

Information, Education, Discussion

# BULLETIN in Defense of Marxism

Published by expelled members of the Socialist Workers Party, Fourth Internationalist Tendency

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The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, founded by members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party because we opposed abandoning the Trotskyist principles and methods on which the SWP was founded and built for more than a half century.

Denied the right, specified in the SWP constitution and by Leninist norms, of a full and free discussion of all programmatic changes, we were subjected first to gag rules and slander and finally to wholesale expulsions. The present leadership has resorted to these bureaucratic methods in order to impose their revisionist political line upon the party without discussion or approval by the membership.

We are now forced to organize and conduct this discussion outside the SWP. Our aim is to encourage discussion and debate within the party by those seeking to defend revolutionary Marxism and to bring about our reinstatement in the party.

We firmly believe that the present leaders of the SWP cannot avoid that discussion through organizational measures and expulsions. The relevant issues will increasingly appear on the agenda as their new course comes into conflict with the reality of the class struggle in the U.S. and around the world.

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*"All members of the party must begin to study, completely dispassionately and with utmost honesty, first the essence of the differences and second the course of the dispute in the party. . . . It is necessary to study both the one and the other, unfailingly demanding the most exact, printed documents, open to verification by all sides. Whoever believes things simply on someone else's say-so is a hopeless idiot, to be dismissed with a wave of the hand."*

—V.I. Lenin, "The Party Crisis," Jan. 19, 1921.

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## F.I.T. ASKS REINSTATEMENT IN SWP

### REQUEST FOR A MEETING

March 26, 1985

Political Committee,  
Socialist Workers Party

Dear Comrades,

On February 21, shortly after the world congress of the Fourth International, we sent you a letter (copy enclosed) in which we made several suggestions for immediate steps to improve relations between the F.I.T. and the SWP. These included collaboration on the April 20 anti-intervention demonstration and on local SWP election campaigns, as well as a lifting of the ban on our attendance at party forums and other public functions. We also asked what you planned to do regarding the demand of the delegates to the congress for our readmission to the party.

To date we have received no response. Last Friday, however, at the New York Militant Labor Forum, two members of the F.I.T. were once again refused admission. We can only assume that this represents your considered reply to the modest proposals made by us.

It is imperative for steps to be taken at once which can begin to carry out the mandate voted by the world congress -- that the unity of the Fourth Internationalist movement in the United States be restored. We believe this can be advanced if you will agree to a meeting between your representative(s) and Comrade Frank Lovell and myself. We will attempt to make ourselves available at your convenience. Please call me at (718) 934-6281, or Lovell at (212) 673-1573 to make the necessary arrangements.

If we do not hear from you within a week -- to at least inform us that you are considering this request, if not to set up an actual meeting -- then we will have to conclude that you are still refusing to answer our correspondence and that you have decided to ignore the congress's decision favoring our reinstatement.

Comradely,  
Steve Bloom  
National Administrative Secretary

### OFFER TO AID TOUR

March 28, 1985

Political Committee  
Socialist Workers Party

Dear Comrades,

This is a brief follow up to our letter of two days ago. We have been contacted regarding the pending visit to the U.S. of Gote Kilden of Sweden, who will be touring the U.S. under your auspices. One of the items we would like to take up at a possible meeting with you is what we can do to help build this tour in cities where there are Local Organizing Committees of the F.I.T.

Comradely,  
Steve Bloom  
National Administrative Secretary

### INCIDENT AT THE MILITANT FORUM

TO MEMBERS OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY  
March 30, 1985

Dear Comrades,

On Friday, March 22, there were two events that Dorothy Breitman and I wanted to attend, and fortunately there was no conflict as one was scheduled at 7:30 p.m. and the other later that evening. The first was a panel discussion "In Defense of Women's Abortion Rights" held by the Militant Labor Forum and the second a benefit party for the April Actions held by the New York Coalition.

We needn't have worried about a time conflict, for we were not allowed to attend the Militant Labor Forum. Several comrades (two of whom live in the same housing complex as we do) were in the bookstore that leads to the meeting hall. As we entered, they looked at each other and appeared to be disconcerted and embarrassed. What to do? One went into the hall to call others to stand at the forum entrance door. We were then told we were not invited and could not attend.

We replied that this was a public forum. And, in light of the decisions and proposals made at the recent world congress of the Fourth International, the SWP policy of barring its expelled members from attending the public meetings of the party was not only unjustified but untenable.

After all, we are all members of the same International (within the limitations imposed by U.S. law). The SWP delegation itself had proposed to the world congress that both the Fourth Internationalist Tendency and Socialist Action be considered sympathizing organizations. How can members of these groups be barred from the public meetings of the party? As we left, we urged them to think about the political logic of this situation and to rescind this disgraceful policy.

Some of the comrades who had been at the forum later attended the April Actions party. We meet party members regularly at coalition meetings and committees where we are working together with many others to help build a massive demonstration in Washington on April 20. At these meetings SWP members distribute leaflets publicizing party rallies and meetings. It appears all are invited -- except us.

How long can the policy of exclusion against us be maintained? The revolutionary Marxist movement has always deplored tactics of this kind. The Socialist Workers Party was forged in the struggle for democracy in the movement. We have been educated in that tradition and feel angry and humiliated, for ourselves and for the party, to be turned away at the door of an SWP public meeting. It should be humiliating to those who have the task of closing the door.

I hope that the comrades reconsider this policy, question it, discuss it, and change it.

Comradely,  
Sarah Lovell

#### FROM A LETTER TO THE UNITED SECRETARIAT

April 5, 1985

United Secretariat

Dear Comrades

You have received a copy of our letter to the SWP dated Feb. 21, requesting information about their plans to carry out the decision of the world congress concerning our appeal, and our follow-up letter of March 26, proposing a meeting between us and the SWP to work out possible areas of collaboration. We also wrote to them on March 28, explaining that we would specifically like to help build the Gote Kilden tour, which is scheduled for later this month.

It is now more than a week since they should have received our March 26 letter. There has been no response of any kind. We can only assume, then -- as we explained in the letter -- that they have chosen to ignore the mandate of the congress delegates.

It is imperative that the April meeting of the United Secretariat take up this question, and demand an explanation from the SWP of what its approach will be toward the reintegration of the expelled members.

Comradely,  
Steve Bloom  
National Administrative Secretary

#### SECTARIANISM

Every tendency, direct or indirect, of a small revolutionary party to construct a world of its own, outside and apart from the real movement of the workers in the class struggle, is sectarian. Such tendencies can take many forms, and we should not delude ourselves that the well known illustrations exhaust the possibilities.

We have come a long way, I think, from the adventures of the earliest American socialists with separate, self-sufficient colonies of their own outside the prevailing economy, and the experiments of the SLP with pure socialist unions outside the existing labor movement, with all its imperfections. But a self-perfecting "political colony," attempting to live a life of its own in a world of its own devising, would not be any better.

-- James P. Cannon in a 1955 letter to Vincent R. Dunne,  
SWP Discussion Bulletin, A-19, June 1955

## BLACK LIBERATION AND THE COMINTERN IN LENIN'S TIME

by Larry Stewart

More than any other person, Leon Trotsky shaped the SWP's thinking about the nature of the Black struggle in the U.S. Despite his considerable influence and prestige among us, he wasn't able to accomplish this all at once.

In 1933, when Trotsky was exiled in Turkey, he tried to convince the leaders of our movement that they should support the right of self-determination for Blacks in this country. But they didn't understand his arguments and they didn't agree.

It was not until 1939, when Trotsky was living in Mexico, that he persuaded us of the progressive character of Black nationalism and helped the SWP to adopt our first resolution having a fully Leninist approach to self-determination. (Both episodes are documented in Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, Pathfinder Press, 1978.)

This, plus the development of the Black struggle itself and the lessons we learned from that during the next 30 years, enabled us to work out our policy of "combined revolution." An application of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution to a particular American reality, this policy combines the democratic struggle of Blacks against racism with the workers' struggle against capitalism. For a long time it gave the SWP a definite theoretical and practical advantage over all other tendencies in the radical movement.

But now the Barnes group in the SWP leadership has set itself the goal of fusion with the Castroist current and puts this goal ahead of everything else. It has repudiated the policy of permanent revolution (without explaining what effect that repudiation has on the policy of combined revolution) and it is

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This article was originally written as part of "Permanent Revolution and Black Liberation in the U.S.," which Larry Stewart was still working on when he died in November 1984. George Breitman divided it into two separate articles when he edited the unfinished manuscript after Stewart's death. The first was published in Bulletin IDOM No. 17, April 1985.

trying in other ways to indicate that the SWP should no longer be considered "Trotskyist."

One of the ways of doing this is to demote Trotsky from the highest level of revolutionary authority and stature, next to Lenin, to a secondary level, alongside Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin, etc.

Demoting Trotsky doesn't necessarily involve belittling him directly or denying that he was a good revolutionary (except with regard to permanent revolution, political revolution, etc.). Often it only involves assertions or hints that when Trotsky was doing certain good things, these were not exceptional contributions because he was only acting in accord with decisions made by the Communist International in Lenin's time.

Efforts along this line are being made by the Barnes group especially in relation to Trotsky's views and record on the U.S. Black struggle. They can't attack him on these matters -- yet -- but they can and do try to whittle down his place in the history of our party's long fight to achieve a correct policy and correct practice in that struggle.

Here, for example, is what Jack Barnes said in his most famous speech ("Their Trotsky and Ours," Dec. 31, 1982) when he was listing the things Trotsky had done in the 1930s that Barnes approved: "Trotsky also carried on the Comintern's work of educating revolutionists in the United States about the centrality of the struggle for Black self-determination and of the vanguard role of Black workers in the class struggle." (New International, Fall 1983, p. 58)

Carrying on the Comintern's work -- how can anyone object to Barnes saying that? What's wrong with putting Trotsky's contributions in their historic context? Nothing at all, if the Comintern's work is assessed correctly and if Trotsky only continued it and did not add to it significantly.

Operation-Cut-Trotsky-Down-to-Size started two days after the SWP's August 1981 convention, at an expanded meeting of the Political Committee where the Barnes group introduced a new educa-

tional-reorientation program focused on carefully selected portions of Lenin's writings. Two reading lists were introduced to show SWP members what to read. The second, entitled "Reading List on the Communist International Under Lenin," is relevant here because of its last section, which we are reproducing from Party Organizer, Vol. 6, No. 1, April 1982, p. 38:

## VII. The Black struggle

- *Lenin on the United States*, New World Publishers, pp. 123-131 and pp. 303-306; Progress Publishers, pp. 124-132 and 301-304 (also in *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 24-31; Vol. 23, pp. 271-273)

In 1915 in his study of agriculture in the United States, Lenin took up the question of Black oppression. In early 1917 in an article on the national question inside the advanced capitalist countries Lenin says that Blacks, "should be classed as an oppressed nation. . . ."

- *The National Liberation Movement in the East*, Lenin, p. 272

In the "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" presented to the second congress Blacks are again characterized by Lenin as an oppressed nation.

- *The Second Congress of the Communist International*, Vol. I, pp. 120-124.

In his remarks at the second congress on the Black struggle in the United States John Reed argues that the key question facing Blacks is class exploitation rather than national oppression.

- *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos*, "The Black Question", pp. 328-331 (also in *The Communist International Documents 1919-1943*, Degras, Vol. I, pp. 398-401)

This resolution, adopted at the fourth congress, took up the struggle of Blacks in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States.

- *First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. II, Trotsky, "A Letter to Claude McKay," pp. 354-356

Lenin was the greatest revolutionary that the human race has produced so far. His teachings and example are precious and irreplaceable for revolutionaries of our time. As a Pathfinder Press note puts it, he "restored Marxism as the theory and practice of revolution in the imperialist epoch after it had been debased by the opportunists, revisionists, and fatalists of the Second International." Where would we be today if he had not been on the scene then?

But Lenin was only one man, with limited time and capacity. He could not solve all problems for his and later generations. He did make very valuable contributions to the revolutionary comprehension of the far-off U.S. Black struggle, but he did not have the time or opportunity to study the question deeply, and it would be foolish of us to expect or pretend otherwise.

First of all, Lenin's comments on the Black struggle in the U.S. are quite brief, and are usually made in the course of broader discussion of other questions. Because of their brevity, almost anyone can look them all up in a few hours if you have access to a good library.

The library I went to has the 45 volumes of the latest English translation of Lenin's Collected Works plus a two-volume index, all published in Moscow. In the subject index you can find all the places where Lenin ever mentioned Negroes, slaves, Africans, etc. It doesn't take long because there are only 30 to 40 such places. Most of the references are quite insignificant -- sometimes only a word or a sentence. Some are very important and suggestive, despite their brevity.

"Lenin took up the question of Black oppression" in his 1915 study of U.S. agriculture, the SWP reading list says. Yes, but unfortunately only in passing. In this 85-page pamphlet he said:

"There is no need to elaborate on the degraded social status of the Negroes; the American bourgeoisie is in no way better in this respect than the bourgeoisie of any other country. Having 'freed' the Negroes, it took good care, under 'free,' republican-democratic capitalism, to restore everything possible and impossible for the most shameful and despicable oppression of the Negroes." Later in the pamphlet he refers to "the existence of still-unparcellled slave-holding plantations in the South, with its downtrodden and oppressed Negro population...." (CW, Vol. 22, pp. 24-5 and 89)

These passages show that in 1915 Lenin unquestionably considered U.S. Blacks to be oppressed, but they say nothing about the specific nature of that oppression. It would have been difficult for most people reading that pamphlet in 1915 to conclude that Lenin was referring to national oppression.

That is not the case with the next excerpt in the SWP reading list, a 1917 passage saying that Blacks "should be classed as an oppressed nation...." A part of a paragraph about the national composition of the U.S. and Japan, in a pamphlet entitled "Statistics and Sociology," here is the passage in its entirety:

"In the United States, the Negroes (and also the Mulattos and Indians) account for only 11.1 per cent [of the total population]. They should be classed as an oppressed nation, for the

equality won in the Civil War of 1861-65 and guaranteed by the Constitution of the republic was in many respects increasingly curtailed in the chief Negro areas (the South) in connection with the transition from the progressive, pre-monopoly capitalism of 1860-70 to the reactionary, monopoly capitalism (imperialism) of the new era, which in America was especially sharply etched out by the Spanish-American imperialist war of 1898 (i.e., a war between two robbers over the division of the booty." (CW, Vol. 23, pp. 275-6)

This is very good; despite its brevity, anybody reading it in 1917 could have seen what Lenin's essential position was on the national oppression of U.S. Blacks.

But it did not have this effect on anybody because nobody else read this pamphlet in 1917 or many years after that. As the SWP reading list neglects to mention, Lenin started this pamphlet in January 1917 but never finished it; the Russian revolution broke out a few weeks later, and his new tasks prevented completion of the pamphlet. So no one else saw it at the time, and in fact it was not published, even in its unfinished form, until 1935, 11 years after his death.

This means that nobody in the Comintern "under Lenin" could possibly have been influenced or educated by the contents of "Statistics and Sociology." It shows what Lenin thought, but not what the Comintern thought.

Now we come to the third and last Lenin citation on the reading list -- the "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions," which Lenin wrote for the Comintern's second congress in 1920. Thesis 11 said, in part:

"It is also necessary ... that all Communist parties should render direct aid to the revolutionary movements among the dependent and underprivileged nations (for example, Ireland, the American Negroes, etc.) and in the colonies." (CW, Vol. 31, p. 148)

The reading list says, correctly, that in that passage "Blacks are again characterized by Lenin as an oppressed nation." And since Lenin's theses were written for a Comintern congress, a reader might conclude that the Comintern shared Lenin's view, especially since the reading list has nothing to say about this.

But such a conclusion would be altogether wrong. After discussing Lenin's draft theses at the congress, the delegates amended them, and the reference to

Ireland and the American Negroes was deleted from the final draft, which now says:

"It is also necessary ... to give direct support to the revolutionary movements in dependent nations and those deprived of their rights, through the Communist Parties of the countries in question." (The Second Congress of the Communist International, New Park Publications, 1977, Vol. 1, p. 180)

Why this deletion was made the delegates were not told and we do not know. Perhaps it was because some delegates were opposed to including U.S. Blacks among dependent nations and nations deprived of their rights. John Reed (see the fourth item on the SWP reading list) was not speaking for himself alone when he stressed the class aspects of the struggle over its national aspects; and nobody at the congress got up to rebut his one-sided position.

We don't know why the deletion was made and it's not too important, except for one thing: Not only at the second congress but at all the other congresses held in Lenin's lifetime (the third and fourth), the Comintern failed to endorse Lenin's position that U.S. Blacks are an oppressed nation or nationality.

That position was never adopted by the Comintern until 1928, four years after Lenin died, when the Comintern was being strangled by the Stalinist bureaucracy. Until then, the Comintern and the CP in this country rejected the right of self-determination for U.S. Blacks and wrongly counterposed class struggle to national struggle, instead of dialectically combining them.

The fifth item on the reading list says that the Comintern's fourth congress in 1922 adopted "The Black Question," a resolution that "took up the struggle of Blacks in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States." It took them up all right but its main emphasis was on class and democratic demands ("for the racial equality of blacks and whites, for equal wages and equal social and political rights," campaigns to force the unions to admit Blacks, etc.). There was nothing in the resolution about the national oppression of U.S. Blacks or anything else that John Reed would have objected to.

For what I have written above I may be accused of hostility to the Comintern. There wouldn't be an iota of truth in such a charge. The Comintern in Lenin's time was the most revolutionary organization the world had ever seen. It blazed many of the paths we are follow-

ing now and will follow until capitalism is banished from this globe.

Its greatest contribution to the U.S. Black struggle was not in charting a correct or complete program for it but in reeducating U.S. and other communists to "shake off their unspoken prejudices, pay attention to the special problems and grievances of the American Negroes, go to work among them, and champion their cause in the white community." (James P. Cannon, quoted in Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, pp. 10-11) Its "harsh" and "insistent" work along this line was by itself sufficient cause for us to remember the Comintern in Lenin's time with the highest respect and appreciation.

But the Comintern had weak sides as well as strong ones. It was fallible and it made mistakes. Alongside some of its most inspiring achievements, it unconsciously carried over some harmful notions and practices inherited from the Second International; or it sometimes reacted to opportunism with corrections that were warped by ultraleftism.

This may come as a shock to SWP members who have been disoriented by the Barnes group's recent campaign to set the Comintern and its documents on a pedestal, and to "justify" its current revisions and theoretical retrogressions with poorly read and poorly assimilated citations from Comintern documents of Lenin's time.

The first four congresses of the Comintern are foundation stones of the Fourth International and the SWP. We could not exist, we could not be what we are, without the theoretical and political tools we inherited from them. But because the Comintern was not infallible, because many things in the world have changed since Lenin's time, we cannot find all the answers to today's problems in those documents, and must learn to use the method they used rather than swallow every formulation they contain.

I am not an authority on Comintern literature, but what I have read of its treatment of the Black struggle, the trade unions, and women's liberation convinces me that while most of this literature was valid and progressive at that time, it also contains false starts and errors that can do us big damage today if we do not read it critically -- the way Lenin encouraged us to do, the way the Barnes group discourages us from doing.

The SWP reading list does not summarize or explain its sixth and last item, Trotsky's 1923 "Letter to Claude

McKay," a Black intellectual who had been an observer at the fourth congress. In it Trotsky said that revolutionary work among Blacks "is not to be carried out in a spirit of Negro chauvinism, which would then merely form a counterpart of white chauvinism -- but in a spirit of solidarity of all exploited without consideration of color." (Reprinted in Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination, p. 81)

Perhaps it was included to show that in 1923 Trotsky had not yet recognized the national aspects of the Black struggle. If that was the reason, it should simultaneously have been noted that in this respect Trotsky was acting in accord with the Comintern line of that time.

In 1928 the now Stalinized Comintern changed its position on U.S. Blacks and pronounced them an oppressed nation, but they did it in a typically bureaucratic and ultimatic way that made a caricature of Lenin's position.

After that, Trotsky stopped "carrying on" the previous Comintern line, but he also rejected the new Comintern caricature, and began to mobilize support for Lenin's policy, which was different from both the original Comintern position and the distortion introduced in 1928.

Trotsky didn't merely continue the Comintern's work in the 1930s -- he revived Lenin's policy on U.S. Blacks and helped to make it part of the program of the SWP and the FI, which it had

#### TROTSKY ON THE COMINTERN DOCUMENTS

"The International Left Opposition stands on the ground of the first four congresses of the Comintern. This does not mean that it bows before every letter of its decisions, many of which had a purely conjunctural character and have been contradicted by the events. But all of the essential principles (in relation to imperialism and the bourgeois state, to democracy and reformism; problems of insurrection; the dictatorship of the proletariat; on relations with the peasantry and the oppressed nations; soviets; work in the trade unions; parliamentarism; the policy of the united front) remain even today the highest expression of proletarian strategy in the epoch of the general crisis of capitalism."

-- Writings of Leon Trotsky (1932-33), Pathfinder Press, 1972, pp. 51-2



never been in either the Leninist Comintern or the Stalinized Comintern.

I maintain that it is necessary to recognize this fact, not in order to defend Trotsky's personal stature, but because the full value and richness of the SWP's combined revolution policy get lost or downgraded if you think it is only a continuation of the Comintern's policy.

Trotsky added new things, and after him the SWP did too. Jack Barnes, in the days before he lost confidence in the future of the SWP except as part of the Castroist current, was not afraid to give credit publicly to Trotsky for adding to Lenin. In a political report to the SWP National Committee in February 1970, Barnes said:

"What Trotsky began grappling with, what he saw ... in the Black struggles in the United States was a national struggle with characteristics that Lenin had not dealt with....

"Trotsky -- in his discussions with his American comrades... -- stressed the lessons learned from the Bolsheviks on the national question, but also added some things that were new...." (Towards an American Socialist Revolution, Pathfinder Press, 1971, pp. 198-9)

As an appendix we are reprinting below substantial excerpts from that report by Barnes in 1970. We do so for two reasons:

1. Because it substantiates our claim that Trotsky's additions to our theory of the Black struggle were universally acknowledged in our party prior to the recently adopted pro-Castroist reorientation.

2. Because it is an eloquent example of the SWP's creative additions to our theory of "some things that were new" -- additions that occurred in the days when our party was unshakably rooted in the policy of permanent revolution and combined revolution.

## Appendix: THE FORGING OF OPPRESSED NATIONALITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

by Jack Barnes

Before discussing our position on an independent Chicano political party, we should begin by clarifying how our view of an independent Black political party developed. We faced a situation that was unique. Lenin did not precisely foresee this demand in his writing on the national question.

Lenin was clear on the responsibility of the revolutionary party in stressing socialist demands and democratic demands; it depended on whether the revolutionary socialist party was in the oppressor nation or in the oppressed nation. The proletarian party of the oppressor nation gave unconditional support to the democratic demands of those nationalities that were oppressed by its own ruling class, and the party stressed this in its propaganda to the usually chauvinist-minded or racist-minded workers. The proletarian party in the oppressed nation, which supported and fought as part of the nationalist struggle for self-determination, stressed the internationalist and proletarian demands in order to win over the workers of its nation to the banner of proletarian internationalism. These were two of the key points that Lenin emphasized. In addition, he was crystal clear on questions like that of the Ukraine.

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These excerpts from a summary to a political report made at an SWP National Committee meeting in February 1970 are reprinted from Towards an American Socialist Revolution, Pathfinder Press, 1971, pp. 197-202. They were reprinted under the title above in International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Vol. 10, No. 10, July 1973, pp. 24-6.

He supported the unconditional right of the Ukrainian people not just to organize and fight for their independence but to separate from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, if they chose. Taking this approach was the only basis on which to establish a strong Soviet Union and prepare for world socialism.

But we are faced here with some special circumstances. What Trotsky began grappling with, what he saw -- and then what we saw later -- in the Black struggles in the United States was a national struggle with characteristics that Lenin had not dealt with. The Afro-Americans are a nationality that did not originate like most others that the Leninist movement discussed. Black people were dragged to North America as slaves. They came here speaking different languages. They came here from totally different levels of historical and cultural development. They came here from totally different nations, from totally different tribes, from totally different sections of Africa. Certainly none of these characteristics was a common denominator.

Their common denominator became their servitude, the destruction of their native languages, the destruction of their native cultures, the destruction of their native religions by the slave masters. What happened was that on American soil, under unique conditions, these Black slaves became a new nationality not directly linked to their original nations or tribes, which spoke different languages, had no common bonds whatsoever and often didn't know each other. That is the origin of what we today call the Afro-American nationality or the Black nationality.

Their common denominator became their skin color. Racism was reinforced with the defeat of Reconstruction and the rise of American imperialism, and an oppressed

Black nationality was welded more strongly together by the oppressor. This was not a development like that of the usual oppressed nationality with a clear geographical boundary and a relatively long, homogeneous cultural-historical identity. It was a unique phenomenon. And that is why Trotsky—in his discussions with his American comrades, who didn't see this because they concentrated on what was *different* about Afro-Americans compared to classical oppressed nationalities—stressed the lessons learned from the Bolsheviks on the national question, but also added some things that were new. He thought the American socialists were blind in not seeing the development of this new nationality that had been created due to the unevenness of the development of American capitalism.

This is a country that is creating new nationalities. Think for a minute about the Indians. The word "Indian" comes from the fact that the white man was so dumb that he thought he was in India. It had nothing to do with describing a single nation. The Native Americans had different levels of cultural development, came from different tribes, spoke different languages; some had no communications with others; there were no nation-states. They were one of the real genocidal victims of American capitalism. What happened was that their culture and their separate identities were to a large degree stripped away from them, and they developed a common bond, too, the common bond of being called goddamned Indians. And that was about all. They were herded together on reservations; they were further discriminated against—victims of the deepening racism and the rise of imperial arrogance; and it was in this process that a new national minority was created, the Indian or Native American nationality. It did not exist before, although this does not erase various differences among Native Americans from different tribal heritages.

In certain ways, this is true of the Chicanos. In this sense, the Chicano people are also a *new* nationality created by American conditions. Chicano nationalism does not reflect the desire to return to Mexico in a geographical sense, but the determination to stand up united and win the right of self-determination right where they are—in Aztlan.

The real *common* language of the Afro-Americans and of the Native Americans is English. The oppressor's language is their common language. Trotsky raised the possibility of Afro-Americans developing a separate language. But this would have had to be a *new* language. It could not have come from their former languages, which have been wiped away.

What did Trotsky say? In the discussions reprinted in *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination* and in the articles on the national question reprinted as part of *The Writings of Leon Trotsky* [1939-40], he said that imperialism itself, under special conditions and out of racial material, can create new nationalities. That's exactly what happened here in the United States, and the specific process is outlined in the political report adopted by the last convention:

"In the [political] resolution, a thumbnail sketch is given of the rise of American imperialism. It says that 'after spreading across the North American continent, slaughtering and dispossessing the Indians and overpowering the slave system in the South in the process, it became a

world imperialist power at the turn of the century. In the Spanish-American War, U.S. imperialism seized sectors of the decayed Spanish empire outright, dislodged Spain from Cuba and proceeded to establish its own empire in Latin America and the Pacific.' In that thumbnail sketch are described all the components that American capital incorporated in its nation: Afro-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans." It is not the working class but the oppressor class, in its drive to incorporate labor and territory under its national control, that created the oppressed nationalities.

In his contribution to the discussion for the convention, George Breitman raised the question for discussion: when exactly did the Afro-Americans become a nationality? I think they became a nationality with the defeat of Reconstruction, which showed the incapacity of American capitalism to integrate the former slaves, and with the rise of American imperialism. That is just my opinion, and someone else may choose another time. But certainly that period—with the growth of racism and the rise of Jim Crow, which were necessary to justify American imperial expansion against the colored peoples of the world and to help create pariah pools of unemployed low-wage labor and divide the working class—was a key point in the creation of this oppressed nationality.

Trotsky was conscious of lurking prejudice among workers of the oppressor and privileged nation, even among advanced workers. He said that it is not very, very difficult for the revolutionary party to teach an English worker to have solidarity with the rest of his class. It is a lot harder to teach him to have solidarity with a yellow coolie or a brown laborer. And it is harder still to teach him to have solidarity with the struggles of women. Something that we can learn from Lenin, Trotsky and our own party's experience and tradition, something we affirmed explicitly in the resolution we passed at the last convention, is that we, as the revolutionary proletarian party in the oppressor nation, the United States of America, have the responsibility to lead the fight for the unconditional right of these oppressed nationalities to organize independently and to determine their own destiny. This is a revolutionary democratic task that the American bourgeoisie has long been unable to carry out. Only the proletarian revolution can carry out this task, we say. And the SWP socialist fighters will prove it by being at the head of those who unconditionally fight at the side of the national minorities at each stage of their struggle.

Unlike every bourgeois politician or petty-bourgeois bureaucrat, we are not afraid of these struggles, because every independent democratic struggle is a fight against imperialism and a fight for the working masses. It is a fight against the enemy of the working class, and we will prove our worth in practice—whether it is a fight for preferential hiring, for open admissions or for the establishment of a separate state.

At the last convention we discussed the fact that, although for many years we didn't recognize the degree to which the national question applied to the oppressed nationalities in the United States, we supported independent candidates of these minorities. Unlike all other radical tendencies, we applied our class-struggle principles and supported every fight for democratic rights, up to and including independent political action. Before we

adopted our 1963 position (really readopted our 1939 position in light of the unfolding rise of Black nationalism), we had a long history of supporting genuinely independent candidates of the national minorities. We understood this responsibility very clearly and acted on it.

At our last convention, we pointed out how the coming American revolution will be a combined revolution. Like the Russian Revolution, it will be a revolution of the oppressed national minorities for self-determination—complete independence and the right to determine their own future—and a revolution of the working class to overturn capitalism and establish a workers' state. A very important fact, which makes our perspective of a combined revolution even more clear, is the overwhelmingly working-

class composition of the oppressed national minorities in the United States. In fact, the odds are that it will be the oppressed national minorities in the United States who will adopt proletarian demands most rapidly and most thoroughly. We have seen nothing in the last thirty years to make us doubt Trotsky's prediction on this.

If the national struggle is another, very complex form of the class struggle, as Trotsky insisted, then the nationalist consciousness of a heavily proletarian national minority is an important form of class consciousness. I think that the general nationalist feeling among the mass of working Afro-Americans is the most advanced form of class consciousness of any broad layer of the proletariat in this country today.

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# LEON TROTSKY and the ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES of the REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

By Dianne Feeley, Paul Le Blanc, and Tom Twiss

This is the first comprehensive examination of Trotsky's views on revolutionary organizational principles and norms from 1917 to 1940. It consists primarily of quotations and is organized into three sections: 1) a summary of his basic conception of organizational principles; 2) an account of his defense of Bolshevik norms during the struggle of the Left Opposition from 1923 to 1929; and 3) a survey of his views during his exile, 1929 to 1940, when he led the International Left Opposition and the Fourth International.

**\$5.00** (includes 4th class postage)

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# THE SWP'S NEW POSITION ON THE LABOR PARTY

by George Breitman

"I can always spot a Trotskyite by what they say about the labor party question. It's always the same, it never varies, and it's not like the position of any other group." That's what a local union official in Detroit told me more than 20 years ago.

This was meant both as a criticism of the SWP and as evidence of the official's sophistication. But it was also a tribute by a political opponent to the clarity and consistency with which the SWP presented its views on a labor party in the U.S. starting in 1938, as reflected in its members' ability to explain those views so that everyone knew what they were.

The same cannot be said in 1985. Some aspects of the SWP's position on the labor party have either changed or become obscure in the last few years.

To compare the SWP's past and present positions on this issue we can recommend a 1981 book for the former and a 1985 magazine.

The book is The Changing Face of U.S. Politics, edited by Jack Barnes and Steve Clark (Pathfinder Press, 1981). It contains several resolutions and reports approved by the SWP as recently as the period between 1975 and 1980. Look under "Labor party" in the index and you can quickly find all the passages where the SWP's past or traditional views on this question are stated or restated.

The changes and retreats from clarity since 1981 will be found in the SWP's latest political resolution, a 90-page document adopted at its January 1985 convention, entitled "The Revolutionary Perspective and Leninist Continuity in the United States," and printed in the Spring 1985 New International.

The SWP's 47-year-old position is reaffirmed, or seems to be reaffirmed, in the section of the 1985 resolution labeled "Independent working-class political action" (pages 18-19). Although only one page long, this section is marred by dubious assertions about "bourgeois electoralism" that seem to imply that all electoral campaigns for public office are and must be bourgeois or part of the bourgeois electoral setup.

Despite such untenable implications, this part of the resolution cor-

rectly states that the unions "must break from bourgeois politics" and require "a political instrument independent of the capitalist parties that administer the state for the exploiters. The unions must break from the capitalist two-party system and forge an independent labor party that can mobilize the producers to fight for a workers' and farmers' government."

But this clearly stated position becomes hedged with qualifications and reservations of all kinds, perhaps to the point of being negated altogether, in a later section of the resolution dealing with "Electoralism in the labor movement" (pages 66-69). There the members of the SWP (the principal consumers of the resolution) are treated to a stern lecture against the numerous pitfalls awaiting people who take too seriously their responsibility for doing something concrete to build an independent labor party.

The burden of this section is not to encourage SWP members to look for openings to help workers break with the capitalist parties (as they were encouraged to do in the past), but to think twice, at least, before getting mixed up with workers who might want to do something along these lines but who haven't reached the stage in their development where they can be called revolutionary.

## PARTS OF THE TRAP

The SWP used to say that winning workers away from support of the capitalist candidates was a major task of the pro-labor party forces. The 1985 resolution says something else:

While support of such candidates "is one of the primary forms taken by class-collaborationist politics at election time," this "is only a small part of the trap of electoralism." If that's only a small part, what's the big part? The resolution answers that by denouncing a number of people, organizations, and concepts (of which we have room here to give only a sample):

\* Union, Black, or Chicano officials who decide to run for office outside the Democratic or Republican parties "in the absence of a program in action that

marks a class step forward." (Campaigns lacking such a "program in action" do "not represent progress toward working-class politics.")

\* The Progressive Party of 1948 and the Peace and Freedom Party of the 1960s and 70s which, although they were outside the two major bourgeois parties, did not run campaigns that broke from bourgeois politics toward independent working class political action.

\* Reformist-led, bourgeois labor parties, like the British Labour Party and the Canadian New Democratic Party, which are "up to their eyebrows in bourgeois electoralism without ever calling for a vote for candidates of openly bourgeois parties." (They are characterized not just as "obstacles" but also as "impediments" to independent working class political action.)

\* And, most notably, the creation of a labor party in the U.S. with a reformist program.

This last target of the 1985 resolution is so important that we'd better quote it in full:

"Similarly [to the British and Canadian examples], the emergence of a labor party with a reformist program in the United States would place a new barrier in the path of independent working-class political action."

Then follow two less-than-crystal-clear sentences designed to square all this with the SWP's long advocacy of a labor party: "But the fight to form a labor party here can be bypassed only at the peril of heading off into a sectarian dead end, removed from the line of march of the U.S. working class. And a refusal by Marxists to organize this fight would increase the odds that a labor party would not develop as a revolutionary vehicle."

Leaving to nimbler hands the chore of untying knots like that, we note that the above citations have points of similarity with previous SWP statements. But their context is different, their intent is different, and their political content is different. A new and different line on the labor party is being introduced, not openly and honestly, but through altered emphasis and unacknowledged reinterpretation of parts of previous positions.

But one part of the new line is altogether new; nothing like it has been said by the SWP since it became an advocate of an independent labor party in 1938. That is the claim that the emergence of a labor party with a reformist program would constitute a "barrier" to independent working class political action.

That changes the whole meaning of the concept of independent working class political action. Consider what is being said:

If the working class or an important segment of it breaks with the capitalist parties and creates a party of its own, based on the unions and their allies, and their program is reformist rather than revolutionary, then that -- according to the authors of the 1985 resolution -- is not independent working class political action, but a barrier to such action.

This means that nothing except a revolutionary party can be said to engage in independent working class politics.

That immediately leads to the question of what attitude we should take to the formation of a labor party that may prove to be reformist in program and leadership.

Genuine Marxists and Leninists of course will work and fight to make an emerging labor party as revolutionary as possible, in the ways that Trotsky recommended to the SWP in 1938. But suppose, despite all our efforts, the new labor party turns out to be less than revolutionary -- should we be for or against founding it?

A direct answer to this question is not to be found in the 1985 resolution. But the implication in it is that the SWP would either oppose formation of such a party or abstain on the question. After all, it couldn't be expected to support the formation of a barrier to independent labor politics.

How can members of the SWP be expected to campaign vigorously for a labor party based on the unions if they are hobbled with a concept like this?

Leaving aside all the other implications (about which a Leninist resolution should make it unnecessary to speculate), we must now try to understand the magnitude of the change this new concept makes.

For an entire century the most perceptive elements in the Marxist movement, both here and abroad, have agreed on one thing about the labor party question in the U.S.: that it would be progressive, not a barrier, for the workers in this country to break with the capitalist parties and launch a party of their own, even if its program was inadequate from a revolutionary standpoint.

#### WHAT ENGELS AND LENIN SAID

We can start with Frederick Engels 99 years ago, when there was an upsurge of struggle by U.S. workers, and when he

thought, following their strong support of "single-taxer" Henry George's independent campaign for mayor of New York City in 1886, that the workers were possibly on the verge of creating their own political party. In letters to his American comrades, Engels wrote:

"The first great step of importance for every country newly entering into the movement is always the constitution of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers' party." (Letters to Americans 1848-1895, International Publishers, 1953, p. 163)

"A million or two of workingmen's votes next November for a bona fide workingmen's party is worth infinitely more at present than a hundred thousand votes for a doctrinally perfect platform...."

"Anything that might delay or prevent that national consolidation of the workingmen's party -- on no matter what platform -- I should consider a great mistake...." (Letters to Americans, p. 167)

Engels was not the only enemy of reformism who had such an opinion. Let us jump ahead 21 years, to 1907, when Lenin wrote a preface to a collection that included the above letters by Engels. Lenin was in full agreement with Engels's position on a U.S. labor party:

"Engels stressed the importance of an independent workers' party, even with a poor programme, because he was speaking of countries where there had formerly been not even a hint of the workers' political independence and where, in politics, the workers mostly dragged along behind the bourgeoisie, and still do." (Collected Works, Vol. 12, p. 365)

"In countries where there are no Social-Democratic workers' parties, no Social-Democratic members of parliament, and no systematic and steadfast Social-Democratic policy either at elections or in the press, etc. -- in such countries Marx and Engels taught the socialists to rid themselves at all cost of narrow sectarianism, and to join with the working-class movement so as to shake up the proletariat politically. For in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century the proletariat displayed almost no political independence in Britain or America." (CW, Vol. 12, pp. 372-3)

For these reasons Lenin favored a U.S. labor party, "even with a poor programme," not only in 1907 but also in 1920 and 1921, at the time of the Comintern's second and third world congresses. According to Theodore Draper, Lenin suggested then that the CP should

work for a labor party in the U.S., and he did not insist that it could only be a party with a revolutionary program. (American Communism and Soviet Russia, Viking Press, 1960, p. 32)

It is hardly necessary to quote Trotsky on this matter since transcripts of his 1938 talks with SWP leaders on why they should fight for a labor party are available in the book The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution (Pathfinder Press, 1977).

#### WHAT BARNES SAID

So let us take another and bigger leap -- to Jack Barnes, national secretary of the SWP, and the main political report he gave to the party's national convention in August 1979. Touching on the 1980 presidential campaign, he said:

"The presidential campaign also offers the broadest opportunity to explain the need for American labor to break with the capitalist two-party system -- with the Democrats and Republicans -- and launch a labor party based on the unions." (Nothing here about the perils of electoralism; the emphasis was on a break with the Democrats and Republicans.)

"The objective need for a labor party -- for a break by the labor movement from the two big-business parties -- is more pressing than at any time since we began running presidential election campaigns in 1948." (Nothing at all about obstacles, impediments, or barriers -- nothing even about program, good or bad, reformist or revolutionary.)

"The actual formation of a labor party would dramatically shift the relationship of class forces, opening the way to the more rapid construction of a mass SWP." (The Changing Face of U.S. Politics, pp. 235 and 238)

That last quotation is worth another look. A labor party, if actually formed, would shift the relationship of class forces to the advantage of the workers -- and Barnes said nothing here or anywhere else in The Changing Face about its having to be a revolutionary party or a party with a revolutionary program in order for it to have that desirable effect.

Such a perspective is obviously quite different from the one introduced in the 1985 resolution. The 1979 report stimulates active participation in the labor movement to try to actually help form a labor party, while the latest document encourages dogmatic abstention until some ideal form of labor party comes along.

## WHY?

Why has the SWP position changed between 1981 and 1985?

It isn't because of objective changes in the international or national class relationships or class struggles. It isn't because the workers are more independent of the capitalists politically than they were before 1981. It isn't because the actual formation of a labor party today would have substantially different results than we foresaw in 1979. So what is it?

It comes, in my opinion, from a serious methodological weakness in the SWP's central leadership team -- its growing tendency to decide important political questions on a narrowly factional basis. More and more frequently, the positions they take are adopted less on their political and theoretical merits or demerits than on the presumed factional advantages these positions will provide the team in combating adversaries or critics in the SWP and FI.

The present errors and aberrations on the labor party can be traced back to Dec. 23, 1981, when Frank Lovell and Steve Bloom, then members of the SWP National Committee, formed the Fourth Internationalist Caucus in the NC and wrote out its platform in a letter to the NC (printed in the SWP's Internal Information Bulletin, No. 1 in 1982, September 1982, and reprinted in our Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, No. 3, February 1984).

The F.I.C. platform mildly criticized the party's propaganda for beginning to deteriorate into "an abstract litany about ... the need for a labor party," and offered the following alternative:

"Breathing real life into our labor party slogan is, in fact, one of the central challenges we face. Union workers can begin from where we are in thinking about independent political action. Relief from the present unemployment crisis will come from a shorter work-week in all industry, the elimination of all overtime work, and a massive public works program to create socially productive jobs. We believe that local unions in every Congressional district should run working men and women for Congress to fight for these basic economic and political demands. That is the way a labor party will be created."

These were not new ideas in the SWP -- they had been shared by the whole leadership and the whole party. But since they were now raised in criticism of the central leadership team, the latter decided that Lovell and Bloom had to be discredited for presenting a simplistic and opportunist approach to "the way a labor party will be created." By the time they got done trying to do this, they had traveled a long distance from the ground defended in The Changing Face of U.S. Politics.

There are three things the members of the SWP ought to do about this:

1. Check the 1985 resolution and The Changing Face to see if we are right or wrong in claiming that crucial but unacknowledged changes have been made in the SWP's labor party position.

2. Start thinking about why the SWP leadership makes changes of this kind and magnitude without any announcement or advance notice to the members.

3. Start working now to elect delegates who will vote to correct current mistakes on the labor party at the next national convention, which is supposed to be held in August 1985.

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## FARRELL DOBBS ON THE LABOR PARTY

Independent labor political action will likely begin around a program of reforms under the existing system. A vital new factor will nevertheless have been added to the social struggle because of the working class composition of a union-based party opposed to the capitalist parties. At the present historic stage, prolonged conditions feeding reform illusions within a labor party are ruled out. New experiences will speed radicalization of the party ranks at a relatively fast pace. As an instrument capable of quickly mobiliz-

ing presently unorganized sectors of the working class, a labor party will be able to bring the whole weight of the class to bear against the capitalist overlords through new and higher forms of struggle in both the industrial and political spheres.

In the process labor will be able to assume general leadership of all who are oppressed and exploited under capitalism. Fraternal cooperation between a labor party and any independent black political formation could be quickly established. Working farmers

would come to identify their interests with those of labor. Instead of having capitalist ideology pumped into the labor movement by way of middle class elements, working class criteria would penetrate into at least the lower strata of the middle class, drawing them toward support of anti-capitalist political action under labor's leadership. Misbegotten reliance on liberal politicians would be scrapped. The way would be open for the workers and their allies to orient toward a struggle for governmental power.

--Farrell Dobbs, Selected Articles on the Labor Movement, Pathfinder Press, March 1983, p. 28

## APRIL 20: A TEST FOR THE SWP

by Evelyn Sell

The January 18 issue of the Militant displayed a welcome front-page headline: "March on D.C. against U.S. war in Central America." Every issue since then has urged participation in the April mobilization, reported national developments, and carried news about the activities of local coalitions. This is a clear sign that SWP policy is to support the April actions.

This is not "in-words-only" support. Members of the SWP and the Young Socialist Alliance have been active in the local coalitions and have taken on many responsibilities. The YSA postponed its national convention set for April "to better help in making April 20 a success." (Militant, 2/15/85)

But people who are familiar with the positive role played by the SWP and YSA during the movement against the war in Vietnam (as well as the civil rights, student, and women's movements) are now seeing an involvement whose character and quality are much more complex. While many SWP branches are playing a helpful role, others are hampering the work of local coalition-building. There are even cases of party members trying to manipulate rather than trying to politically convince activists or to earn leadership roles in coalitions. The worst examples seem to be from the West Coast.

In Los Angeles, SWPers hampered the coalition's functioning by raising objections to decisions which had been approved and reapproved overwhelmingly when no question of principle or political importance was involved. Within the Los Angeles April 20 Coalition, the SWP fought to include a civil disobedience action in the schedule of actions. Even after the proposal was withdrawn, the SWP insisted that the coalition endorse civil disobedience which might be organized by other groups.

In Seattle, the SWP collaborated with other forces to delay the formation of the Northwest Action for Peace, Jobs and Justice. The leaflet for mass distribution, designed by SWPers, failed to include a coupon for endorsements or financial contributions--an elementary part of any initial leaflet used by a coalition just getting off the ground.

These political mistakes and wrong methods of functioning are the logical outcome of a combination of developments inside the SWP over the past five-six years: the disorientation caused by the

programmatic revisions of fundamental tenets; the sectarian and abstentionist attitudes toward mass movements and day-to-day struggles; the factional war carried out by the central leadership. Party members failed to gain experiences and develop skills while those with long years of experience, highly-honed skills, and solid political understanding were driven out or expelled. The SWP is now suffering from the loss of precious cadre -- many of whom are currently playing well-earned leadership roles in coalitions around the country.

Compounding the above problems, the Barnes faction has miseducated the party ranks about how "leaders" act. Some SWPers entered the coalitions with the attitude, "Here we are. We know best. Now we will run things." They are learning -- the hard way -- that leadership must be earned through presenting better ideas, showing good judgment, providing skills, and cooperating with others.

Every organization includes members with a range of individual strengths and weaknesses. In the past, the SWP was able to maximize its strengths and minimize its weaknesses by employing the "team concept." That team concept was purged along with the dissidents. It was replaced with National Office directives and punitive measures against members who did not agree 101 percent with the central leadership.

The factional war inside the party has produced a core of members who go along with or vehemently defend the leadership. This core is now thrust into coalitions where they have to make sudden and unexpected decisions on the spot. They can't dash to the phone and call New York for instructions and guidance. The very qualities which are essential for effective work within mass movements are the same qualities that the Barnes faction purged from the SWP.

As a result, some SWPers gain respect for their good work while others ruin the SWP's reputation for being the best builder of social struggles. This unevenness may be overcome with more experience in the broad coalitions formed for the April actions. The party has often said, "We have much to learn from the Cubans, the Sandinistas, the Grenadians." The SWP has much to learn from, as well as much to contribute to, U.S. builders of the mobilizations for peace, jobs, and justice.

March 31, 1985



## GEORGE LAVAN WEISSMAN (1916-85) 49 YEARS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

by the Editorial Board

George Lavan Weissman died of a heart attack in Concord, New Hampshire, on March 28, after almost half a century of service to the cause of revolutionary socialism. He had suffered from emphysema for some years, but remained politically active until he had a stroke in January.

He will be remembered as a founding member of the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International in 1938 and as a founder of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in 1984. He worked on the Militant editorial staff from 1948 to 1967 and was a member of the editorial board of our Bulletin in Defense of Marxism at the time of his death.

Weissman was born in Chicago in 1916, the only child in a petty-bourgeois family. He grew up in Boston, where he was educated at prestigious schools -- Boston Latin School and Harvard College. His father, of a Jewish background although not religious, had belonged to the Intercollegiate Socialist Society at Yale before World War I. His mother came from an Irish-American background and a family that was deeply involved in trade union activity.

He became a Marxist during the Great Depression while he was at Harvard, and at the age of 20 joined the Young People's Socialist League and the Socialist Party in Boston. In the SP he met Trotskyists, including Dr. Antoinette Konikow and the Trainor brothers (Larry and Frank), who influenced his continuing evolution to the left. When they were expelled from the SP in 1937, he went with them and helped found the SWP.

While still in college, Weissman became a volunteer organizer for several unions in New England. In this capacity he was active in a rank-and-file seamen's strike in Boston in 1937, a textile workers' organizing drive in Rhode Island, a shoe workers' strike in Maine, etc. He himself was a member of the CIO National Maritime Union and the AFL Retail Clerks when he worked briefly in those industries.

But he had decided to devote most of his time and energy to building the

revolutionary workers party, and that is how he utilized his many talents from then on. Despite his petty-bourgeois origins, he spent his adult life reaching, organizing, and educating revolutionary workers. This was true even during World War II when he was drafted into the U.S. Army as a private and emerged as a captain of artillery (1941-46).

After the war he was what he called a "party functionary," an elastic term covering a broad variety of functions which the SWP assigned him to. He was a local or branch organizer in Boston (1939-41) and Youngstown (1946). At the SWP national center in New York he was director and editor of Pioneer Publishers and Pathfinder Press (1947-81); organizer for the American Committee for European Workers' Relief after World War II; manager of Mountain Spring Camp in New Jersey (1948-62); as well as editor and writer for the Militant and other party publications. He was also a member of the SWP's national and political committees for many years and a regular or fraternal delegate to most of its national conventions before the 1970s.

Weissman and another SWP member, Constance Fox Harding, were married in 1943, and they became an exemplary team of party workers. Together they worked in all kinds of defense and solidarity cases, and together they broke new ground for the SWP by getting its presidential ticket on the ballot in several states where there were no SWP members or branches. Over the years hundreds of people in the movement were guests at "Connie and George's place" in Manhattan -- some overnight, others for months at a time. Their warmth and hospitality to people in need, both party members and non-members, were almost legendary. Connie Weissman died in 1972.

Among the many organizations Weissman belonged to were the Boston youth branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; the American Student Union at Harvard; the NAACP in New York; the American Veterans Committee in the Bronx, NY; the Committee to Combat Racial Injustice (in the

Monroe, NC, "kissing case"), of which he was secretary; the Civil Rights Defense Committee during the period when it defended Carl Skoglund, a revolutionary union leader whom the government repeatedly tried to deport to Sweden, and James Kutcher, the legless veteran purged from the Veterans Administration in Newark; and the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, of which Weissman was East Coast regional organizer.

In addition, he found time to be literary representative in this country of the Leon Trotsky estate, and to write hundreds of articles for the party press. The subjects that evoked his best writing were the Black struggle in the U.S. and American history. Perhaps a collection of these will be published some day.

Because of poor health Weissman did not play any role in the internal debates over Castroism and Trotskyism that divided SWP members prior to their 1981 national convention. Nevertheless, the SWP leadership sensed that he would never support its efforts to revise the party's program, and included him among more than 100 members purged for "disloyalty" in 1983-84. Weissman's indignant appeal against his expulsion, refuting the charges and demanding reinstatement in the party he had helped to build for so many years, can be read in Bulletin IDOM No. 5, April 1984.

**'BULLETIN IDOM' ARTICLES  
BY GEORGE LAVAN WEISSMAN**

"Appeal to the National Committee," Feb. 24, 1984 -- No. 5, April 1984.

"How the SWP Began," a review of The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party -- No. 7, May 1984.

"James P. Cannon on the Birth of American Trotskyism," a review of The Left Opposition in the U.S. 1928-31--No. 12, October 1984.

In February 1984 he joined with other expellees in forming the Fourth Internationalist Tendency and became a member of the Bulletin IDOM editorial board. He attended the F.I.T.'s first national conference in Minneapolis last October and planned to attend the second in May 1985.

When the SWP convention in August 1984 rejected the appeals of Weissman and the others who sought reinstatement, they turned to the Fourth International and asked its recent world congress (February 1985) to intercede on their behalf. The congress responded with an overwhelming majority vote to demand that the appellants be reinstated in the SWP.

Although by this time Weissman was hospitalized after his stroke, he was exhilarated by the reports of the congress's action on this and other issues. In a message to our editorial board, he said:

"I hope you won't forget to let the congress delegates know somehow how grateful we are for their support to our fight for reintegration into the party. Of course they were only doing their duty, given the facts about the purge. But not everybody does it when it is needed, or does it as effectively as it was done in this case, and I for one would like our comrades to know how much we appreciate their adherence to the principles of our International."

Surviving Weissman are Muriel McAvoy, his second wife; three step-children from his first marriage -- James Harding of Manhattan, Dorothea Lobsenz of Los Angeles, and Timothy Harding of Los Angeles; and six grandchildren. We extend our condolences to them and to his many friends here and in Mexico.

The revolutionary movement has lost a tireless builder and a wise counselor. We honor him by continuing the struggle he conducted for 49 years and by seeking to recruit and educate others in his mold. Young revolutionaries will not find a better model.

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A memorial meeting will be held in Manhattan at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, May 25, on the 7th floor at 151 West 19th Street (between 6th and 7th Avenues). For further details about speakers, etc., write the F.I.T., P.O. Box 1947, New York, NY 10009, or phone (212) 673-9410 or (718) 934-6281.

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# WHY WORKING PEOPLE NEED SOLIDARITY

by Bud Schulte

## INTRODUCTION

The following speech was delivered on March 24 to a solidarity rally of 2,000 in Austin, Minnesota, in support of the anticoncessions struggle of Hormel workers organized in United Food and Commercial Workers Local P-9. The Austin workers were the sole local in the eight-plant Hormel chain to refuse to accept a giveback agreement negotiated by the international UFCW leadership. In retaliation, Hormel unilaterally cut P-9 wages and benefits by 23 percent. An "impartial" arbitrator upheld the company's right to impose such savage cuts so that Hormel could remain "competitive" -- even though the giant meatpacker has piled up healthy, and increasing, profits.

Local P-9 responded to the company attack by launching a "corporate campaign" aimed at pressuring Hormel and their main financial backer, First Bank System. The Austin local retained the public relations firm of Ray Rogers, principal architect of the J. P. Stevens campaign of the 1970s. Hormel and First Bank, with the assistance of the capitalist press, has countered with a vicious campaign of their own, raising the threat of closing the modern productive Austin plant and leaving the small, southern Minnesota city a ghost town. Unfortunately, the UFCW international leadership, fearing a reversal of their concession strategy in the packinghouse industry, has joined the bosses and the media in publicly condemning, and attempting to isolate, the Austin workers.

Militant unionists, including revolutionary socialists, have rallied to support the courageous fightback by Local P-9. (This does not mean that revolutionary socialists necessarily endorse all the tactics proposed by "Corporate Campaign, Inc.") A Twin Cities support group has been established and a car caravan of unionists from that area traveled over a hundred miles to the March 24 Austin rally.

Bud Schulte recounts in his speech some of his experience as a militant packinghouse unionist. In 1984, Bud was chairman of the picket-captains committee during the 49-week strike at Iowa Pork's South St. Paul plant. Iowa Pork tried to bust UFCW Local P-4, demanding unacceptable concessions and attempting to operate the plant with strikebreakers. An effective P-4 Support Committee was organized in which socialist unionists of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency played a leading role. The Support Committee, backed by the entire official labor movement, organized two impressive rallies, conducted a boycott campaign that swept Iowa Pork products out of area supermarkets, and raised thousands of dollars for strike relief. In the end the company had to back off their union-busting drive and negotiate an honorable contract.

Respecting the work of F.I.T. unionists in the Support Committee, Bud began discussing other, broader political and social issues with them. He also became an active member of the Minnesota Labor Committee on Central America and the Caribbean. Becoming radicalized by his experiences in a bitter strike, he decided, after examining the words and deeds of several socialist currents, to join the F.I.T.

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Before I make my remarks, I have something for Jim. When I first met Jim Guyette at the first support meeting held at the Ford local, he noticed a button I had on. This is the button. It's a button from 1938. The old Packing House Organizing Committee put it out. He asked me where I got it. He said he wanted it. "P-9 has a button collection," but they didn't have that one. Well, at that time, I wasn't willing to part with it. Today, seeing the size of this crowd, I realize that it may be in my best interest to honor his request. So, Jim, here is the button. Add it to the collection and preserve some of our proud packinghouse tradition.

In 1965 I was 18 years old. I knew who I was, and where I was going. I was a packing houseworker. I was a proud packinghouse worker. I worked for Swift and Company in South St. Paul. When I

walked out of that plant gate on Friday, the paycheck in my hand represented the wages of one of the best-paid industrial workers in the country. My family and I were protected by some of the best medical benefits anywhere. I counted on a solid pension fund for a dignified life in retirement.

There were 2,500 workers at Swift's. Two blocks away, at Armour's, over 3,000. Our union at Swift's was Local 167, United Packinghouse Workers, and South St. Paul was a union town. I wish I could say that today. The sports teams at the high school were proud to be nicknamed the Packers. Today, they are the only packers left in South St. Paul.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

Since then I have had three packing plants fold up under me and my fellow workers. Swift's abandoned its work force in 1969. Morrell and Company in St. Paul deserted its workers in 1979, along with Armour's, in South St. Paul. Now, Iowa Pork Industries has severed our employment. They did this after a long, bitter 11-month strike, where we fought tooth and nail, just to keep them from cutting starting wages to \$5.50 an hour. What happened to the meatpacking industry? What happened to the democratic, fighting union that we built, on the foundation our fathers laid, to defend our wages, our working conditions, and our human rights?

We have been the victims of a plot. Like many other workers in this country, we've been ganged up on by the corporations, by the banks, and by the government. They busted up the big packing plants, because they claimed they weren't efficient, and they busted up the large effective and democratic union locals along with them. They dispersed the industry into rural areas with no union tradition, and we, as a union, failed to chase these plants down and organize them.

They began to play the non-union workers off against the union workers, and little by little they began to get concessions. Then they began to play the unionized workers off against one another. They said, "We can't compete. The packing plant in the next town is paying its workers less. If you don't give us some concession we'll have to close." As soon as they got the concession, the other packing plant turned around and said, "Now, we need a concession. We can't compete with the plant up the road that just got a concession." They began

to break down the dike that protected us, the master agreement in the industry. They blackmailed us into a bidding war against our union brothers and sisters.

### SLEIGHT-OF-HAND TRICKS

Then they started the sleight-of-hand tricks. They changed their names. One morning, the Armour workers woke up and found out they were working for Conagra, or Swift Independent. Guess what? When you change the name on the door, you don't have to honor your collective bargaining agreement anymore. The courts and the labor boards backed them up. But the system only works one way. Our union used to be called the United Packinghouse Workers, then we were the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen. Now we are the United Food and Commercial Workers. Were we allowed to say to the meatpacking bosses, "Wait a second, our contract is off. We just changed our name. Oh, by the way, next Monday we'll have to have two dollars more an hour." No, the laws in this country only work in one direction.

Now they've got most of the workers in the industry beaten down to \$8.00 an hour, and a lot of us make much less. Conagra, Armour in disguise, pays around \$6.00 an hour. Where will it end? I say right here in Austin. You brothers and sisters have the guts to stand up to them and say No. You are starting the fight that should have been started by packinghouse workers 25 years ago, when they first started the attack. We should have said then, "You touch one hair on the head of any member of our movement, you're going to have to take us all on." We should have said, as the founders of our unions said, "An injury to one is an injury to all."

Well, in the name of the Support Committee, I am here today to shout that precious slogan, and we will make everyone hear us. We are on your side, and we're not going to back down. When P-4 was on strike in South St. Paul, who gave us money? Who turned the scab meat around at the Hormel plant gate? Who could we always count on? P-9, that's who, and we were stronger for it.

Now there are a lot of people watching this struggle, and some of them want it to lose. First Bank wants it to lose. If you make less, they make more. They're robbing the workers and poor farmers. Do you know who's on the board of directors of First Bank? There are 25 or 30 of them. Every one of them is a

high official in a major corporation in Minnesota; 3M, Honeywell, Cargill, General Mills, as well as Hormel. It's the executive committee of big business in Minnesota. There are others there too; the mighty Minneapolis Star and Tribune, for one.

If you think the Star and Tribune is a friend of labor, ask the members of organized labor that work for them. Ask the union members how they tried to bust the union at that paper. Ask how they've tried to cut wages, and play one group of workers off against the other. Well, we are wise to them, and we say, keep your hands off. Get your greedy corporate fingers out of the internal affairs of Local P-9.

We, as supporters, have complete confidence that the members of P-9 are capable of making their own decisions about the future of their union. They don't need the assistance of the Star and Tribune, or any other force outside the labor movement. The members of P-9 have the right to vote, and they elected a leadership to speak for them. They have their own newspaper, The Unionist; they don't need any volunteers from Minneapolis.

#### UNION DEMOCRACY

We're not babes in the woods in the meatpacking industry. We know packing-house workers don't always agree on everything, and we don't always make unanimous decisions. There's nothing wrong with that. That's what makes us strong. That's democracy. We know something else too. After all the debate and discussion is over, we take votes, and we make a decision, and then we carry that decision out, to every last union brother and sister. If that were not the case we would not be here today. When we decide to strike, we all strike.

Anyone who crosses the picket line is a scab and a strikebreaker. We act together. We act united. We are a union. Debates in your local and our union are nobody else's business. All we have to know, as the Metro Area P-9 Support Committee of 100, is your decision. You decided to fight the wage cut. You asked for help. We're here to help. We pledge to carry your message back to the labor movement in the Twin Cities, and the next time you call a rally, we'll bring twice as many brothers and sisters down here, because we realize you're fighting for all of us.

Some demoralized people say the odds are insurmountable. Labor history shows that there are no insurmountable odds. That's why we are here today,

speaking out. That's why we have had a union in the meatpacking industry for fifty years. Our union was built in the midst of the greatest economic crisis in the history of the United States. Twenty-five percent unemployment. No Social Security. No unemployment benefits. Masses of people out of work. The corporations just as greedy and arrogant as they are now. But they were beaten.

Why? Because the labor movement was built on the rank and file, its greatest resource. That rank and file elected strong leadership, leadership that had the wisdom to plan strategy, organize, and mobilize the ranks to fight when forced to do so. In just four short years, from 1934 to 1937, the great industrial unions, the Auto Workers, Steelworkers, Rubber Workers, Packing-house Workers, and many others, took on the giant corporations, and won. They won because they rose up in their millions and no power in the world could stop them. I'm here to tell you that when that sleeping giant, the American worker, wakes up, everything is possible. There are no odds that can't be overcome. It's time we woke up, and you in Austin, with your proud labor history, are showing the way. We salute you and we pledge to stay with you until we all share your victory.

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## **CRISIS IN THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY**

**An Answer to Jack Barnes**

BY CLIFF CONNER

F.I.T., P. O. Box 1947  
New York, N.Y. 10009

**60¢**

## FORUM: ON THE WORKERS' AND FARMERS' GOVERNMENT

[NOTE--The following two items relate to an important question which is currently being debated within the Fourth International; one which we have addressed occasionally in the pages of the Bulletin IDOM. It is the problem of the transition from a bourgeois state to a workers' state, and the proper understanding of the concept of a "workers' and farmers' government." The article by Paul Le Blanc discusses his appreciation of the various positions which exist on this question within the FI today. The letter from Steve Bloom was written in response to a request from Le Blanc for comments on the article.]

### THE NEED FOR A SERIOUS DISCUSSION

by Paul Le Blanc

Shortly before his death, as the Second World War was unfolding across the face of our planet, Leon Trotsky forecast a postwar revolutionary upsurge which would shake both capitalism and Stalinism to their core, swelling the ranks of the world party of socialist revolution, the Fourth International. With revolutionary Marxist leadership, he believed, the workers and the oppressed would finally triumph in the advanced capitalist countries, the colonial and semicolonial countries, and the bureaucratically oppressed Soviet Union.

Reality confirmed only part of this forecast. The Fourth International's growth was quite modest. There was a postwar revolutionary upsurge in the colonial and semicolonial countries, in some areas achieving important or even decisive victories, but it was drawn in some cases to the Stalinists, in other cases to bourgeois or petty-bourgeois nationalist currents. In the advanced capitalist countries, the Stalinists and Social Democrats benefited from (and betrayed) the radical upsurge among the workers. The USSR, as the Cold War began, set up bureaucratically deformed workers' states -- in its own image -- within the countries on its Eastern European border, creating a long-desired buffer between it and its imperialist adversaries. Resistance and even uprisings by workers and others against bureaucratic tyranny, however, did not prove capable of overturning the Stalinists either in the USSR or in the newly formed workers' states. A grim con-

frontation between capitalist and Stalinist superpowers, plus revolutionary ferment confined to the underdeveloped "third world" -- this seemed to be the framework for activity in which revolutionary Marxists found themselves.

This unforeseen postwar situation created a crisis for the world Trotskyist movement. Some militants of the Fourth International, seeing and attempting to adjust to the actual situation, ended up adapting to Stalinism and seriously compromising the revolutionary program. Others tended to make the opposite error--refusing to see the realities even of living revolutions, counterposing dogmatized, mechanistically understood theories and principles to life itself. Still others, exhausted and demoralized, were unable to sustain a commitment to revolutionary politics and left the Fourth International altogether.

Joseph Hansen, one of the most thoughtful and important leaders of American Trotskyism, stands out as one who was able to maintain his commitment to revolutionary politics while avoiding the pitfalls of adaptationism and sectarianism. In doing this, he made significant theoretical contributions to the world Trotskyist movement. Among these were a pioneering analysis of the class nature of the new Stalinist-led regimes of Eastern Europe, an early understanding of the dynamics of the Cuban revolution, and a creative development of the "workers' and farmers' government" concept. (The key documents on this last point are to be found in Jo-

seph Hansen, The Workers and Farmers Government, SWP Education for Socialists Bulletin, April 1974.)

One of the most appealing aspects of the "workers' and farmers' government" concept as developed by Hansen is that it can sustain a sweeping yet thoughtful and informative analysis, within a Trotskyist framework, of a variety of post-World War II revolutions. This has been demonstrated skillfully in Robert Chester's Workers and Farmers Governments Since the Second World War (SWP Education for Socialists Bulletin, January 1978), which reviews the Yugoslav, Chinese, Cuban, and Algerian revolutions. The only other systematic work of similar scope is Michael Lowy's excellent The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development, which -- disappointingly -- completely ignores Hansen's contribution.

Recently, Hansen's writings on the "workers' and farmers' government" have been utilized by very different elements in the Fourth International, leading up to the recent world congress of that organization. Jack Barnes and his followers have used it in a cynical manner to challenge the theory of permanent revolution, with an intellectual dishonesty and lack of principle that would have infuriated Hansen himself. (See Barnes's "For a Workers and Farmers Government in the United States," International Internal Discussion Bulletin, Vol. XVIII, No. 5, June 1982, and "Their Trotsky and Ours," New International, Fall 1983.) There are others, more honest and principled, who have utilized the concept in a way which supplements the theory of permanent revolution (this was Hansen's own orientation), but with a rigidity, a tendency toward schematic abstractions, which was alien to Hansen's own method.

Of particular significance is the way in which both of these currents view the revolutionary process in Nicaragua. Barnes claims to be an enthusiast of the Sandinistas. The rigid defender of "orthodoxy" typically presents himself as a searching revolutionary critic. Both Barnes and those who take a sectarian approach, however, agree that the Sandinista regime is a "workers' and farmers' government," claiming to use the concept in a manner consistent with Hansen's contribution. With each, this is seen as worker-peasant-nationalist regime, more or less politically independent of the bourgeoisie, but essentially still a capitalist state (because capitalist property relations still dominate majority sectors of the economy, and this

predominantly capitalist economy is still tolerated and even defended by the government). Barnes thinks that this situation will eventually result in a workers' state but that there is no hurry. On the other hand, many Trotskyist adherents of the workers' and farmers' government concept insist that, as Hansen said, this is "a highly transitional phenomenon" and that "the establishment of such a government by no means leads inevitably to the establishment of a workers state." (Hansen, The Workers and Farmers Government, p. 35.) The typical exponent of "orthodox" rigidity therefore criticizes the Sandinistas to the extent that they fail to overturn capitalist property relations. Both Barnes and the rigid ones agree that such an overturn is a precondition for the transformation of Nicaragua into a workers' state.

Along with the majority of the Fourth International, both Barnes and the sectarian wing see the term "workers' state" as a synonym for the term "dictatorship of the proletariat." The Fourth International majority, it should be noted, has never clearly or fully embraced Hansen's "workers' and farmers' government" contribution (although in the past it has seemed to find it a useful label -- for example, in identifying the revolutionary Ben Bella regime of Algeria). It does not, at this point, apply the label to Nicaragua. Instead, it holds that the dictatorship of the

## **Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua**

by Paul Le Blanc

This study offers a detailed analysis of the dynamics of the revolutionary process in Nicaragua. Based on a variety of English-language sources and translations, it explores the socio-economic and historical background of the 1979 revolution and the political forces that were involved.

Another purpose of this study is to test the value of the revolutionary theories of V.I. Lenin and L.D. Trotsky in light of the Nicaraguan experience. In particular, Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution is examined.

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proletariat (i.e., a workers' state) exists in that country.

There is yet another position, however, which deserves special attention and has the potential for providing either insights or confusion. In a major contribution entitled "The Workers' and Farmers' Government and the Socialist Revolution" (Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, April 1984), Steve Bloom has amply demonstrated the dishonesty and distortion which are central to Barnes's false version of Hansen's theory. Bloom is also able to apply theory to reality more successfully than those who defend "permanent revolution" but have a schematic conception of the workers' and farmers' government. Bloom is therefore more in the spirit of Hansen himself. The distinction of Bloom's contribution is to further develop Hansen's theory in the light of recent developments within the Trotskyist movement and within the world revolution. He documents the following important points: 1) for Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, the term "workers' and farmers' government" and the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" could be applied to one and the same regime; 2) for Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, the dictatorship of the proletariat means the political rule of the working class,

and it can exist before the establishment of a nationalized, planned economy (and, according to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, it must precede nationalizations); and 3) following both Trotsky and Hansen, it can be said that the dictatorship of the proletariat and a "workers' and farmers' government" exists in Nicaragua. At the same time, Bloom refrains from giving the designation of "workers' state" (or, for that matter, of capitalist state) to the Sandinista regime, in this way distinguishing himself from the Fourth International majority. Bloom believes that a "workers' state" can only be said to exist when proletarian forms of property -- i.e., a nationalized, planned economy -- have been created by the dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletarian dictatorship, then, could be said to have two phases: first, the "workers' and farmers' government" phase before capitalist economic relations are smashed, and second, the "workers' state" phase after the nationalized economy has become predominant.

This terminological innovation may have merit in providing us with additional theoretical tools for analyzing the realities of our time. It seems to preserve something of Hansen's contribu-

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## BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS FROM THE F.I.T.

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tion while, at the same time, saving it from unprincipled misuse by Barnes and from the schematic-sectarian error of the rigid ones. In particular, it eliminates the possibility of counterposing the "workers' and farmers' government" concept to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution (a counterposition that Hansen never intended, that sectarian defenders of 'Hansenism' inadvertently stumble into without realizing it, and that has now become Barnes's trademark).

The extent to which Bloom's contribution fruitfully supplements (or even rescues) Hansen's "workers' and farmers' government" conception, and the extent to which Hansen's original contribution provides a key to understanding the revolutionary developments of the post-World War II period, remain to be established. This must be done in the course of a thoroughgoing literary discussion within the Fourth International. In the interests of clarity, however, it is important to avoid an unnecessary terminological tangle.

There are comrades who, basing themselves on Bloom's contribution, sharply take issue with the Fourth International majority. "Nicaragua has a proletarian dictatorship, but it is not a workers' state!" they insist, in an uncompromising tone. The Fourth International majority's equation of "dictatorship of the proletariat" with "workers' state," its inclination to give a common definition to both terms, is perceived as a very serious theoretical confusion. The problem is, however, that the distinction between the two terms -- so far as I can tell -- originated in 1982 with Bloom himself.

In the "Resolution on the Soviet Union," adopted in 1938 by the founding convention of the Socialist Workers Party, the two terms are presented unambiguously as synonyms. Under the sub-heading "The Workers' State," the resolution tells us: "The revolution of 1917 established as the state form the dictatorship of the proletariat. ... As its major economic measure, the workers' state nationalized all important factories, banks, mines, railroads, means of communication, and established a state monopoly of industrial enterprise and foreign trade...." In the next section, the resolution refers to "the transitional regime between capitalism and socialism known as the dictatorship of the proletariat (workers' state)." (The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party, Minutes and Resolutions 1938-39. New York: Monad, 1982, pp. 132, 135.)

For Trotsky, too, the terms are synonymous. For example, in his 1937 article "Not a Workers' and Not a Bourgeois State?" he clearly uses them as two different names for the same thing -- both "the rule of the proletariat" and "the regime which guards the expropriated and nationalized property...." (Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1937-38. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1976, pp. 61, 62.) I don't think that anything can be found in such major works as The Revolution Betrayed which would diverge from this use of the terms "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "workers' state."

Hansen's use of the terms simply follows this tradition: "...proletarian dictatorships, that is, workers states." (Hansen, The Workers and Farmers Government, p. 27.)

Traditionally, then, "workers' state" means precisely the same thing as "dictatorship of the proletariat." Given this fact, the lengthy and excellent section of Steve Bloom's article which shows that (according to Trotsky) a nationalized, planned economy is by no means a precondition for the existence of a proletarian dictatorship also stands as a demonstration that a nationalized, planned economy is not a precondition for the existence of a workers' state. If this is the case, then perhaps additional work should be done to clarify the need for a distinct "workers' and farmers' government" conception such as that developed by Hansen. (Such clarification would probably focus on the need to reserve judgment on the capacity of the leaders of a revolution -- especially if they are Stalinists or petty-bourgeois nationalists -- to enable or allow the revolutionary process to advance.)

In any event, if the innovative character of Bloom's terminology is kept in mind, then we can avoid superficial disputes over whether or not Nicaragua is a workers' state. If we define the term in the way that Trotsky defined it (proletarian dictatorship), then Nicaragua is a workers' state. If we define the term in the way that Bloom defines it (based on a nationalized, planned economy), then no informed person would claim that Nicaragua is yet a workers' state. Using the term in the way Trotsky used it, but incorporating the point that Bloom is stressing, we could say that Nicaragua is a proletarian dictatorship (or a workers' state) which has not yet fully consolidated itself economically.

March 1, 1985

## A LETTER TO PAUL LE BLANC

by Steve Bloom

March 7, 1985

Dear Paul,

Thanks for sending me your latest article on the workers' and farmers' government. I am enclosing the comments I made on this at the world congress, which as you will see anticipate the questions you raise about the workers' state -- though without answering them entirely. With a few copy-editing changes this text, along with other congress material, will be published in the next issue of the Bulletin IDOM.

I am planning to go back to work on the workers' and farmers' government at some point in the near future. Preliminarily, I believe the focus of the discussion, insofar as it takes place among those who defend permanent revolution, should not be Nicaragua. Because of the nature of the FSLN leadership and what this has meant for the Nicaraguan revolution it is possible to get by using only the workers' state and dictatorship of the proletariat as theoretical categories in assessing this process -- though I think that approach is inferior. Where such an analytical method breaks down, making an understanding of the workers' and farmers' government essential, is in China, Cuba, and Algeria. It is the fact that the United Secretariat majority is reconsidering our previous assessment of these revolutions that makes their new "workers' state in Nicaragua since 1979" position a serious theoretical problem.

You are correct in one sense in asserting that Hansen did not introduce the distinction between the workers' state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. As far as I know he never did this formally, never codified it in any way. But it is not correct to conclude on this basis that such a distinction is simply an invention of "comrades who, basing themselves on [my] position, sharply take issue with the Fourth International majority."

In discussions I have had with a number of experienced comrades who worked closely with Hansen in his later life, this was accepted as part of his understanding. But more importantly, it is an absolutely essential corollary of Hansen's definition of a workers' state -- as the period of the socialist revolution following the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. He considered this

definition essential as a result of the actual experience of the postwar revolutionary developments, and only as a result of this. That is why it is wrong to try to compare this definition, as you do, to the use of the term workers' state by Trotsky, Lenin, or the Bolsheviks -- who never saw the processes Hansen was trying to grapple with.

If we accept Hansen's definition of a workers' state then we must acknowledge that the revolutionary Marxist program calls for a period of consolidation of the socialist revolution under the leadership of a proletarian party -- the dictatorship of the proletariat -- before the workers' state actually comes into existence. The dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers' state become distinct concepts. The only alternative is to do as Barnes has done -- i.e., to make the dictatorship of the proletariat equal to a nationalized economy. In my 1982 article, which was primarily attempting to answer Barnes for those who do accept Hansen's definition (i.e., members of the SWP) it was absolutely necessary to take the approach which I did.

It is, of course, reasonable to raise a question about whether Hansen's definition of a workers' state is a good one. There can be no doubt that it does have its problems. I don't believe that the definition of the workers' state is the key aspect of Hansen's contribution. But the distinction he was trying to make between different periods of the socialist revolution is important. We should keep in mind that Hansen himself never presented his thinking as any kind of absolute or finalized theory. There can be little doubt that if he had lived to see the lessons of the Nicaraguan or Grenadian revolutions he would certainly have added to and developed his conception, perhaps changing his approach to some things. We need not be wedded to terminology. But there are also serious problems connected to the United Secretariat majority's current use of the term workers' state, which I go into to some extent in my comments to the congress.

The big question, the central problem addressed by Hansen and the issue which this terminological dispute tends

to hide, is that of the class nature of the leaderships which carried through the postwar overturns. How were these accomplished in the absence of a proletarian revolutionary party, and what does this mean in terms of the theory and program of revolutionary Marxism? As I said before, this problem is not so sharply posed in Nicaragua. But should we conclude on this account that we were mistaken to think it was posed in the cases where Hansen applied the workers' and farmers' government idea? That would be a bad methodology. If we treat Hansen's work as a beginning, as a basis on which we can build (and not in a dogmatic fashion) then I think we can enrich our overall theoretical tools.

Today we might pose the problem in terms of whether it is necessary to make a qualitative distinction between the process of the Nicaraguan revolution on the one hand, and that of the postwar overturns which Hansen analyzed on the other. Already Aubin, in his article for the LCR discussion, rejects this as far as Cuba is concerned. The logic of the USec majority's present definition of workers' state will lead them to abandon this for the others as well, if they haven't already. Various delegates made comments along these lines at the congress. In fact, if you take their simplistic approach, the only correct thing will be to declare that there were workers' states established in Greece and Vietnam in 1945, since in both of these cases partisan movements, led by Stalinist Communist parties, drove out the occupying forces and essentially held the power. Of course in both cases these "communists" simply invited a new imperialist army back in to occupy the country.

I will also raise a question which seems almost frivolous, but which must be addressed by those who insist on making an absolute equality between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the workers' state. Does your consistency on

this go so far as to assert that the Paris Commune, which Engels described as a dictatorship of the proletariat, was also a workers' state? If not, and I think that there are few who would go that far, then why is the distinction considered so outrageous in other situations?

These are a few preliminary comments on the thoughts raised in your article. I would welcome any response.

Regards,  
Steve Bloom

A pamphlet about an issue  
debated in the FI between  
its 1979 and 1985 congresses

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## THE 'MILITANT' AND 'SOCIALIST ACTION' REPORT ON THE WORLD CONGRESS

March 25, 1985 -- In the last issue of the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, we provided extensive coverage of the 1985 world congress of the Fourth International. This included factual coverage, as well as our assessment of what the congress accomplished.

This time we would like to briefly survey for our readers the way the congress has been reported by the two other organizations in the United States which sent fraternal delegates: Socialist Action and the Socialist Workers Party. (U.S. revolutionaries are prohibited from membership of the FI because of reactionary legislation.) Our survey will be brief because neither SA nor the SWP has had very much to say.

\* \* \*

Socialist Action, like the F.I.T., constitutes an organization founded by expelled members of the SWP who have demanded their readmission to the party. In their newspaper, also called Socialist Action, they published a very brief, objective account of the congress, but

have not tried to present any analysis or balance sheet of the decisions made there. Curiously, considering the importance of the congress for all those expelled in the SWP leadership's purge, the article in Socialist Action is buried on the bottom of page 11 in the March 1985 issue.

Readers should be aware of one serious factual error in the SA account. The last paragraph reads: "Furthermore, in view of the political expulsions from the SWP, the World Congress noted that its U.S. sympathizing organization had been split into three component parts: the SWP, Socialist Action, and the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. Each of the three organizations would enjoy full rights within the Fourth International within the limitations of reactionary U.S. legislation."

This implies that each of these three groups has some kind of equal status within the FI. This is not so. The world congress clearly affirmed its recognition of the SWP as the organization which would be the section of the FI in the U.S. were it not for reactionary legislation.

Members of F.I.T. and SA, the delegates decided, should be readmitted to the SWP. Our organizations are recognized only insofar as the leadership of the SWP refuses to take steps to comply with the demand of the delegates for our readmission. This, of course, gives us quite a different status in the International than the party itself.

\* \* \*

The SWP has had more extensive news about the world congress in several issues of the Militant and Intercontinental Press. But like SA, it has refrained, up to now, from offering readers any assessment of what the present party leadership thinks about the outcome of the congress.

Coverage has been limited to the solidarity declarations adopted by the delegates (concerning the April 20 demonstration in the United States, the Kanak struggle in New Caledonia, and similar items) along with a factual account of the congress issued by the United Secretariat Bureau of the FI.

S. B.

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## A CORRECTION FOR THE PATHFINDER PRESS CATALOG

New York, N.Y.  
February 7, 1985

Pathfinder Press  
410 West Street  
New York, N.Y. 10014

Comrades:

In your current (1985-86) catalog, there is an error or distortion on page 21. Your list of pamphlets attributes authorship of The Organizational Character of the Socialist Workers Party to "James P. Cannon, et al." This is wrong.

When this document was first made public in an SWP educational bulletin in July 1970, it was correctly described on the cover, beneath the title, as "Resolution Adopted by the 21st National Convention of the Socialist Workers Party, September 1965." It was never attributed to Cannon in his lifetime, which ended in 1974. Your own catalog for 1980-81 described it as "Resolution of 21st Convention" (page 30). Your 1982-1983 catalog did the same (page 32).

It is politically and factually wrong to say that Cannon was the author of this 1965 resolution whose interpretation has been the subject of dispute inside the SWP in recent years. The facts are that Farrell Dobbs, George Novack and Cannon were assigned as a committee to prepare a draft resolution on the party's organizational principles in preparation for the 1965 convention.

The draft was written by Dobbs in New York and edited by Novack. Cannon, then 75 years old and living in Los Angeles, was sent a copy of the edited draft and returned it without comment. He did not oppose the draft but he thought it was poorly written and too ambiguous on certain key points. The convention approved the document without Cannon participating one way or another.

In 1968 Cannon stopped writing to the party center in New York, but in 1966 and 1967 he sent a number of letters to the National and Political Committees showing that he had differences with some interpretations of the 1965 convention resolution. His main concern was a trend toward the "tightening" of party and YSA centralization which he feared might "strangle the party to death." (See his letter to Reba Hansen, Nov. 12, 1966, in James P. Cannon As We Knew Him, page 281, Pathfinder Press, 1976.) It is impossible, on the basis of these letters, to believe that he would have supported the party's recent supercentralist "norms."

That is why your catalog should correct its misleading listing of the pamphlet's authors.

Fraternally,

George Breitman

## Objectives

The Central American and Caribbean region has become one of the focal points of international tension, together with the Middle East, thanks to the great geo-political importance that Northamerican imperialism has conferred upon it in its plan to recuperate world hegemony.

The regionalization of the confrontation which a few years ago was barely been herald, today is a concret fact, and is in the process of deepening.

Such a policy option corresponds to the United States' governments strategy to impose once again and at whatever cost the old longed-for absolute hegemony obtained since the end of the last century in this corner of its "backyard porch", which includes all of Latin America.

The Reagan administration would not be content with just isolating Nicaragua in order to avoid "spreading the disease", nor with a political solution between the FMLN-FDR and the government of El Salvador to seek a negotiated settlement. It will only be satisfied with the destruction of both processes, in order to close the door shut on the opening provided by the Cuban revolution, an opening in which to a certain degree the bourgeois governments of the region benefited as well, obtaining a greater maneuvering room in relation to its powerful protector.

Today Reagan is demanding from these bourgeois governments an unconditional realignment behind his policies, in a new, corrected and enlarged edition of the policies of the Cold War.

For this reason, the White House, always "deeply concerned" for democracy, is not the least bit concerned with eliminating the neutrality and democracy of Costa Rica, now on the way of becoming a police state: together with Honduras, Costa Rica is facing the fate of all those nations to which the US government has assigned an important role in the battleground "against communism".

The imperialist offensive during its five year buildup has only been able to deliver a firm blow to the weakest link of the revolution in the region, that is, Grenada after the assassination of Maurice Bishop. However, imperialism has taken the confrontation to ever increasing more dangerous levels.

The government of the United States has transformed almost the entire region in a gigantic trampoline from which it can launch, at any time, a direct intervention with military forces against Nicaragua and/or El Salvador. Under the cover of military training centers and of permanent military maneuvers there is an increasing troop concentration

in the region. US warships spy on both coasts, building up arms deposits, constructing air runways and cementing military alliances.

If the regionalization of the conflict has not advanced as much as the Reagan administration would like it to, this is primarily due to the enormous capacity for resistance and political initiative displayed by the FMLN-FDR, as well as the intelligent and skillful policies put into practice in Nicaragua by the FSLN.

An Additional factor which has prevented an open explosion of the regional confrontations has been the reticence on the part of the US's imperialists allies and the most important bourgeois governments in Latin America to support a policy based on brute force. However, this hesitance, for one reason or another, is continually ceding ground.

The general offensive of American imperialism, one of whose expressions, the closest and with most immediate effects on ourselves that is taken place in Central America, demands a response everywhere where it is possible to confront it.

One of this terrains is that of information and analysis concerning the events that are transpiring in the area, so that those forces dedicated to the defense of the liberation struggles of the peoples have materials to combat the continual campaign of ideological distortion and disinformation which the US government has launched to justify its policies.

Objective information and analysis of the events in the Central American and Caribbean area from the point of view of the revolutionary forces immersed in the liberation struggles and dedicated to their defense, will certainly allow us to continue increasing the scope of opposition to the disinformation campaign which the US government maintains in order to justify its policies.

*Panorama de Centroamérica y El Caribe* is published with the idea of contributing to such an effort. Our first issue, number '0', is a trial number. Beginning in March, the magazine will appear monthly. We view ourselves as part of the forces of democratic and revolutionary journalism, as a pluralistic enterprise in which different currents can participate with the idea of creating points of contact for those interested in exchanging opinions, analysis as well as to increase the flow of information which will allow us, above all, to advance in our knowledge of the region, and in search of the best possible political conditions—for all—to deal with a political question that has been thrust in the center of the world politics.

## New Magazine Launched

[On the facing page we are reprinting an editorial from a new magazine, Panorama, which is being published in Mexico by supporters of the Fourth International. Its purpose is to provide a forum for discussion on the problems of the Central American revolution. Most of the magazine is in Spanish, but it will also carry material in English. In addition to the editorial, the first issue, No. 0, carries an interview with Hector Oqueli Colindres, member of the FDR-FMLN's political diplomatic commission, in both English and Spanish. It is entitled, "The Dialogue's Limits." Other material, in Spanish only, includes:

November 4: Second Victory of the Sandinista Revolution

Accomplishments of the Revolution--Excerpts from a speech by Daniel Ortega

December 3: Elections Under Occupation

The Complexities of the International Situation

U.S. supporters of the Central American revolution can help establish a circulation base for the magazine by ordering subscriptions. Rates are indicated on the subscription blank below.]



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# FROM AN ADAPTATION TO CASTROISM TO AN ADAPTATION TO STALINISM

by David Williams

The Vietnamese Revolution and Its Leadership, by Allen Myers. Pathfinder Press (Australia), 1984, 60 pages, \$1.00.

The Vietnamese Revolution and Its Leadership is an expanded version of a report approved by the National Committee of the Australian Socialist Workers Party in October 1984. If anyone wants to see where the anti-Trotskyist logic of Barnes's "Their Trotsky and Ours" (New International, Fall 1983) is leading, a reading of Myers's pamphlet is in order. Myers makes the transition from rejection of permanent revolution to support for Stalinist class collaboration. He rejects in a straightforward manner ideas he and his cothinkers once held; he acknowledges the class collaborationist actions of the Vietnamese Communist Party and defends them, stopping just short of endorsing the murder of the Vietnamese Trotskyists in 1946.

Myers says that the Australian SWP -- and by extension, the U.S. SWP and other sections of the Fourth International influenced by the U.S. SWP which had the same analysis--have been wrong to characterize the Vietnamese Communist Party as Stalinist. Those who would be most intrigued by this "discovery" might very probably be the Vietnamese CP leaders themselves, who never had a problem labeling themselves as Stalinist, and whose loyalty to the Kremlin leadership has never been questioned by either themselves or the Soviet bureaucrats.

That in itself, of course, proves very little. Most readers of this review are familiar with organizations falsely claiming to be Trotskyist, just as the Stalinist parties falsely claim to be Marxist-Leninist. In this case, however, the Vietnamese Communist Party is correct. While Myers raises criticisms of the Moscow bureaucrats, it is significant that the Vietnamese CP would completely reject them. They in no way consider Gorbachev and the Soviet hierarchy anything less than Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries. While acknowledging that the Kremlin leaders have, on occasion, made errors as anyone can, they totally reject any concept that the Soviet Union and its Communist Party are run by a privileged bureaucratic clique.

Any reader who doubts this can ask the Vietnamese CP leaders directly. It would not be unreasonable to conjecture how long it will take for Myers to accept the Hanoi leaders' view of the Soviet Communist Party, since he has accepted their ideas on so many other questions which have divided Stalinism from revolutionary Marxism over the years.

## PERMANENT REVOLUTION VS PEOPLE'S FRONT

Myers comments extensively on the dispute between the Vietnamese Trotskyists and Stalinists in the 1930s and 1940s. He openly takes the side of the Stalinists. He says, "The ultraleft line flowing from the theory of Permanent Revolution would have produced a disaster if it had been followed by the Communist Party." He supports the policy of subordinating all struggles to the national liberation struggle, against France, Japan, and later the United States, in the interests of unity of all classes against the imperialist enemy.

Myers further states: "The CP was also being realistic and sensible when it attempted to establish a broad national united front that would confront those foreign powers as a securely established government, and when it made the compromises and concessions necessary to secure such an alliance. The main enemy at that time, the enemy who had to be defeated if the revolution was to go forward, was foreign imperialism, not Vietnamese landlords or capitalists -- their turn would come later. This is why one southern party official, Nguyen Van Tao, issued the warning during August [1946]: 'All those who have instigated the peasants to seize the landowners' property will be severely and pitilessly punished. ... We have not yet made the Communist revolution which will solve the agrarian problem. This government is only a ... bourgeois-democratic government, even though the Communists are now in power'" (pp. 45-46).

Compare Myers's words to these: "At present nothing matters except winning the war; without victory in the war all else is meaningless. Therefore this is not the moment to talk of pressing forward with the revolution. We can't af-



ford to alienate the peasants by forcing collectivization upon them, and we can't afford to frighten away the middle classes who were fighting on our side. Above all for the sake of efficiency we must do away with revolutionary chaos. We must have a strong central government in place of local committees, and we must have a properly trained and fully militarized army under a unified command. Clinging on to fragments of workers' control and parroting revolutionary phrases is worse than useless; it is not merely obstructive, but even counter-revolutionary, because it leads to divisions which can be used against us." The second quotation represents the same political policy as the first; there is no doubt of it. However, it is not taken from any document of the Vietnamese CP or any other Vietnamese organization. It appears in George Orwell's Homage to Catalonia (Boston, 1967, p. 59); it is his description of the Stalinist program in Spain in 1936-37.

In fact, VCP policies which Myers claims were correct as opposed to those of the Trotskyist movement are nothing more than the international policy of People's Front, followed by the Stalinist parties from 1935. Myers says that this policy led to victory in Vietnam; however, the Vietnamese victory has to be weighed against disasters in China (1927), Spain, France, Indonesia, Chile, and other countries as well -- not to mention several disastrous actions by the Vietnamese CP itself, which cost the Vietnamese people several decades of war and suffering as the price of their victory.

The Trotskyist movement has been fighting against such policies since its beginning, ten years before the foundation of the Fourth International. Does Myers reject this entire struggle? We deserve to know. Trotsky said the following in reference to Spain, and it applies as well to Vietnam:

"[The workers and peasants] have nothing to defend except slavery and poverty. They will direct all their forces to smashing fascism only if, at the same time, they are able to realize new and better conditions of existence. In consequence, the struggle of the proletariat and the poorest peasants against fascism cannot in the social sense be defensive but only offensive. That is why Leon goes wide of the mark when, following the more 'authoritative' philistines, he lectures us that Marxism rejects utopias, and the idea of a socialist revolution during a struggle against fascism is utopian. In point of

fact, the worst and most reactionary form of utopianism is the idea that it is possible to struggle against fascism without overthrowing the capitalist economy" ("Once Again on the Causes of the Defeat in Spain," The Spanish Revolution (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, N.Y., 1973, p. 340, emphasis in original).

If one substitutes the word "imperialism" for "fascism," Trotsky's words lose none of their meaning. And these words are not a peripheral position on some less-than-important question. They sum up the very foundation of the Trotskyist program. History has borne them out over and over again. The fact that the Vietnamese revolution was victorious in spite of the false program of its leadership does not disprove the Trotskyist analysis.

Many more factors are involved in the success or failure of a revolution than the program of the leadership, and in the case of Vietnam these proved decisive. The central factor leading to the victory in Vietnam was the incredible courage, self-sacrifice, and dedication of the nameless millions of Vietnamese workers and peasants. The Japanese were militarily defeated by their imperialist enemies. France was devastated by World War II, and its troops in no way shared the French bourgeoisie's dedication to preserving the colonial empire.

The United States had the resources to defeat the Vietnamese, in fact, even to erase Vietnam from the map, but the U.S. government had a second enemy to fight--a mass antiwar movement in its own country, and indeed throughout the world. The Vietnamese leaders understood its importance: whenever they met with North American radicals they urged over and over, "Keep organizing those demonstrations!" The antiwar movement had a significant effect on the U.S. fighting forces; GIs came to understand that they had nothing to gain by defeating the Vietnamese, and that their only priority was to stay alive.

These factors proved strong enough to compensate for the false program of the Vietnamese leadership. It must further be added, especially for those who belittle the theory of permanent revolution, that the Vietnamese Communist Party often recognized permanent revolution in practice if not in program. In areas which it militarily controlled it often did turn the land over to the peasants, for the landlords had either fled or were openly fighting against the revolution. The VCP abolished capitalism

in North Vietnam, in spite of its own program, in the years following its victory in 1954. The existence of the North Vietnamese workers' state -- deformed though it is -- was of vital importance to the successful outcome of the most difficult period, the war against the United States.

### A CONFUSED EXPLANATION OF PRIVILEGE

Myers explains that Stalinism had at its beginning, and continues to have, a material base in the privileged bureaucracy which rules the Soviet Union. He further explains that revolutionary Marxists use the term "Stalinist" to describe parties which "generally follow policies that are complementary to those policies of the Soviet bureaucracy." Everything he says thereafter is a total jumble of half-truths, faulty logic, and outright casuistry. One is reminded of a slick lawyer defending a well-heeled criminal.

It is not clear whether Myers believes that a party can be politically Stalinist without being dominated by privileged bureaucrats. If he does not believe that, he is parting company with fifty-plus years of political experience. As an example, can one say that Angela Davis is a "privileged bureaucrat"? One cannot at all; she makes a good living as a professor at the University of California, but her politics are not based on her privileges as a leader of the Communist Party. Does that mean that the CPUSA is not Stalinist? That its policy of supporting Democrats, of derailing mass-action struggles is simply a case of a "revolutionary party that has made a mistake"? Not at all: the privileged bureaucracy from which the CPUSA derives its political line is not its U.S. leadership, but the leadership in Moscow.

Myers makes one glaring error of fact: he states that "Stalinist bureaucrats harm the world revolution because their goal is compromise with imperialism." That is not true, and the conclusions Myers draws are equally false. No, the goal of Stalinist bureaucrats is self-preservation. That may sometimes be brought about by compromise with imperialism, and sometimes by making or aiding revolution against imperialism. If given a choice, the Stalinists will choose the former, but the imperialists do not always give them a choice. And, if cornered, Stalinists will fight, and can fight to the finish--even if, as the logic of permanent revolution dictates, that finish is the abolition of capital-

ism in a particular national context, such as North Vietnam in the 1950s.

Obviously to everyone except the most sectarian, compromise with imperialism is often necessary in a revolutionary struggle. It is useless to discuss compromise in the abstract. The policy of "People's Front" carried out by Stalinists the world over, however, is a policy of compromise not in the interests of workers and peasants who may need to buy time, to regroup after a difficult period of struggle. No, it is compromise which betrays the workers and peasants in exchange for diplomatic and economic favors to powerful bureaucrats in Moscow, Beijing, or--let us be honest -- Pyongyang or Hanoi. If conditions of scarcity in postwar Vietnam have not allowed the leaders of the Vietnamese CP and government to enjoy the villas and limousines of their Soviet counterparts, it has not diminished their loyalty to the political program which flows from bureaucratic privilege.

### THE TRUE RESULTS OF THE VIETNAMESE VICTORY

Myers very early in his report gives a glowing -- and one-sided -- description of the impact of the Vietnamese revolution on Southeast Asian politics: "It began to reconstruct society on a new basis, in a way that had a powerful attraction for other exploited countries of the region--so much so that this revolution aroused tremendous fears and hatred in imperialism and reactionary governments of the region: ASEAN, the Pol Pot regime in Kampuchea, the conservative bureaucracy that rules China. ... In the process, they saved the Kampuchean people from genocide, and today they are giving selfless material and military aid to prevent the return of the Khmer Rouge and assist the Kampuchians in the construction of a revolutionary society" (p. 6).

This rosy picture ignores a few facts. If Myers will think back to 1975, the Khmer Rouge was hailed as a force for liberation. It was thought to be the sister organization of the Vietnamese NLF. Few on the left questioned this. It was not until war broke out and Vietnam supported the overthrow of Pol Pot that there was general acknowledgment about what had happened.

However, the Vietnamese did not involve themselves in Cambodia until they had been attacked on their border. Hundreds of thousands of people had already been killed or starved to death by the Pol Pot gang by then. They were not saved by the Vietnamese interven-

tion, and Myers offers no proof at all that the Vietnamese leaders were motivated by humanitarian considerations. And let's be honest with ourselves. Was it fear of the socialist transformation in Vietnam that led the Khmer Rouge to empty the cities and kill so many people? This is what Myers asserts in the quote at the beginning of this section. But that is far-fetched indeed. The Khmer Rouge claimed to be socialist and ideologically aligned with the Chinese Communist Party, whose support it still enjoys.

Furthermore, is it any kind of "reconstruction of [Vietnamese] society on a new basis" which bothers the conservative bureaucracy which rules in China? No, that is not what bothers the Chinese bureaucrats, who, for better or worse, still rule a workers' state. The reason the Beijing leaders have opposed and even militarily invaded Vietnam is their alliance with the Soviet Union, which China considers its number one enemy.

The "powerful attraction" which this revolution is supposed to have had for other countries in the region simply cannot be demonstrated. Ten years after the Vietnamese victory only the countries of former French Indochina -- Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea -- have had victorious revolutions. The Vietnamese revolution seems to have little appeal to the people of Thailand, Malaysia, Burma, the Philippines, Singapore, or Indonesia.

In some of these countries there are struggles developing--primarily for democratic rights--which could evolve in a revolutionary direction. Has Vietnam done anything to further these struggles, whose victory would without question be of great benefit to Vietnam? No.

The fact is that the people of the Southeast Asian countries see the Indochinese revolution as having mixed results. War and suffering have not ended for the Indochinese people. Pol Pot's crimes, the fighting on the borders, the "boat people," the lack of democratic rights in any of the countries liberated in 1975--these are realities that maybe North Americans, Europeans, and Austra-

lians can ignore. Southeast Asians cannot. The Vietnamese victory was a victory, but not an unalloyed one. A workers' state exists in the united Vietnam, but it is a deformed one, and the Vietnamese revolution will not be complete until the working masses of both the cities and countryside have put into power a truly proletarian revolutionary government.

### A DISSERVICE TO REVOLUTIONARIES

The biggest problem with Myers's report is that it disarms the revolutionary movement. It attempts to wave away over fifty years of experience in struggle. Stalinism is a counterrevolutionary force in world politics; make no mistake! The events of France in 1968, Chile in 1970-73, Portugal in 1975, Poland at the present time, not to mention the disasters of the 1930s in Germany and Spain, and China in 1927, are part of the historical record. One ignores their lessons at one's peril. A political program's value is not theological: a correct political program is a weapon. To discard the political program of Trotskyism today in favor of the ideology of the Vietnamese CP would be analogous to discarding an automatic rifle in exchange for a slingshot. Revolutionary parties must be politically prepared for future betrayals by the Stalinists, so that disasters like those already mentioned are not repeated. Revolutionary Marxists will only gain the leadership of the working class in struggle against the Stalinists -- and Social Democrats--as well as against the bourgeoisie.

The Australian SWP -- and the U.S. SWP with it -- began its political trajectory away from Trotskyism by adapting to the programmatic weaknesses of the Cuban Communist Party. Rejection of permanent revolution was one step in this trajectory. Allen Myers in The Vietnamese Revolution and Its Leadership has taken another step -- a headlong adaptation to Stalinism, as codified in this thoroughly deplorable pamphlet.

## AN APPRECIATION OF LEON TROTSKY

During Lenin's lifetime, Trotsky occupied some of the highest posts in the Soviet Union. He was Commissar of Foreign Affairs, heading the peace talks at Brest Litovsk, Commissar of War and Chairman of the Supreme War Council, organizing the Red Army and leading it to victory over the invading White armies. After Lenin died, he headed up the Commissariat of Heavy Industry.

But important as Trotsky's contributions were during the Russian revolution, his most important contributions were not made until after his defeat by Stalin. Lenin was the foremost leader of the world revolutionary movement at the time of the Russian revolution and Trotsky succeeded him in that role after Lenin's death and after he was exiled by the Stalinist bureaucracy from the Soviet Union.

His literary output alone would have made him one of the world's most illustrious figures. Trotsky's monumental work, "The History of the Russian Revolution," could have been an important lifework of the ordinary mortal.

Trotsky's life was on such a grand scale that far too little has been written to even approximate justice to his works and his deeds. One way to start a study of Trotsky is by reading one of the great speeches by James P. Cannon, a founder of the Socialist Workers Party and the Fourth International. The speech was given at a memorial meeting after the assassination of Trotsky and is entitled, "To the Memory of the Old Man." The following is a small excerpt:

"Trotsky's place in history is already established. He will stand forever on a historical eminence beside the other three great giants of the proletariat, Marx, Engels and Lenin. It is possible, indeed it is quite probable, that in the historic memory of mankind, his name will evoke the warmest affection, the most heartfelt gratitude of all. Because he fought so long, against such a world of enemies, so honestly, so heroically, and with such selfless devotion. ... We must all write everything we know about Trotsky. Everyone must record his recollections and his impressions. We must not forget we moved in the orbit of the greatest figure of our time. Millions of people, generations yet to come, will be hungry for every scrap of information, every word, every

impression that throws light on him, his aims, and his personal life."

If any one thing can be considered to incarnate the spirit of Leon Trotsky it is Internationalism. The founding of the Fourth International was perhaps the crowning achievement of his extraordinary life. It was Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution as counterposed to Stalin's theory of socialism in one country which formed the essence of internationalism and was indeed the very core of Marxism-Leninism.

Jim Cannon best summed up the meaning of the struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism. In an article printed in the "Fourth International" (winter issue of 1954) he wrote, "The historic battle against Stalinism, the greatest theoretical and political struggle of all time, was in essence a struggle to resuscitate genuine Leninism."

A New York subscriber

## HELPFUL

As a member of Socialist Action in Massachusetts, I find your journal helpful in keeping me up to date with what is happening with the SWP. I also find it helpful in educating people who never belonged to the SWP but want to learn about genuine Trotskyism.

Satisfied Subscriber

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