

The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party—Part 9

8 October 2008

The Socialist Equality Party (US) today continues publication of The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party. The document was discussed extensively and adopted unanimously at the Founding Congress of the SEP, held August 3-9, 2008. (See "Socialist Equality Party holds founding Congress") The WSWS will serialize the publication over two weeks. (Click here for parts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11)

The WSWS has published the Socialist Equality Party Statement of Principles, which was also adopted at the Founding Congress. Click here to download a PDF version of the Statement of Principles.

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A Shift in the World Situation: The Capitalist Counter-Offensive

171. The period between 1968 and 1975 witnessed an immense upsurge of the working class. Left-wing and socialist movements grew significantly throughout the world. In the midst of a powerful strike movement of British workers in the summer of 1972, the *Daily Telegraph* published an editorial headlined, "Who Shall Rule?," raising openly the specter of a revolutionary overturn of the capitalist state by the working class. In the United States, the attempt by the Nixon administration — with the support of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy — to impose wage controls failed in the face of widespread defiance by an increasingly militant working class. In country after country, the workers demonstrated a determination to fight in defense of their class interests. But the central historical problem identified by Leon Trotsky in 1938 — the "historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat" — remained unsolved. The old Stalinist and Social-Democratic labor and trade union bureaucracies utilized their positions of influence, with the critical assistance of the Pabloite tendencies, to divert, disorient and suppress mass struggles that threatened bourgeois rule. Situations with immense revolutionary potential were misdirected, defused, betrayed and led to defeat. The consequences of the political treachery of the Stalinists and Social Democrats found their most terrible expression in Chile, where the "socialist" Allende government, abetted by the Communist Party, did everything it possibly could to prevent the working class from taking power. That Allende himself lost his life as a consequence of his efforts to prevent the overthrow of the bourgeois state does not lessen his responsibility for facilitating the military coup, led by General Augusto Pinochet, of September 11, 1973.

172. The inability of the working class to break through the log-jam created by its own organizations provided the bourgeoisie with the time it needed to stabilize and reorganize the fragile world order. By mid-1975 there were signs that the worst of the economic crisis had passed. Dollars that had flowed into the Middle East after the quadrupling of oil prices ("petro-dollars") were recycled by the International Monetary Fund back to the major capitalist banking centers, to provide new liquidity for the

world financial system. The IMF-sponsored "reflation" provided Britain's Labour Party prime minister, Harold Wilson, with the financial credits he needed to arrange temporary compromises with the trade union bureaucracy, while preparing the ground for renewed attacks on the working class. The reactionary political intentions of the Labour government found their most conscious expression in September 1975, when Wilson's government ordered an unprecedented police raid on the education center of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

173. By late 1975 the international bourgeoisie was able to begin exploiting the social frustrations produced by the inability of the working class to implement a revolutionary socialist solution to the crisis. In Australia, in November 1975, Governor-General Sir John Kerr intervened in the political crisis created by the provocative actions of the bourgeois Liberal Party to remove from power the democratically-elected Labor government of Gough Whitlam. This action took place at a time when it was well known that the CIA was heavily engaged in efforts to destabilize the Whitlam government. Kerr's "coup" was met by massive protests by the working class, demanding that Whitlam stand his ground and openly defy Kerr. The call for Whitlam to "sack" Kerr was voiced by hundreds of thousands of working class protestors throughout Australia. Instead, Whitlam capitulated cravenly to the Governor-General and left office. Such exhibitions of political cowardice by the labor bureaucracies served only to encourage the international bourgeoisie to believe that it could attack the working class with impunity. In Argentina, the military overthrew the Peronist regime — which had been backed by the Pabloites — and initiated a reign of terror against the left. In Sri Lanka and Israel, right-wing governments came to power, espousing the anti-Keynesian monetarism promoted by Milton Friedman, whose economic theories had already been set to work by the Chilean dictatorship.

174. In May 1979 the Tory party, led by Margaret Thatcher, came to power in Britain. The political conditions for her victory were created by the right-wing policies of the Labour government. Working class anger erupted in a wave of strikes in late 1978 and early 1979, the so-called "Winter of Discontent." All of these struggles were sabotaged by the trade union bureaucracy. In the United States, the Carter administration shifted sharply to the right in the wake of a protracted miners' strike in 1977-78 that lasted more than 100 days. The government's invocation of the Taft-Hartley Act, ordering the miners back to work, was ignored by the strikers and could not be enforced. The American ruling class decided that further attacks on the working class required more careful preparation. In August 1979 President Carter appointed Paul Volcker chairman of the Federal Reserve. Volcker proceeded to raise interest rates to unprecedented levels, with the intention of provoking a recession that would significantly raise unemployment levels, weaken the working class, and prepare the ground for a major right-wing offensive. The sharp turn toward class confrontation was confirmed with the Republican Party's nomination of Ronald Reagan and his election as president in November 1980. Reagan was inaugurated in January 1981. Little more than six months later, in August, the Reagan administration responded to the strike called by the

Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) by firing 11,000 striking controllers. The AFL-CIO refused to take any action to defend the workers. This attack marked the beginning of the end of the trade union movement as a significant social force in the United States. A green light had been given by the government to the corporations, authorizing open strike breaking. The AFL-CIO, moreover, made it very clear that it would do nothing to stop the right-wing rampage against the working class.

175. The setbacks suffered by the working class in the major centers of capitalism cleared the way for a more aggressive assertion of imperialist interests. Prime Minister Thatcher dispatched the British navy to the South Atlantic to dislodge Argentina from the Malvinas (Falkland Islands). The Reagan administration became deeply entangled in a dirty war against left-wing forces in El Salvador and Nicaragua, intensified its collaboration with the mujahedeen in Afghanistan, sent US forces into Lebanon, escalated its anti-Soviet "Evil Empire" rhetoric, and dispatched troops to Grenada.

The Crisis in the Workers Revolutionary Party

176. Contrary to the expectations of the Workers Revolutionary Party, the return of the Labourites to power in England in March 1974 did not quickly lead to confrontations between the working class and the new government. The IMF-backed reflation provided maneuvering room for the Labour government. This new situation revealed the weaknesses in the political foundations of the WRP. Because the conversion of the Socialist Labour League into the WRP, and the "mass recruitment" campaigns that had accompanied it, had been based mainly on appeals to widespread and elementary anti-Tory sentiment in the working class, the new party and its membership were ill-equipped to deal with the more complex situation created by the return of the Labourites to power.

177. The WRP sought to counteract the difficulties it faced in the development of the working class by seeking a base of support elsewhere. The cultivation of relations, beginning in 1976, with various national liberation movements and bourgeois nationalist regimes in the Middle East expressed a high degree of political disorientation. As the WRP retreated from its earlier insistence on the centrality of the struggle against revisionism in the building of the Marxist movement, Healy and his closest associates, Cliff Slaughter and Michael Banda, drifted more and more openly toward the Pabloite conceptions they had fought in the 1950s and 1960s. Their capitulation to the Pabloite program was accompanied by the development of an idealist mystification of Marxism that grossly distorted the dialectical materialist method of analysis.

The Workers League's Critique of the WRP

178. In the 1960s and early 1970s the British Trotskyist movement had exerted an extremely positive influence on the Workers League. The emergence and early development of the Workers League would not have been possible without the invaluable experience of the Socialist Labour League and Gerry Healy. And yet, particularly in the aftermath of the break with Wohlforth, the development of the Workers League proceeded in a manner that was notably different from that of the Workers Revolutionary Party. The central difference consisted in the attention paid by the Workers League to the history of the Trotskyist movement and the lessons of the struggle against Pabloism.

179. In the aftermath of the break with Wohlforth, the Workers League oriented its work strongly toward the working class. Beginning in the 1970s, it developed a substantial presence in the struggles of the most militant sections, most notably among the coal miners of the UMWA. In 1978 the Workers League decided to relocate its political center in Detroit. The purpose of this relocation was to establish a closer link between the party and the daily life and struggles of the working class. In the years that followed, the Workers League and its newspaper, *The Bulletin*, played a significant role in the strikes of the air traffic controllers, Phelps Dodge Copper miners, Greyhound drivers, Hormel workers, and numerous strikes in the coal fields of West Virginia and Kentucky. And yet all these struggles were seen, not as occasions for the celebration of trade union militancy, but as essentially political struggles that required the development of socialist consciousness and Marxist leadership within the working class. This work made the Workers League all the more conscious of the importance of a clearly worked out and comprehensive international revolutionary strategy.

180. The differences between the WRP and the Workers League emerged openly in the autumn of 1982. In an essay published to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the murder of Tom Henehan, David North, national secretary of the Workers League, stressed the significance of history in the education of the cadre of the Marxist movement. He wrote:

The real heart of cadre training is the conscious subordination of all who join the Party to the revolutionary principles through which the historical continuity of the Marxist movement is expressed. By 'historical continuity,' we have in mind the unbroken chain of political and ideological struggle by our international movement against Stalinism, Social Democracy, revisionism and all other enemies of the working class...

Revisionists and political charlatans of all descriptions invariably base their politics and policies on the immediate and practical needs of the hour. Principled considerations, i.e., those which arise out of a serious study of the history of the international workers' movement, knowledge of its development as a law-governed process, and, flowing from that, a constant critical reworking of its objective experiences, are utterly foreign to these pragmatists...

A leadership which does not strive collectively to assimilate the whole of this history cannot adequately fulfill its revolutionary responsibilities to the working class. Without a real knowledge of the historical development of the Trotskyist movement, references to dialectical materialism are not merely hollow; such empty references pave the way for a real distortion of the dialectical method. The source of theory lies not in thought but in the objective world. Thus the development of Trotskyism proceeds from the fresh experiences of the class struggle, which are posited on the entire historically-derived knowledge of our movement.[104]

181. North submitted to the Workers Revolutionary Party a detailed critique of a pamphlet written by Healy, *Studies in Dialectical Materialism*. This critique established that Healy's conception of dialectics involved a repudiation of materialism and a reversion to the type of subjective idealist philosophy that Marx had overcome in his critique of the Left Hegelians in the early 1840s. North wrote:

Cde. Healy's *Studies in Dialectical Materialism* suffers from one decisive defect: they essentially ignore the achievements of both Marx and Lenin in the materialist reworking of the Hegelian dialectic. Thus, Hegel is approached uncritically, essentially in the manner of the Left Hegelians against whom Marx struggled. ...

Cde. Healy does not take into account the oft-repeated warnings of both Marx and Engels that the Hegelian dialectic was unusable in the form it was left behind. Thus, Cde. Healy seeks to explain the process of cognition directly from the Hegelian Logic. This is a false approach. The process of thought cannot be explained from the Logic any more than the

nature of the State could be explained from the Logic. ...

The phrase "standing Hegel on his feet" should not be used to diminish the profound scientific achievement embodied in this task. What was involved was nothing less than the establishment of the materialist world scientific outlook through which laws of nature, society and consciousness are cognized. The chief concern of philosophy was no longer the "matter of Logic" but the "logic of the matter."

Marx clearly revealed that the Hegelian logical schema, when utilized as given, leads inevitably to sophistry, via the manipulation of logical categories and the further manipulation of empirical facts to fit the pre-existing categories.[105]

182. In his conclusion, North summarized his critique of the political evolution of the ICFI under the leadership of the WRP. "*Studies in Dialectics*", North wrote, "has brought into the open a crisis that has been developing within the International Committee for a considerable period of time. For several years (in my opinion, this began in 1976 and only began to predominate in 1978), in the name of the struggle for dialectical materialism and against propagandism, the International Committee has drifted steadily away from a struggle for Trotskyism." The critique of Healy's theoretical method was linked to an analysis of the WRP's relations with bourgeois national regimes in the Middle East. "A vulgarization of Marxism, palmed off as the 'struggle for dialectics,' has been accompanied by an unmistakable opportunist drift within the International Committee, especially in the WRP," North wrote. "Marxist defense of national liberation movements and the struggle against imperialism has been interpreted in an opportunist fashion of uncritical support for various bourgeois nationalist regimes." [106]

183. The Workers League presented a more comprehensive analysis of the degeneration of the WRP in January-February 1984. In a letter dated January 23, 1984 to Michael Banda, the general secretary of the WRP, North stated that the Workers League had become "deeply troubled by the growing signs of a political drift toward political positions quite similar — both in conclusions and methodology — to those we have historically associated with Pabloism." He pointed out that the International Committee:

...has for some time been working without a clear and politically-unified perspective to guide its practice. Rather than a perspective for the building of sections of the International Committee in every country, the central focus of the IC's work for several years has been the development of alliances with various bourgeois nationalist regimes and liberation movements. The content of these alliances has less and less reflected any clear orientation toward the development of our own forces as central to the fight to establish the leading role of the proletariat in the anti-imperialist struggle in the semi-colonial countries. The very conceptions advanced by the SWP in relation to Cuba and Algeria, which we attacked so vigorously in the early 1960s, appear with increasing frequency within our own press.[107]

184. North amplified the Workers League's criticism in a report to the ICFI on February 11, 1984, which placed the adaptation of the WRP to bourgeois nationalism within the context of the IC's decades-long struggle against Pabloism, while also pointing to the WRP's opportunist relations with reformist tendencies in Britain. North explained:

The International Committee is based upon the traditions and principles established through the political, theoretical and organizational struggles of all previous generations of Marxists—and the way in which this continuity of the IC with these previous generations has developed is through the struggle against every variety of anti-Marxism that has emerged within the workers' movement, especially within the Trotskyist movement itself.[108]

185. North noted that the US SWP's explicit repudiation of the Theory of Permanent Revolution — proclaimed by Barnes in late 1982 — vindicated the ICFI's fight against Pabloite revisionism. In place of the

struggle for the political independence of the working class, the SWP promoted bourgeois nationalist and petty-bourgeois movements such as the New Jewel movement in Grenada, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and the Farabundo Marti of El Salvador. Within this context, North stressed the need to examine the political experiences of the ICFI. Noting its relations with national movements in the Middle East, North stated:

It is clear that by mid-1978 a general orientation toward relations with nationalist regimes and liberation movements was developing without any corresponding perspective for the actual building of our own forces inside the working class. An entirely uncritical and incorrect appraisal began to emerge ever more openly within our press, inviting the cadres and the working class to view these bourgeois nationalists as "anti-imperialist" leaders to whom political support must be given.[109]

186. North criticized the WRP's support for Saddam Hussein's repression of the Iraqi Communist Party, including the execution of 21 members in 1979; the praise given to the Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini after an initially correct appraisal of the February 1979 revolution; and the uncritical support for the leader of the Libyan Jamahiriya, Muammar al-Gaddafi, between 1977 and 1983. North also cited the relations that the WRP had established with sections of the Labour Party, including Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight, and the Greater London Council.

187. The Workers Revolutionary Party refused to engage in a discussion of these differences. Instead, it issued threats to sever relations with the Workers League if it persisted in its criticisms. This unprincipled and opportunist course had, ultimately, devastating consequences for the WRP. Within little more than one year, in the autumn of 1985, the WRP was shattered by an organizational crisis that was the outcome of more than a decade of political retreat from the principles upon which the founding of the Fourth International and the International Committee had been based. Its refusal to accept the political counsel of the ICFI, and its pursuit of political interests that were conceived of in entirely nationalist terms, led to the split of February 1986.

The Collapse of the WRP and the Split in the International Committee

188. In August 1985, members of the International Committee were summoned to London, where they were informed by Healy and other leaders of the WRP that the British section was confronted with a serious financial crisis. The ICFI members were told that the problems were caused by unexpected tax surcharges and a substantial increase in the cost of distributing the WRP's daily newspaper, the *Newsline*. An urgent appeal was made by the WRP leaders for financial assistance from the ICFI sections. As was soon to emerge, the report given to the ICFI consisted almost entirely of lies. Moreover, the WRP did not inform the IC members that a crisis had erupted in the leadership of the British section over allegations of improper personal conduct by Healy himself. Demands raised within the Central Committee for a control commission investigation of these allegations were being opposed, not only by Healy, but also by Michael Banda and Cliff Slaughter. While seeking money from the ICFI to shore up the problems created by the internal political crisis in the British section, the WRP sought to conceal these facts from the ICFI members. However, as the factional conflict within the WRP intensified over the next few weeks, the facts of the crisis became known to the ICFI. David North, representing the Workers League, Nick Beams (from the Socialist Labour League in Australia), Ulrich Rippert and Peter Schwarz (from the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter in Germany), and Keerthi Balasuriya (from the Revolutionary Communist League in Sri

Lanka) traveled to Britain to review the political situation in the Workers Revolutionary Party. They insisted that the crisis that had developed inside the British section was rooted in long-standing political issues relating to international program and perspectives. They informed the WRP leaders that the ICFI would not take sides in the struggle among different unprincipled factions in the WRP leadership. The ICFI rejected entirely the efforts of WRP leaders to utilize the international movement for their own nationalist and opportunist purposes. Indeed, the political recovery of the WRP from its crisis was possible only to the extent that the British organization accepted the discipline of the international movement.

189. On October 25, 1985, after examining the allegations against Healy, the International Committee voted for his expulsion. The statement issued by the ICFI declared:

In expelling Healy the ICFI has no intention of denying the political contributions which he made in the past, particularly in the struggle against Pabloite revisionism in the 1950s and the 1960s.

In fact, this expulsion is the end product of his rejection of the Trotskyist principles upon which these past struggles were based and his descent into the most vulgar forms of opportunism.

The political and personal degeneration of Healy can be clearly traced to his ever more explicit separation of the practical and organizational gains of the Trotskyist movement in Britain from the historically and internationally grounded struggles against Stalinism and revisionism from which these achievements arose.

The increasing subordination of questions of principle to immediate practical needs centered on securing the growth of the Party apparatus, degenerating into political opportunism which steadily eroded his own political and moral defenses against the pressures of imperialism in the oldest capitalist country in the world.

Under these conditions his serious subjective weaknesses played an increasingly dangerous political role.

Acting ever more arbitrarily within both the WRP and the ICFI, Healy increasingly attributed the advances of the World Party not to the Marxist principles of the Fourth International and to the collective struggle of its cadre, but rather to his own personal abilities.

His self-glorification of his intuitive judgments led inevitably to a gross vulgarization of materialist dialectics and Healy's transformation into a thoroughgoing subjective idealist and pragmatist.

In place of his past interest in the complex problems of developing the cadre of the international Trotskyist movement, Healy's practice became almost entirely preoccupied with developing unprincipled relations with bourgeois nationalist leaders and with trade union and Labour Party reformists in Britain.

His personal life-style underwent a corresponding degeneration.

Those like Healy, who abandon the principles on which they once fought and who refuse to subordinate themselves to the ICFI in the building of its national sections, must inevitably degenerate under the pressure of the class enemy.

There can be no exception to this historical law.

The ICFI affirms that no leader stands above the historic interests of the working class.[110]

190. Notwithstanding their factional conflict with Healy, Banda and Slaughter shared his opportunist and nationalist perspective. They, no less than Healy, sought to avoid an examination of the origins and development of the crisis of the organization in which they had played a leading role for more than three decades. Moreover, it soon became clear that Banda and Slaughter would not accept international constraints upon the political alliances and activities of the WRP. On December 11, 1985, the Workers League Political Committee wrote to the Central Committee of the WRP:

During the past three months, the Workers League has stated repeatedly

that the political crisis within the Workers Revolutionary Party can be overcome only through the closest collaboration of the British section with its international comrades. Unfortunately, after years of systematic miseducation under Healy there are many comrades within the leadership of the WRP who view the International Committee with contempt, and consider appeals of the IC for genuine collaboration and consultation as an unwarranted intrusion into the life of the British section. References to the "subordination of the WRP to the International Committee" evoke a hostile response from some comrades. Of course, we are not dealing with the subjective weaknesses of individual members. The existence of powerful nationalist tendencies within the WRP is a political reflection of the historical development of the working class in the world's oldest imperialist country. Insofar as they are recognized and consciously fought these tendencies can be overcome, and the responsibility for waging this struggle falls upon the leadership of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

The great danger that we now confront is that anti-internationalism is being encouraged by the leadership. The national autonomy of the Workers Revolutionary Party is being counterposed to the authority of the International Committee as the leading body of the World Party of Socialist Revolution.[111]

191. In response to Slaughter's assertion that "Internationalism consists precisely of laying down ... class lines and fighting them through," the Political Committee asked:

But by what process are these "class lines" determined? Does it require the existence of the Fourth International? Comrade Slaughter's definition suggests — and this is the explicit content of his entire letter — that any national organization can rise to the level of internationalism by establishing, on its own, the "class lines and fighting them through." ...

The Workers League reminded Slaughter:

Those parties which uphold Trotskyism as the contemporary development of Marxist principles and program are organized in the Fourth International and accept the authority of the International Committee. To base one's definition of internationalism on the separation of the program from its organizational expression is to adopt the standpoint of all those revisionist and centrist opponents of Trotskyism who deny the continuity of Marxism, embodied in the ICFI, in order to retain freedom of action within their national theater of operations.[112]

192. On December 16, 1985, the International Committee received a report from an International Control Commission that it had formed to examine the political and financial relations that had been established by the WRP with various bourgeois national regimes in the Middle East between 1976 and 1985. This report established conclusively that the WRP had entered into political relations that betrayed the principles of the Fourth International, while keeping these relations hidden from the ICFI. The International Committee voted, over objections of WRP delegates representing the Slaughter and Banda factions, to suspend the WRP from membership in the international organization. This resolution was supported by David Hyland, who represented a substantial section of the WRP membership that was in political agreement with the International Committee.

193. The suspension of the WRP represented an unequivocal assertion of the principles of revolutionary internationalism within the Fourth International. With this action the ICFI made clear that it would not tolerate the subordination of international Trotskyist principles to any form of national opportunism. The purpose of the suspension was not to punish the WRP, but to establish the conditions for membership in the ICFI. A second resolution passed by the ICFI on December 17, 1985 enumerated the historical and programmatic foundations upon which the International Committee was based. It called upon the WRP to reaffirm these principles and, in so doing, prepare for its own rapid readmission into the ICFI. The statement concluded:

The ICFI and the Central Committee of the WRP shall now work

closely together to overcome as quickly as possible the existing problems which are the legacy of the nationalist degeneration of the WRP under Healy, to reassert the basic principles of internationalism within the WRP, and on this basis restore its full membership in the International Committee of the Fourth International. The organizational structure of this relationship shall at all times be based on the Leninist principles of democratic centralism, which are elaborated in the statutes of the Fourth International.[113]

194. Once again, the WRP delegates, with the exception of David Hyland, voted against this resolution. Their vote made clear that the WRP did not accept either the program or the authority of the International Committee. One month later, the WRP Central Committee rescinded its previous agreement, made in October 1985, to reregister its membership by admitting into its ranks only those who agreed that membership in the British section required acceptance of the political authority of the International Committee. Hyland and two other members of the WRP Central Committee opposed the WRP's repudiation of this agreement. The WRP Central Committee vote signified a split from the International Committee. On February 8, 1986, the WRP held a rump congress from which all supporters of the International Committee were excluded. This political travesty marked the definitive end of the WRP as a Trotskyist organization. The main document prepared for this congress was an anti-Trotskyist diatribe composed by Banda, entitled *27 Reasons Why the International Committee Should be Buried Forthwith and the Fourth International Built*. Within months of writing this document, Banda repudiated his nearly 40 year association with the Fourth International and proclaimed his admiration for Stalin. As for the WRP, its various factions disintegrated one by one. Within less than a decade, Slaughter and other former leaders of the WRP were heavily involved in the US-NATO operation in Bosnia. The only viable political tendency in the British organization that was to emerge from the collapse of the WRP was that led by Dave Hyland, which upheld the principles of the ICFI. This tendency established the International Communist Party in February 1986, the forerunner to the present-day Socialist Equality Party, the British section of the ICFI.

A Further Comment on the Cause and Significance of the Split in the ICFI

195. As in 1953, the split in the International Committee that developed between 1982 and 1986 anticipated enormous changes, which were to shatter, in the last half of the 1980s, the structure of world politics as it had existed in the four decades following the end of World War II. The protracted crisis of the WRP was a complex and contradictory process. Its basic source lay not in the weaknesses of one or another individual, but in changes in the relationship of class forces on an international scale. It is not uncommon that a political party, which for many decades has played an immensely positive role in the development of the working class, enters into crisis in a later period as new conditions emerge and new tasks are posed. The most tragic examples of this historical phenomenon are the German Social Democracy and the Bolshevik Party. But their historical achievements are not erased by their ultimate fate.

196. Nor are the achievements of the SLL\WRP and its principal leader, Gerry Healy, obliterated by the later degeneration of the organization. In insisting on an objective appraisal of the history of the SLL\WRP, it is worth recalling advice that Healy gave to Wohlforth in December 1972, after the death of Max Shachtman. Wohlforth had written an obituary of Shachtman in which he denounced, as was appropriate, the deceased's betrayal of socialism and the working class during the final decades of his

life. But Wohlforth included in his condemnation the following declaration: "Shachtman died a traitor to his class and a counter-revolutionary. That is the long and short of it." Replying to Wohlforth, Healy noted: "This phrase itself seems at once paradoxical because Shachtman didn't just die, he also lived. Naturally the memory of someone who finally betrayed disgracefully does not give rise to kind feelings. However, we are not here to attribute responsibilities, but to understand." [114]

197. For many years, particularly after the SWP's return to Pabloism in 1963, the British Trotskyists stood virtually alone in their defense of the program and heritage of the Fourth International. With the OCI an increasingly unreliable ally and, by the late 1960s, a political opponent, the SLL intransigently opposed the efforts of the Pabloites to liquidate the Fourth International into the milieu of Stalinism, bourgeois nationalism and petty-bourgeois radicalism. With little international support, the SLL opposed Pabloite liquidationism by developing, to the best of its abilities, a powerful revolutionary organization in Britain. Into this project Healy threw his extraordinary gifts as a revolutionary organizer and orator. While the Pabloites insisted that Trotskyism had no independent political role to play, the SLL engaged in relentless political warfare against the British Labour Party and captured the political leadership of its youth movement, the Young Socialists. When the British Labourites sought to counter this offensive by proscribing *Keep Left*, the newspaper of the Young Socialists, the SLL and its supporters in the YS fought back and built up a circulation of 10,000 readers. Finally, the Young Socialists became officially the youth movement of the Trotskyist movement in Britain. The Pabloites responded to the advances of the SLL by organizing vicious political witchhunts, enthusiastically backed by the Stalinists, who sought to label the SLL as a "violent" organization.

198. Given the conditions of political isolation, the SLL came increasingly to see the development of the Fourth International as a by-product of the growth of its organization in England. The successes of the movement in England, it reasoned, would provide the basis for the growth of the International Committee. Thus, over time, the forms and habits of work assumed an increasingly nationalistic coloration. What was, in fact, a temporary relation of political forces — one which imparted to the work in Britain an overwhelming weight within the International Committee — was apotheosized into an increasingly nationalistic conception of the relationship between the SLL\WRP and the Fourth International. The various forms of opportunist practices that were developed by the WRP in the 1970s and into the 1980s were justified by Healy, at least to himself, on the grounds that by "building the party" in England, he was, in the long run, laying the foundations for the international expansion of the ICFI. Even though there had been a substantial political development in the 1970s and early 1980s in different sections of the International Committee, the WRP tended to view the international organization as little more than an adjunct to its own British-based organization.

199. The essential problem with this approach was that it was based on a nationalistic premise that ran counter to the political traditions of the Fourth International and collided with objective processes of global socio-economic and political development. The crisis of the WRP was part of a broader process that was sweeping through all the mass parties and trade union organizations based historically on the working class. Whatever their differences in organizational structure and political allegiances, the Stalinist, Social-Democratic and reformist organizations were all based on a nationalist program. This essential similarity connected even such apparently irreconcilable enemies as the American AFL-CIO and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. While the latter's program based itself on the socialist potential of the productive forces of the USSR, the former's reformist aspirations were premised on the supposedly inexhaustible resources and wealth of American capitalism. Both organizations entered into crisis when developments in technology, and

the resulting changes in production and the circulation of capital, rendered the national-reformist perspectives of the post-World War II era obsolete.

200. These fundamental changes in world economy and their impact on the international class struggle were reflected within the International Committee and, in the final analysis, led to the split. The basic difference in political perspective — between, on one side, revolutionary internationalism and, on the other, national opportunism — emerged clearly well in advance of the organizational split. In a letter to Michael Banda, dated January 23, 1984, North wrote on behalf of the Workers League: "No matter how promising certain developments within the national work of the sections may appear — such as our own experiences in various trade union struggles — these will not produce real gains for the sections involved unless such work is guided by a scientifically-worked out international perspective. The more the Workers League turns toward the working class, the more we feel the need for the closest collaboration with our international comrades to drive the work forward." [115]

201. The opposition of the Workers League to the national opportunism of the WRP was in theoretical alignment with social and economic processes that were already in an advanced stage of development, and which were about to blow apart the existing structures and relations of world politics. To the extent that large sections of the international cadre had been drawn to the ICFI in the 1960s and early 1970s, on the basis of the British Trotskyists' defense of the internationalist perspective of Permanent Revolution, the criticisms advanced by the Workers League, once they became widely known in the international movement, found overwhelming support. It was this that accounted for the relatively rapid political realignment that took place within the International Committee in the autumn of 1985. It established a new basis for the work of the international movement. The subsequent development of the ICFI was the conscious response of the Marxist vanguard to the new economic and political situation. The reorientation of the movement was based on a systematic struggle against all forms of nationalism, a reorientation that was inextricably tied to the development of an international perspective. All opportunism is ultimately rooted in definite forms of national adaptation. In the struggle against other tendencies and within its own organization, the ICFI reasserted the conceptions developed in their highest form by Trotsky—the primacy of the global developments of world capitalism over the particular manifestations in any given nation-state, and the primacy of international strategy over national tactics.

To be continued

Notes:

104. David North, *Leon Trotsky and the Development of Marxism* (Detroit, 1985) p. 5; 17-18.

105. *Fourth International* (Detroit, 1986), Volume 13, No. 2, Autumn 1986, pp. 16-18.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 39

109. *Ibid.*, p. 42-43.

110. *Fourth International*, Volume 13, No. 2, Autumn 1986, p. 52.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

114. *The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth [Trotskyism versus Revisionism, Volume Seven]* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 228.

115. *Fourth International*, Volume 13, No. 2, Autumn 1986, p. 38.



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