great campaign against the execution of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927, which Cannon led in his capacity as head of the party's defense organization, the International Labor Defense.

It was the question of the Farmer-Labor movement and the Communists' call for the creation of a labor party which dominated the disputes in the Workers Party during 1922-25. The PRL's introduction details the formation, trajectory and social composition of the Farmer-Labor movement, necessary background material for any reader trying to make sense of the disputes. The Zinoviev leadership of the Comintern took up the fight against the Workers Party's opportunist bulge (revealed most clearly in the party's near-support to the third-party candidacy of "Progressive" Republican Robert M. La Follette in 1924) only reluctantly, and at the insistence of Trotsky in Moscow. In the aftermath, the party's discussions on the question were deformed and distorted by Zinoviev's campaign against Trotsky for "underestimating" the peasantry. Moscow's insistence that the American party continue to orient toward the La Follette movement and fight for a two-class "workers and farmers" party totally muddled the waters, creating a confusion on the labor party slogan from which the ostensibly communist movement in this country still suffers.

In previously unpublished notes written for Theodore Draper and quoted by the PRL in its introduction, Cannon pointed to the key role of the indefatigable John Pepper in formulating the party's opportunist adaptation to the La Follette movement, a policy which persisted even after the Cannon-Foster factional alliance had overthrown the Pepper-Lovestone-Ruthenberg leadership at the party's Third Convention:

"The cold fact is that the party which had proclaimed itself at its inception as a revolutionary party of the working class, and had adopted a corresponding program, became, for a period in 1924, the advocate of a 'third party' of capitalism, and offered to support, under certain conditions, the presidential candidacy of the petty-bourgeois demagogue La Follette....

"The bewildered party disgraced itself in this affair, and all the prominent leaders without exception, myself included, were in it up to our necks, with no excuse save that of ignorance and no reason except perhaps the foolhardy ambition to outwit ourselves. If I can force myself to return to this leap into political irrationality, even now—30 years later—it is only because a bad experience, honestly evaluated and accounted for, may serve a useful purpose in immunizing the movement against similar abnormalities in the future.

"Foster's role in this sorry business was the same as mine and that of all the other American leaders at the time. Pepper—interpreting what he took to be the Comintern line—formulated the policy; the rest of us went along. Considering the fact that Pepper had been defeated and put in the minority at the party convention, at the end of 1923, this says a lot for his resilience and continuing influence, but it doesn't say much for the rest of us."

—James P. Cannon, unpublished notes  
(written about 1959)

In the aftermath of the 1924 elections, Cannon and his factional supporters attempted to assimilate the import of their opportunist error and steer the party away from the Farmer-Labor milieu; Lovestone and Pepper won the Comintern's support for a continued orientation to petty-bourgeois Farmer-Laborism. In 1924 Cannon did not know



that Trotsky had been responsible for the CI's opposition to the Workers Party's La Follette policy. But the fact that, unwittingly and belatedly, Cannon supported the thrust of Trotsky's intervention goes a long way to explaining his later evolution toward Trotskyism. Also notable is Cannon's failure to speak or write major articles in support of Zinoviev-Stalin-Bukharin's "anti-Trotskyism" campaign. While voting for all the ritual anti-Trotsky resolutions in the American party, where the anti-Trotsky campaign merged with the struggle against the social-democratic tendency led by Ludwig Lore, he was by all accounts unenthusiastic on the question. Bittelman quotes Cannon as often remarking, "Stalin makes leaders out of shit and shit out of leaders."

Nonetheless, as the material collected in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* demonstrates, there were many elements of the Cannon faction's political profile that militated against their being able to make the leap to the Left Opposition: a parochial focus on American questions, insistence on the strategy of a bloc with "progressives" in the unions, a lack of attention to fighting Jim Crow segregation in the labor movement. While Martin Abern, Max Shachtman and Arne Swabeck made the leap to Trotskyism with Cannon, Cannon's chief political collaborator, William F. Dunne, who was also Cannon's best friend, did not.

The fact that Cannon remained true to the revolutionism which inspired his youth, leading a significant number of founding American Communist cadre into Trotsky's Left Opposition in 1928, is a key historical precondition for the formation of the Spartacist tendency and our existence today. As Trotsky underlined, the decisive factor in the survival of the irrational and outmoded capitalist system is the crisis of revolutionary proletarian leadership. Our links to the revolutionary Communist International, carried forward in the early Trotskyist movement and Cannon's SWP through the 1940s and 1950s, are thin. But they are real, as *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism* demonstrates. This allows us to proclaim, along with Cannon:

"The important thing to remember is that our modern Trotskyist movement originated in the Communist Party—and nowhere else. Despite all the negative aspects of the party in those early years...despite its weaknesses, its crudities, its infantile sicknesses, its mistakes; whatever may be said in retrospect about the faction struggles and their eventual degeneration; whatever may be said about the degeneration of the Communist Party in this country—it must be recognized that out of the Communist Party came the forces for the regeneration of the revolutionary movement.... Therefore, we should say that the early period of the Communist movement in this country belongs to us."

—James P. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism* (1944) ■

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# Prometheus Research Library Book

## James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism

Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928

The following article is reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 565, 11 December 1992, newspaper of the Spartacist League/U.S.

### A Review:

*James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*  
Spartacist Publishing Co.,  
624 pp., \$22.50  
(\$14.50 paperback)

The Prometheus Research Library, the library and archive of the Spartacist League/U.S. Central Committee, has just published its first book, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928*. The 624-page volume, available in both paperback and hardcover, contains 60 documents, articles and speeches by Cannon from the time he was a leader of the Communist Party (called at that time the Workers Party), as well as an extensive historical introduction by the PRL. Supplementing Theodore Draper's excellent two-volume history of the American Communist movement (*The Roots of American Communism and American Communism and Soviet Russia*), as well as Cannon's letters to Draper published as *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, the PRL book provides original documentary material from American Communism's first decade.

The book, which covers Cannon's years as one of the principal leaders of the American section of the Communist International, also serves as a prelude to Pathfinder Press' series of Cannon writings, which



James P. Cannon

Labor Defender

was centrally edited by the late George Breitman. Pathfinder's series covers the period when Cannon was the authoritative leader of the American Trotskyist movement.

Coming out of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and won to Communism in the great wave of labor radicalism which swept the world in response to the 1917 Russian Revolution, Cannon was a founding American Communist, chairman and chief public spokesman of the Workers Party when it was founded in 1921, and a member of the party's top leadership bodies for most of the next seven years. In October 1928 he and about a hundred factional supporters were expelled from the party for attempting to organize a faction in support of Leon Trotsky's International Left Opposition (ILO). They

went on to form the nucleus of the first Trotskyist organization in the United States, the Communist League of America (CLA). The central leader of American Trotskyism for the next 25 years, until his retirement as secretary of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1953, Cannon was the finest communist leader America has yet produced.

The introduction to this volume notes that the American Trotskyist movement was unique in having been generated from an established factional grouping in the official Comintern section—other early ILO sections were formed from disparate elements and individuals, most of them expelled from the Communist movement only after having been discredited and stripped of all supporters. Cannon stands out as a Communist leader who came over to Trotsky with his authority pretty much intact. And unlike the European groupings of the Left Opposition, for the most part a collection of petty-bourgeois circles, the CLA began with a base among worker militants. Together these factors

*continued on page 50*

