

WSWS republishes extracts from *The Heritage We Defend* by David North, chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board

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On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the *World Socialist Web Site* is proud to republish two key chapters from *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International*, by David North, chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board and national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in the United States.

The Heritage We Defend is a critical and detailed assessment of the history of the Trotskyist movement since the assassination of Leon Trotsky in 1940. It was written in 1986 as a polemic against an attack launched by Michael Banda, longtime General Secretary of the Workers Revolutionary Party, the former British section of the ICFI, aimed at discrediting the program, perspective and principles of the Fourth International.

The two chapters published below examine the political and theoretical issues surrounding the split in November 1953 between the orthodox Trotskyists, led by James P. Cannon, the founder of the Trotskyist movement in the United States, and an opportunist faction led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, then the principal leaders of the International Secretariat of the Fourth International in Europe.

Cannon initiated the struggle against the Pabloites in his “Open Letter to the World Trotskyist Movement,” written on November 16, 1953. In this document, Cannon summed up the irreconcilable political, theoretical and organizational differences that had emerged within the Fourth International and reaffirmed the six fundamental principles on which the international Trotskyist movement had to be based. One week later, on November 23, 1953, the ICFI was

officially founded.

At stake in the 1953 split was the very existence of the Fourth International. Adapting themselves impressionistically to the post-war stabilization of capitalism on the one hand, and the consolidation of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe on the other, Pablo and Mandel argued that sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union would undertake a gradual process of self-reform that would eventually lead to socialism.

Likewise, the Pabloites advanced highly exaggerated and fundamentally false estimates of the revolutionary capacities of the national bourgeois leaderships in the Middle East and Latin America, of the Chinese revolution and of the social democratic and Stalinist parties in the advanced capitalist countries.

Trotsky’s insistence on the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism, and on the unique role of the Fourth International in the struggle for world socialism was, they claimed, no longer relevant in the “new reality” that had emerged following World War II.

At the heart of Pabloism was the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class and its hegemonic role in the socialist revolution. The struggle to build independent parties of the working class based on the theory and program of Marxism was to be abandoned in favor of “integration” into the “really existing mass movements.”

Five decades on, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the complete prostration of the national bourgeois leaderships, as well as the social democratic and Stalinist parties, before the dictates of world imperialism have vindicated the stand taken by Cannon

and the orthodox Trotskyists, and fully substantiated the analysis advanced in the “Open Letter”.

David North’s review of the 1953 split explains the broader context in which the struggle against Pabloism unfolded. His assessment of its political significance and implications remains highly relevant today. Contained in the difficult and complex political issues that led to the founding of the ICFI exactly 50 years ago are fundamental questions of program and perspective that remain critical in the building of a new international revolutionary movement of the working class in the twenty-first century.

The Split in the Fourth International

James P. Cannon’s Open Letter

The WSWs will soon be republishing all 35 chapters of *The Heritage We Defend*, along with other critical material from the archives of the ICFI. For further reading on the history of the Fourth International, we recommend:

The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International, David North, (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1988), ISBN 0-929087-00-3.

Gerry Healy and His Place in the History of the Fourth International, (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1991), ISBN 0-929087-58-5.

“How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism 1973-1985”, *Fourth International*, Volume 13. No 1, Summer 1986.

These publications and other material on the history of the Fourth International can be purchased from our online bookshop or by contacting Mehring Books: sales@mehring.com in the US; sales@mehringbooks.co.uk in the UK; and mehring@ozemail.com.au in Australia..



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