

A reply to a supporter of the World Socialist Party of the USA

30 October 2000

Letter to wsws.org from a supporter of the World Socialist Party USA

Hello

I looked at your Web Site today for the first time—Congratulations on an excellent site!

Your Web address had been given to me while I, along with several other comrades from the World Socialist Party of the US, was manning an information table at the Freedom Rally held on Boston Common Sept. 16. One of the many people who stopped by our table and participated in discussions about socialism with us mentioned that our ideas sounded familiar to him from his reading of your Web page. I must agree that from the perfunctory reading I did just now (I came nowhere close to reading everything on the site, and doing a search for **principles** did not result in my finding your principles written out anywhere)—but from what I did read, it seems we are at least **on the same wave-length** in a general way.

Your use of the term **World Socialism** is interesting to me, since the World Socialist Party of the US has had that name since 1946, and we were under the impression that we and the other companion parties comprising the World Socialist Movement were the only ones using it. Are you familiar with, or aware of, the World Socialist Movement?

Please get back to me. I'd be very interested in learning more about your organization. If it turns out that we are in agreement, our position is that we're not in competition with anyone as to who should make the Revolution! :-) We ought to join forces.

If you are not already familiar with what we stand for, check out our Web site — www.worldsocialism.org.

For socialism,

Karla Ellenbogen (WSPUS)

Chris Talbot replies on the behalf of the World Socialist Web Site

Dear Karla,

Thank you for the praise for the *World Socialist Web Site*. You can find out more about our history and principles from the links “About the WSWs” (<http://www.wsws.org/sections/category/about/about.shtml>) and “About the ICFI” (<http://www.wsws.org/sections/category/icfi/icfi.shtml>) on our home page.

As you will see there, the history of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) goes back to the 1920s when Leon Trotsky founded the Left Opposition in the Soviet Union to oppose the Stalinist bureaucracy, and later founded the Fourth International in 1938. We defended the heritage of Trotskyism in the post war period against those who wanted to adapt to Stalinism or reformism. Unfortunately your own party's website does not list us under “other organisations” or “Trotskyists”.

I think that if you study what we are saying more deeply, you will realise that we are not, as you put it, “on the same wavelength” as the World Socialist Movement. There are fundamental differences between us. There are many aspects to this, but the most basic is in relation to the scientific conception of socialism developed by Karl Marx. The World Socialist Movement (WSM)-World Socialist Party of the US, Socialist Party of Great Britain, etc.—call themselves Marxist but have a fundamental misunderstanding of Marx's approach to socialism. That is why they have continued for nearly 100 years as an organisation that can only be described as a sect—in the sense that they refuse on principle to get involved in the political struggles of the working class.

Very briefly, Marx developed a scientific understanding of historical change based on the struggle between classes, the conflict of material interests between these different social strata arising

from their relationship to production, the economic basis of society. The working class, who own no property, have interests that are completely irreconcilable with the capitalist property owners. Socialism was thus no longer just a utopian idea, an ideal system of society, but must be seen as a higher level of social relations based on common ownership arising out of the contradictions within capitalist society. Socialism can only be established when the working class overthrows capitalist rule in a social revolution.

The task of socialists was no longer that of preaching socialism as a “good idea” but giving the working class a political direction in the class struggle, raising their level of understanding of society to a scientific level. A socialist political party was needed which would give the working class revolutionary leadership.

Looking at the WSM website reveals instead an organisation which hangs on to pre-Marxian conceptions of socialism, despite claiming adherence to Marx. WSM says, for example, that it doesn't get involved in "social activism", because it is necessarily "reformism".

This means that the WSM abstains from the class struggle entirely, on the grounds that when workers demonstrate, go on strike, etc., their ideas are still reformist—i.e. they still hope to reform capitalism. But this is hardly surprising since the dominant ideas in capitalist society are ideas that support capitalism. Instead of engaging in a struggle against these existing ideas in the working class, the WSM leaves workers to their fate.

In the same way, the WSM derides those who fight to build a socialist party to give a lead to workers because "leaders are inherently undemocratic and socialists oppose leadership".

After the tragic experiences made by the working class with Stalinism it is easy to attack “leadership”—but this simplistic idea that all leaders are corrupt takes us nowhere and is not a substitute for scientific analysis. Again, it leaves working people defenceless in the face of a ruling class, which has its own political parties and leaders. Politics for the WSM is reduced to the rather scholastic defence of unchanging dogma, with the hope that at some future date the masses will be convinced and “see the light”.

The WSM's view of the history of the last century is

that it was entirely dominated by capitalism. They regard the 1917 Russian revolution as merely a capitalist revolution overthrowing feudalism. Lenin and Trotsky are presented as undemocratic advocates of "Bolshevik ideology" which inevitably led to the Stalinist "state capitalist" regime in Russia, etc., etc.

This interpretation—which fits in nicely with the superficial distortions of the truth put out by right wing historians, not to mention the distortions of Stalinist hacks—does not meet up to a serious examination of history. I would recommend that you study *Leon Trotsky and the Fate of Socialism in the 20th Century* by David North (<http://www.wsws.org/exhibits/trotsky/trlect.htm>) as well as the other material in the “About the ICFI” section of our site.

I hope that this brief explanation will lead you to a further study of our material on our Web Site and convince you of the necessity of developing revolutionary Marxism, i.e. Trotskyism, for the revival of the working class movement.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Talbot

PS: A book that is well worth reading on the history of the Fourth International is David North's *The Heritage We Defend*, available from Mehring Books.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact