

Workers Revolutionary Party member resigns and declares his support for the International Committee of the Fourth International

16 December 1998

The World Socialist Web Site has received the following letter written by Paul Day, resigning his membership in the Workers Revolutionary Party in Britain.

The WRP was, until February 8, 1986, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. However, for more than a decade and a half previously it had progressively abandoned its defence of a socialist perspective. From the early 1980s a political struggle was mounted within the Fourth International, spearheaded by the Workers League (forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party in the USA) against the WRP's opportunist adaptation to the Stalinist and reformist labour bureaucracies and to bourgeois nationalist movements in the Middle East. This struggle culminated with the WRP splitting from the ICFI and breaking up into opposing factions. Principal amongst these were the groups led by Gerry Healy/Sheila Torrance and that headed by Cliff Slaughter, both of which continued to call themselves the WRP.

For several years the Slaughter group pursued an increasingly nationalist and pro-Stalinist political line, while claiming to be 'rebuilding the Fourth International'. With each more opportunist twist and turn, it suffered repeated splits from its ranks. Finally, in 1996, Slaughter declared that Trotskyism had failed. He claimed that any attempt to build a Marxist party was futile, and that the WRP should be liquidated in favour of building a loose alliance with various Stalinists, middle class radicals and minor trade union bureaucrats. Arguing for the creation of his 'Movement For Socialism', Slaughter wrote, 'The only raison d'être of the Trotskyists today is to fight their way out of isolation.'

Paul Day joined the WRP several years after it split from the ICFI. His letter explains the basis for his resignation and provides a revealing insight into the inner political workings of the WRP and the invidious role played by Slaughter himself. The 'Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International' constitutes the former international affiliates of the WRP, but is now largely defunct.

The Socialist Equality Party in Britain was formed by members of the WRP who, in 1986, had rallied to the socialist and internationalist perspective defended by the ICFI.

To all members of the Workers International

This is my letter of resignation from the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International and what remains of its British section, the former Workers Revolutionary Party. Some explanation is called for.

I joined the Workers Revolutionary Party in early 1992. I had become ever more critical of the right-wing trajectory of the Labour Party and was disgusted by its support for the Gulf War. Having read some of the works of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, I had decided that it was time for me to seek out a genuine socialist alternative, one committed to the working class and internationalism. I met members of the WRP on several demonstrations opposing the Gulf War and was impressed by its newspaper, *Workers Press*.

What attracted me to the party was its pledge to re-form the Fourth International, the international socialist party of Leon Trotsky. I knew very little about the history of the socialist movement and was told by WRP members that corrupt leaders who abused their authority had destroyed the FI. To my sorrow I accepted this as good coin.

I did not join the party lightly. I understood that the working class needed a Marxist leadership, an international organisation ready to combat the nationalist and pro-capitalist Labour parties and the Stalinist Communist Parties. I worked on the *Workers Press* in an unpaid capacity because I wanted to build such a leadership. I read what I could of the socialist classics, including Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution.

Over the period of my membership, I became concerned about the disparity between what I read of the position taken by the socialist movement historically and the line advanced by the WRP. Certain things stand out in my memory.

Firstly, during the crisis in Rwanda, WRP Political Secretary Cliff Slaughter wrote an article demanding that given the current political disorientation in the working class internationally, only the imperialist powers and the multinational companies could ease the suffering of the Tutsi people and that the WRP should demand they intervene.

Not only myself, but many members were concerned by this statement. The South African section called it a pro-imperialist position, but their criticisms were denounced as slander by Slaughter.

My concerns over this were confirmed in spades by what later occurred in 1993, during the civil war that erupted in Yugoslavia. Once again the terrible suffering inflicted on the Bosnian Muslims by the Serbian army was used to push the WRP in a pro-imperialist direction.

I was appalled by the atrocities committed during the war and initially welcomed the WRP's initiative in calling for the Workers Aid convoy to be organised in order to provide food and medicine from labour movement organisations. But as the campaign progressed, it became clear that a definite political agenda was being introduced behind a smokescreen of humanitarian concern.

The WRP leaders, Cliff Slaughter and Dot Gibson first of all, said that this was the way in which the working class could 'rebuild itself' and therefore lay the basis for rebuilding the FI. But in practice the party tail-ended the bourgeois regime led by Izetbegovic and established relations with all manner of nationalist elements from Croatia. I was troubled by how closely the party's line mirrored that of newspapers like the *Guardian* and sections of the British establishment like former Labour Party leader Michael Foot. This was not the first time that hypocritical statements of concern have been used to justify military action by Britain and the United States to further their own interests. But I was ashamed to find that the positions the WRP was advocating brought us into line with this propaganda offensive. The party ended up rubbing shoulders with Foot and Tory politicians on demonstrations. The WRP's main contact in

Bosnia was a banker with a political interest in developing capitalism in the region. Discussions were held with supporters of the Croatian militias, the HVO, who were if anything fascist. The party handed over responsibility for writing on the war to Attila Hoare, an unabashed nationalist whose stated goal was the creation of a capitalist Croatia. I was appalled to read Hoare's denunciations of any calls for unity between Serb, Croat and Bosnia workers as unrealistic and his rubbishing of a 'working class solution'.

I knew that Trotsky had called for a socialist federation of the Balkans and that everything we were saying ran contrary to the theory of permanent revolution. But the crunch came for me when the WRP applauded the US bombing of the Krajina in 1994. I could not believe that we as internationalists were indifferent to the suffering of ordinary Serbs, whatever we felt about Milosevic. When the Dayton Accord was finally drawn up, I knew that our line had helped pave the way for this debacle through glorifying nationalism instead of opposing it. Our supposed commitment to a 'multi-ethnic Bosnia' had proved to be nothing more than a cover for the ethnic division of the Balkans by the imperialist powers and the gangsters who led the contending armies.

It was during this period that I became concerned about the internal regime within the WRP. I felt intimidated by the atmosphere being generated, in which anyone who had questions regarding the WRP's line was denounced as 'pro-Serb'.

This was not unusual. The WRP made great play of the democratic character of the party. Nearly everyone I knew was on the central committee. Yet I never saw an occasion when the party bodies actually determined the party line. That was done elsewhere. Cliff Slaughter was a grey-eminence who, while claiming no powers, met with a small group--depending on who was currently in favour--prior to meetings and decided where the WRP would go next. Slaughter would regularly threaten to stand down as Political Secretary if he did not get his way. I remember most vividly attending a meeting during the Balkan war to be greeted by a massive banner proclaiming 'Open the Northern Route' to Tuzla as the WRP's main aim. This had never been discussed and led to a split in the Workers Aid with supporters of Alan Thornett's Socialist Outlook group.

One issue above all others was considered taboo. Whenever I asked questions regarding the origins of the WRP, I was fobbed off with comments of how its former leader Gerry Healy was single-handedly responsible for the destruction of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Sometimes members said that the Workers International continued what was best in the ICFI, sometimes that the ICFI was not worth continuing, but nobody explained to me what the ICFI had done or the *political* basis of our split with it.

In 1995, the party held a meeting commemorating the tenth anniversary of Healy's expulsion. Many things said there concerned me. It more resembled a group therapy session than a political gathering. But what astonished and troubled me most was that, even here--after a decade--no analysis was presented of the political issues that led first to Healy's expulsion and later to the WRP's split with the ICFI.

The WRP struck up relations with the Liverpool dockers shop stewards committee during their lockout that same year. The leadership was dominated by ageing Stalinists like chairman Jimmy Nolan (he recently praised Stalin as 'one of the greatest men of our time' at a rally held by the Stalin Society) and the dispute they led dragged on for almost two years to defeat. Yet with much bombast about how the dockers were in the vanguard of a new international reorganisation of the workers movement, Slaughter organised what he called a 'debate' on the future of the party. This amounted to he and the clique surrounding him declaring that the party had no future.

The dockers struggle and the formation of direct action groups like 'Reclaim the Streets' proved, according to Slaughter, that the working

class could lead itself and was better off without the interference of 'self-proclaimed vanguards'. With almost breathtaking speed, *Workers Press* began featuring articles--the most important written by Slaughter--which said that any attempt to build a Marxist party was wrong. Slaughter borrowed his line wholesale from an ageing academic, Istvan Meszaros, taken from his largely impenetrable book, *Beyond Capital*. Without any genuine discussion, a party whose *raison d'être* was supposedly to rebuild the Fourth International proclaimed that Lenin was wrong, the October Revolution was a tragic mistake and Trotsky was outmoded.

In the space of less than a year, the *Workers Press* was junked and the party liquidated into a nebulous 'Movement for Socialism'. The small groups and individuals affiliated to the Workers International were not even consulted and have been treated ever since as an irrelevance or at best a minor annoyance. This was supposedly to build a broader organisation, but to date there are no members of this all-encompassing new formation other than ex-members of the WRP or its long-standing periphery. Slaughter has meanwhile moved ruthlessly against those of his former allies like Dot Gibson who balked at this latest turn for their own reasons.

It was during these months that I finally decided that the WRP was in no way an independent Marxist party of the working class and neither was the Workers International. Behind the claim that 'We must not impose a party on the class. We must build a party of the class not for the class,' the WRP has abandoned any pretence of preparing a political programme and leadership in opposition to the labour and trade union bureaucracy. It is rather the most finished expression I have ever known of political opportunism. The party's policy has been to tail-end any militant movement of workers, not presenting a clear and definite socialist perspective but simply following whoever is at their head.

I responded by seeking answers, at first within the WRP, but to no avail. I even posted queries on the Internet in discussion forums, but received nothing of substance in reply. It was while searching for some form of explanation of what happened to the WRP that I came across the *World Socialist Web Site*. I found reading its analysis of world events truly inspiring. Here was a demonstration of the principled socialist and internationalist approach to politics I once thought the WRP stood for, accessible to a wide audience of workers, youth and intellectuals around the world.

To my surprise, I found that those responsible for the site were the International Committee of the Fourth International--the tendency treated as a great dark secret within the WRP. I understood that here was a party seriously challenging for the leadership of the international working class.

This prompted me to undertake a more considered study of the history and perspectives of the ICFI and the split from it by the WRP. I can only say that the reason for the reluctance to discuss these questions within the party became apparent. The trajectory taken by the WRP in the last three years was not the abandonment of socialist internationalism I once assumed it to be. That occurred prior to its foundation in 1986.

It is my conclusion that neither the WRP's decaying fragments nor the Workers International is now or has ever been a Trotskyist organisation.

In reading the relevant documents, it became clear to me that the issue of Healy's sexual abuses was used as a smokescreen behind which to conceal the fundamental political disagreements that led to the WRP's split with the ICFI. (If anyone has doubts on this issue, then they should consider carefully the parallels with the right-wing attempt to destabilise the Clinton Presidency or the sex and corruption scandal whipped up against Anwar Ibrahim by the Mahathir regime in Malaysia.)

The documents produced by the ICFI present a clear analysis of the WRP's descent into opportunism from the 1970s onwards. They also show that between 1982 and 1986, there was opposition within the ICFI to the WRP's abandonment of the Marxist standpoint towards Stalinism, reformism and the bourgeois national movements--all the questions over

which I had become concerned.

I was struck in particular by the letter of December 2 from Peter Schwarz to the WRP Central Committee. He wrote: 'Having closely watched Comrade Slaughter's actions during the last six weeks I am more and more convinced, that he follows his own political course, which he does not intend to discuss with anybody, thereby using the political confusion prevailing in the WRP after the expulsion of the Healy group to break it up.'

'It is a course of liquidating the WRP into a 'broad left', which would become indispensable for the bourgeoisie to control the working class, should a Labour or Labour coalition government come to power.'

How prophetic this has proved to be. Since then, Slaughter has dragged WRP members in an ever more right-wing direction and in pursuit of an agenda of his own devising.

If there is anyone left amongst my former comrades within the Workers International who is still prepared to examine political questions objectively, they would do well to study the *World Socialist Web Site* and the documents produced by the ICFI on the WRP's split. For my part, I will resume the task I set myself in 1992 of building the Fourth International as the socialist party of the working class, only this time in collaboration with principled co-thinkers around the world.

Sincerely,

Paul Day

See Also:

How the WRP joined the NATO camp

Imperialist war in the Balkans and the decay of the petty-bourgeois left

[14 December 1995]

Behind the split in the Workers Revolutionary Party

[21 February 1986]



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