

Obituary

Sam Marcy, an apologist for bureaucracy

Fred Mazelis
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Sam Marcy, who died February 1 at the age of 86, was one of the last of an older generation who were trained in the Trotskyist movement and then repudiated the principles of socialist internationalism in the period following the Second World War. Marcy broke from the Trotskyist movement in 1959. The Workers World Party, which he founded at that time, functions today as a cheerleader for the remnants of Stalinism on the one hand and the US trade union bureaucracy on the other.

Marcy and his organization managed to combine sycophantic praise for Stalinist tyrants such as the late Kim Il Sung of North Korea and Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania with groveling support for the anticommunist AFL-CIO bureaucracy.

The statement issued by the Workers World Party on the death of its founder makes no mention of Marcy's Trotskyist past. Marcy has spent the last 40 years trying to atone for his earlier struggle against Stalinism. In the current issue of the *Workers World* newspaper, his political career before the age of 48, when he founded the WWP, is glossed over with a few vague references to trade union activity.

Marcy was born in tsarist Russia in 1911. Having survived the anti-Semitic pogroms in the period leading up to the October Revolution and in the subsequent Civil War, he came to the US as a child. Growing up in Brooklyn, the primary influences on his political development were the Russian Revolution, together with the social misery and class struggles of the 1930s.

After joining the Young Communist League, the youth movement of the Communist Party, Marcy declared his opposition to Stalinism. He joined the Trotskyists during this period and built a branch of the Socialist Workers Party, then the US Trotskyist movement, in Buffalo in the 1940s and 50s.

His subsequent degeneration took place under the difficult conditions facing the socialist movement in the postwar period. Like so many others, Marcy was unable to withstand the tremendous ideological pressures that bore down on the Trotskyists during the years of economic prosperity and

Cold War witch-hunt.

The postwar restabilization of imperialism, facilitated by the powerful influence and counterrevolutionary policies of the Soviet regime, profoundly disoriented many who had fought in earlier years against capitalist exploitation as well as its agencies in the social democratic and Stalinist bureaucracies.

The rapid bureaucratization of the CIO unions and the relative quiescence of the American working class led them to reject the fight for Marxist principles in the working class as a hopeless project. At the same time, the expansion of the Soviet bloc and the Chinese and Yugoslav revolutions were taken as evidence that the Soviet bureaucracy and Stalinist parties elsewhere could be forced to take the road of revolution.

The perspective of world socialist revolution, which had animated the founders of the Marxist movement and the leaders of the Russian Revolution, was abandoned in the name of a "new world reality." The economically backward countries were declared to be the new "epicenter" of revolution. This became the mechanism by which a whole layer turned away from an internationalist perspective and essentially accepted the Stalinist line of "national-state socialism."

Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel became the leaders of an international faction that repudiated the fight to build independent revolutionary parties. A split took place within the Fourth International in 1953, with James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, leading the struggle in defense of Marxist principles, through the establishment of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Marcy did not join with Pablo and his American supporters, but he harbored similar views on the most essential question of internationalism. He opposed some of the more blatant opportunist developments within the SWP during the 1950s, particularly its call for the US government to send federal troops to Mississippi. But his attempt to defend a proletarian orientation while failing to take up a struggle against the Pabloite attack on the Fourth

International inevitably ended in capitulation to the same right-wing pressures.

He adopted the conception of “global class war,” in which the conflict between US imperialism and the Soviet bloc was seen as superseding the class struggle internationally and within each country. The international working class was ignored as an independent force, dissolved into the Soviet bureaucracy and various bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist forces that were in conflict with Washington. The need for continued defense of the Soviet Union against imperialism, as well as the defense of the colonial and semicolonial masses against imperialist oppression, was converted into support for the national bourgeoisie and Stalinism.

Rejecting any revolutionary role for the working class, Marcy responded to the uprising of the Hungarian workers in 1956 by supporting the invasion by the Moscow bureaucracy and its Warsaw pact allies. This led to his official break with Trotskyism a few years later.

I can recall a long discussion with Marcy in 1959, just before I joined the SWP and just after Marcy had split to found his new organization. Marcy attempted, without success, to convince me that the Hungarian workers were hopeless counterrevolutionaries and that we should support the Stalinists in their crushing of the Hungarian workers councils. I replied that neither Marx, Lenin nor Trotsky had ever proposed that socialism could be imposed on the working class, and I insisted that the actions of Stalinism in Hungary proved its counterrevolutionary character.

In the subsequent decades Marcy’s organization has made many twists and turns, which, taken as a whole, have entailed the abandonment of any orientation to the working class. In the 1950s Marcy had advanced an ultra-left line of opposition to political work among student youth. Within a few years he had turned this “leftism” on its head, embracing middle class protest movements of all varieties.

Workers World became known for its uncritical support for black nationalism, gay liberation and other forms of middle class ideology. Marcy devoted himself to building an organization that juggled various disparate elements, from aging Stalinists disgruntled with the official Communist Party USA to those who saw their main political identity as feminists, transsexuals or gay activists. When the Workers World Party ran candidates for office, it promoted them not as fighters for the working class, but rather as representatives of their gender or sexual orientation.

What remained constant for the bulk of Marcy’s political career was his loyalty to Stalinism and all forms of bureaucracy in the workers movement. He attributed the collapse of the Soviet Union simply to the “Gorbachev-Yeltsin counterrevolution,” and allied himself with the

remnants of Russian Stalinism in the Russian Communist Workers Party (RKRP), an organization whose politics combine the worship of Stalin with right-wing nationalism and anti-Semitism.

In the US Marcy increasingly lined up with the trade union bureaucracy as well as “left” sections of the Democratic Party. He was an enthusiastic supporter of Jesse Jackson in his campaigns for the Democratic presidential nomination, and Workers World regularly hailed the Democratic politicians in the Congressional Black Caucus.

The Workers World Party declared in its tribute to Marcy: “His analysis of the irreconcilability of the conflict between the imperialist bourgeoisie on the one hand and the progressive camp of the socialist countries and national liberation movements on the other has stood the test of time.” Nothing could more clearly demonstrate the bankruptcy of Marcy’s perspective than this flight from reality by his political heirs.

The so-called “socialist countries” have been dissolved by the same Stalinist bureaucracies which Marcy and his followers looked to as the bulwark of revolution. Capitalist restoration has been carried through by the Stalinists themselves. In clinging to the handful of states and ruling parties which still preserve some tie to the Stalinist travesty of socialism China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba the Marcyites are compelled to deny the obvious fact that all of these regimes have turned to capitalist restoration and accommodation to imperialism. As for the self-proclaimed “national liberation” movements, all of them from the PLO to the ANC have renounced their previous anti-imperialist pretensions and are vying for the favor of American capitalism.

History has thoroughly exposed the Pabloite glorification of the “progressive camp” of Stalinism, social democracy and bourgeois nationalism. Marcy distinguished himself only by taking this perspective, in a particularly crude way, to the logical conclusion of open support for Stalinist tyranny. His perspective lies in ruins, along with the bureaucracies on which it was based.



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