

The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party—Part 10

9 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, 9, 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.

To find out more about how to join the SEP, contact us here.

After the Split: The Significance and Implications of Globalization

202. In the immediate aftermath of the split, the International Committee subjected the dissolution of the Workers Revolutionary Party to a detailed analysis. *How the WRP Betrayed Trotskyism 1973-1985* demonstrated that the crisis in that organization was bound up with its retreat from the principles that the British Trotskyists had previously defended in the founding of the International Committee and, later, in their struggle against the unprincipled reunification carried out by the SWP with the Pabloites in 1963. The International Committee then responded to Michael Banda's attack on the history of the Trotskyist movement, publishing *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International*, by David North.

203. Having analyzed the historical roots and political origins of the split in the International Committee, the ICFI initiated a systematic examination of the changes in world economy that provided the objective foundations for the development of the class struggle and the building of the Fourth International. At the fourth plenum of the International Committee in July 1987, the following questions were posed: (1) With what new tendencies of world economic and political development is the growth of the International Committee of the Fourth International a conscious expression? (2) On what objective basis can the development of a new world revolutionary crisis be anticipated?

204. In its answer to these questions, the ICFI placed central emphasis on the “explosive growth in the activity of transnational corporations.” It stated:

The result has been an unprecedented integration of the world market and internationalization of production. The absolute and active predominance of the world economy over all national economies, including that of the United States, is a basic fact of modern life. Advances in technology associated with the invention and perfection of the integrated circuit have produced

revolutionary changes in communications which, in turn, have accelerated the process of global economic integration. But these economic and technological developments, far from opening up new historical vistas for capitalism, have raised the fundamental contradiction between world economy and the capitalist nation-state system, and between social production and private ownership, to an unprecedented level of intensity.[116]

205. The International Committee also noted:

The phenomena of massive transnational corporations and the globalization of production are inextricably linked with another factor which has profoundly revolutionary implications: the loss by the United States of its global economic hegemony, in both relative and absolute terms. This historic change in the world position of US imperialism, expressed in the transformation of the United States from the world's principal creditor into its largest debtor, is the underlying cause of the dramatic decline in workers' living standards and must lead to a period of revolutionary class confrontations in the United States.[117]

206. Another development, reflecting the breakdown of the post-World War II order, to which the ICFI called attention, was the escalation of inter-imperialist antagonisms. At that time, the rapid economic development of Japan was the most immediate, though by no means only, source of these new tensions. The ICFI pointed to the implementation of plans to establish a unified European market capable of challenging both American and Japanese capital. The ICFI also attributed revolutionary significance to the vast expansion of the proletariat in Asia, Africa and Latin America — the result of the international export of capital in pursuit of high rates of profit.

207. The development of transnational production and the global integration of finance and manufacturing dramatically undermined the viability of social and political organizations embedded in the nation-state system. Though the global integration of capitalism was creating the objective conditions for the unification of the working class, this revolutionary potential required organizations and leadership based on a consciously internationalist strategy. Without such a leadership, the working class would be unable to defend itself against globally-organized capital. As the ICFI explained in its 1988 perspectives document, *The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International*:

The massive development of transnational corporations and the resulting global integration of capitalist production have produced an unprecedented uniformity in the conditions confronting the workers of the world. The ferocious competition between national groups of capitalists for domination of the world market finds its brutal expression in a universal campaign by the ruling classes to intensify in their 'own' countries the exploitation of the working class. The offensive of capital against labor is realized in country after country through mass unemployment, wage-cutting, speed-ups, union busting, slashing of social benefits, and intensified attacks on democratic rights.[118]

208. The changes in the form of capitalist production brought with them a change in the form of the class struggle:

It has long been an elementary proposition of Marxism that the class struggle is national only as to form, but that it is, in essence, an international struggle. However, given the new features of capitalist development, even the form of the class struggle must assume an international character. Even the most elemental struggles of the working class pose the necessity of coordinating its actions on an international scale. It is a basic fact of economic life that transnational corporations exploit the labor power of workers in several countries to produce a finished commodity, and that they distribute and shift production between their plants in different countries and on different continents in search of the highest rate of profit...Thus, the unprecedented international mobility of capital has rendered all nationalist programs for the labor movement of different countries obsolete and reactionary.[119]

It was precisely these developments that constituted the objective foundation to which the growth of the ICFI was necessarily linked. This point was developed and emphasized in an August 1988 report to the Thirteenth National Congress of the Workers League:

We anticipate that the next stage of proletarian struggle will develop inexorably, beneath the combined pressure of objective economic tendencies and the subjective influence of Marxists, along an international trajectory. The proletariat will tend more and more to define itself in practice as an international class; and the Marxian internationalists, whose policies are the expression of this organic tendency, will cultivate the process and give it conscious form...[120]

209. The ICFI warned that the new forms of global production did not diminish, but rather intensified the danger of world war:

The global character of capitalist production has tremendously sharpened the economic and political antagonisms between the principal imperialist powers, and has once again brought to the forefront the irreconcilable contradiction between the objective development of the world economy and the nation-state form in which the whole system of capitalist property is historically rooted. Precisely the international character of the proletariat, a class which owes no allegiance to any capitalist 'fatherland,' makes it the sole social force that can liberate civilization from the strangulating fetters of the nation-state system.

For these fundamental reasons, no struggle against the ruling class in any country can produce enduring advances for the working class, let alone prepare its final emancipation, unless it is based on an international strategy aimed at the worldwide mobilization of the proletariat against the capitalist system. This necessary unification of the working class can only be achieved through the construction of a genuine international proletarian, i.e., revolutionary party. Only one such party, the product of decades of unrelenting ideological and political struggle exists. It is the Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, and led today by the International Committee.[121]

Perestroika and Glasnost in the USSR

210. The struggle within the International Committee between 1982 and 1986 took place against the backdrop of a deepening crisis in the Soviet Union and its Stalinist regime. The development of this crisis arose, paradoxically, from the immense growth of the Soviet economy in the aftermath of World War II. This expansion further eroded the viability of the national autarkic economic policies based on the Stalinist perspective of 'socialism in one country.' The increasing complexity of the Soviet economy posed with ever-greater urgency the need for access to the world economy and its international division of labor. The mounting economic

problems of the USSR, particularly as the rate of world economic growth began to decline from the generally high levels of the first two decades after 1945, were exacerbated by the gross inefficiencies of the bureaucratically-managed system, which made a mockery of the claims to scientific planning. As Trotsky had insisted in 1936, quality in a planned economy 'demands democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative — conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery.'[122] Trotsky had also noted in 1935, 'The more complex the economic tasks become, the greater the demands and interests of the population become, all the more sharp becomes the contradiction between the bureaucratic regime and the demands of socialist development.'[123] The contradiction between the political and social interests of the bureaucracy and the objective requirements of economic development found particularly grotesque expression in the regime's morbid fear of computer technology. In a country whose citizens were required to register all typewriters and mimeograph machines, the Stalinist authorities were terrified by the political implications of the widespread use of computers.

211. Opposition to the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe rose steadily throughout the 1960s and 1970s. There were reports of major strikes in the Soviet industrial city of Novocherkassk that were suppressed violently by the army in June 1962. The sudden removal of Khrushchev from power in October 1964, his replacement by Leonid Brezhnev, and the clamp-down on the post-1953 de-Stalinization campaigns were a desperate attempt to uphold the political legitimacy of the regime. The trial and imprisonment of the writers Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky, aimed at intimidating the growing dissident movement, served to discredit the regime, as did the later exile of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The coming to power of Alexander Dubcek in Czechoslovakia in January 1968, the so-called 'Prague Spring,' further frightened the Soviet bureaucracy. The subsequent invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and Dubcek's removal from power deepened the alienation of significant sections of the working class and intelligentsia in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe who had believed in the possibility of reforms of a democratic and socialistic character. In 1970, mass strikes in Poland brought down the regime of Gomulka — who had himself risen to power amidst mass protests in 1956. In the face of these challenges, Brezhnev sought to assert a Stalinist orthodoxy that imparted to his regime an utterly sclerotic character. Significantly, this period was also one that saw the flowering of 'détente' between the Soviet Union and the United States — a process that came to an end in the late 1970s when the Carter administration shifted toward a more confrontational policy, which was further developed by the Reagan administration.

212. By the time Brezhnev died in November 1982, the regime could no longer conceal the signs of serious economic crisis and general social stagnation. Significant sections of the Soviet bureaucracy saw the emergence of the mass Solidarity movement in Poland in 1980 as a warning that a revolutionary explosion was possible within the USSR itself. Brezhnev's replacement, the KGB director Yuri Andropov, sought to implement various anti-corruption reforms to rebuild the credibility of the regime. He also instituted a crackdown on alcoholism with the hope that this would increase the productivity of Soviet industry. But these measures were mere palliatives. The basic problem remained the nationally shut-in character of the Soviet economy. At any rate, Andropov, who was seriously ill when he came to power, died of kidney disease in February 1984, just 15 months after assuming office. His replacement, Konstantin Chernenko, was another terminally ill Soviet bureaucrat. He lasted only 13 months. Chernenko was succeeded by Mikhail Gorbachev, whose crisis-ridden regime ended with the dissolution of the USSR.

213. Gorbachev initiated a twin policy of limited expansion of domestic

freedoms (glasnost) and economic reforms (perestroika). The central aim of the section of the bureaucracy led by Gorbachev was to channel the mass opposition that existed within the Soviet population behind policies that would restore capitalism. Gorbachev was relying on the disorientation of workers produced by decades of Stalinist rule. He also counted on political support from the petty-bourgeois radical left. This was the only political calculation in which Gorbachev demonstrated an appreciable degree of astuteness. Nowhere did the phenomenon, which the bourgeois press dubbed 'Gorbymania,' find such unrestrained expression as it did within the milieu of the left petty bourgeoisie. Ernest Mandel, seeing in Gorbachev the apotheosis of the Pabloite perspective of bureaucratic self-reform, proclaimed him to be 'a remarkable political leader,' a Soviet version of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.[124] Peering into the future through rose-tinted spectacles, Mandel outlined four plausible scenarios of Soviet development. Not one of these included the possibility of the dissolution of the USSR — an extraordinary oversight for an author writing only two years before its final collapse! Mandel's disciple, Tariq Ali, the leader of the Pabloite organization in Britain, could not contain his enthusiasm for perestroika and its initiators. He dedicated his book, *Revolution From Above: Where Is the Soviet Union Going?*, published in 1988, to Boris Yeltsin. His moving tribute declared that Yeltsin's 'political courage has made him an important symbol throughout the country.' [125] Ali, describing his visits to the Soviet Union, informed his readers that 'I felt really at home.' [126] The policies of Gorbachev had initiated the revolutionary transformation of Russian society from above, Ali asserted. There were those, he noted cynically, who 'would have preferred (me too!) if the changes in the Soviet Union had been brought about by a gigantic movement of the Soviet working class and revived the old organs of political power — the soviets — with new blood. That would have been very nice, but it didn't happen that way.' [127] Ali then offered a succinct summary of the Pabloite perspective, which combined in equal measures political impressionism, naiveté, and personal stupidity:

Revolution From Above argues that Gorbachev represents a progressive, reformist current within the Soviet elite, whose programme, if successful, would represent an enormous gain for socialists and democrats on a world scale. The scale of Gorbachev's operation is, in fact, reminiscent of the efforts of an American President of the nineteenth century: Abraham Lincoln. [128]

214. The appraisal of the Gorbachev regime by the ex-Trotskyists of the Workers Revolutionary Party was no less uncritical. Healy declared that Gorbachev was leading the political revolution in the Soviet Union. For Banda, the accession of Gorbachev represented the final refutation of Trotskyism. 'If restoration didn't exist,' he declared, 'it would be absolutely necessary for Trotsky to invent it! The whole of Soviet history — during and after Stalin — testifies against this infantile leftist speculation and points in the opposite direction.' [129]

215. In opposition to these conceptions, the ICFI explained, as early as 1986, the fundamentally reactionary character of Gorbachev's economic policies. In its 1988 perspectives document, it wrote:

As he seeks to implement his reactionary perestroika, Gorbachev implicitly concedes the failure of all the economic premises upon which Stalinism was based, i.e., that socialism could be built in a single county. The very real crisis of the Soviet economy is rooted in its enforced isolation from the resources of the world market and the international division of labor. There are only two ways this crisis can be tackled. The way proposed by Gorbachev involves the dismantling of state industry, the renunciation of the planning principle, and the abandonment of the state monopoly on foreign trade, i.e., the reintegration of the Soviet Union into the structure of world imperialism. The alternative to this reactionary solution requires the smashing of imperialism's domination over the world economy by linking up the Soviet and international working class in a revolutionary offensive aimed at extending the planned economy into the

European, North American and Asian citadels of capitalism. [130]

216. The glasnost reforms and the loosening of restrictions on censorship opened the floodgates for discussion in the Soviet Union on political and historical questions. The bureaucracy retroactively 'rehabilitated' many of the old Bolsheviks, including Bukharin, Zinoviev and Kamenev, and was forced to acknowledge that the Moscow trials were based on lies. However, the bureaucracy could never rehabilitate Trotsky, since his criticisms attacked the social interests of the bureaucracy as a whole. If these ideas were to achieve a wide hearing in the Soviet working class, it would severely threaten the plans of capitalist restoration. In 1987, Gorbachev insisted that Trotsky's ideas were 'essentially an attack on Leninism all down the line.'

217. The ICFI sought to bring the perspective of Trotskyism to the Soviet population, publishing a theoretical journal in Russian and organizing several trips to the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991. Its work focused on clarifying the place of Trotsky in the October Revolution, the origins and significance of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism, the political program of the Fourth International, and the nature of the crisis confronting the Soviet Union. The ICFI repeatedly warned that the liquidation of the USSR and the restoration of capitalism would have catastrophic consequences for the Soviet working class. Speaking in Kiev in October 1991, David North explained:

...In this country, capitalist restoration can only take place on the basis of the widespread destruction of the already-existing productive forces and the social-cultural institutions that depend upon them. In other words, the integration of the USSR into the structure of the world imperialist economy on a capitalist basis, means not the slow development of a backward national economy, but the rapid destruction of one which has sustained living conditions that are, at least for the working class, far closer to those which exist in the advanced countries than in the third world. When one examines the various schemes hatched by the proponents of capitalist restoration, one cannot but conclude that they are no less ignorant than Stalin of the real workings of the world capitalist economy. And they are preparing the ground for a social tragedy that will eclipse that produced by the pragmatic and nationalistic policies of Stalin.

This is not a theoretical projection: rather the future which threatens the USSR is the present reality in much of Eastern Europe. In all the countries where capitalism has been or is in the process of being restored, the result has been a catastrophic collapse of the national economy. [131]

These warnings were completely vindicated by the actual course of events following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

The End of the USSR

218. The formal dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 25, 1991, 74 years after the October Revolution, confronted the International Committee with crucial theoretical, historical and political questions. The origins, social character and political destiny of the state that arose on the basis of the October Revolution had been a central preoccupation of the Fourth International since its founding. In countless struggles within the Trotskyist movement, dating back to the 1930s, the 'Russian Question' had been the focus of intense controversy, often associated with bitter factional divisions. The question of the nature of the Soviet Union was at the center of the splits in the Fourth International of 1940 and 1953. In the immediate aftermath of the split of 1985-86, the issue of the class basis of the states established in Eastern Europe at the conclusion of World War II reemerged as a crucial historical and contemporary question for the International Committee. In one form or another, all the revisionist tendencies attributed to Stalinism a central and enduring historical role. In

1953, Pablo and Mandel predicted that socialism would be realized via revolutions led by the Stalinists, leading to the establishment of deformed workers' states that would last for centuries. In 1983, on the eve of the eruption of the political crisis in the WRP, Banda told North that the survival of the Soviet Union was a 'finished question,' and that there was no possibility that it would, as Trotsky had warned, cease to exist. Within less than a decade after Banda's declaration, the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the USSR had passed into history.

219. In the months that followed the dissolution of the USSR, none of the revisionist organizations were able to offer a credible assessment of the significance of this event. Many of the Pabloite tendencies ignored it as if nothing at all had happened. Having believed so fervently in the political omnipotence of the bureaucracy, they could hardly bring themselves to acknowledge that the USSR no longer existed. Moreover, even those who were willing to admit that the USSR had been dissolved still argued that this did not necessarily alter the class character of the state. Even without the Soviet Union, Russia remained a 'workers' state'! This remained, for several years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the position of Robertson's Spartacist group and of one fragment of the Workers Revolutionary Party.

220. The International Committee of the Fourth International, unburdened theoretically and politically by the sort of illusions in Stalinism that characterized the Pabloite tendencies, was able to make, in a timely manner, an objective and precise evaluation of the dissolution of the USSR. On January 4, 1992, the following assessment was made:

In the aftermath of the events of the past month, which marked the climax of the politics pursued by the bureaucracy since the advent of Gorbachev to power in March 1985, it is necessary to draw the appropriate conclusions from the juridical liquidation of the Soviet Union. It is impossible to define the Confederation of Independent States as a whole, or any of the republics of which it is comprised, as workers' states.

The quantitative process of degeneration of the Soviet Union has led to a qualitative transformation. The liquidation of the USSR and the establishment of the CIS is not merely a reshuffling of the letters of the alphabet. It has definite political and social implications. It represents the juridical liquidation of the workers' state and its replacement with regimes that are openly and unequivocally devoted to the destruction of the remnants of the national economy and planning system that issued from the October Revolution. To define the CIS or its individual republics as workers' states would be to completely separate the definition from the concrete content which it expressed during the previous historical period.[132]

221. The role played by the bureaucratic strata in the USSR had far reaching political implications:

What has occurred in the former Soviet Union is a manifestation of an international phenomenon. All over the world the working class is confronted with the fact that the trade unions, parties and even states, which they created in an earlier period, have been transformed into the direct instruments of imperialism.

The days are over when the labor bureaucracies 'mediated' the class struggle and played the role of buffer between the classes. Though the bureaucracies generally betrayed the historical interests of the working class, they still, in a limited sense, served its daily practical needs; and, to that extent, 'justified' their existence as leaders of the working class organizations. That period is over. The bureaucracy cannot play any such independent role in the present period.

This is true not only for the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR, but for the American bureaucracy in the trade unions. At our last Congress we stressed that the leaders of the present trade unions cannot be defined as a force which defends and represents, if only in a limited and distorted way, the interests of the working class. To define the leaders of the AFL-CIO as 'trade union leaders,' or, for that matter, to define the AFL-CIO as a

working class organization is to blind the working class to the realities which they confront.[133]

The Struggle Against the Post-Soviet School of Historical Falsification

222. The dissolution of the USSR provoked within the bourgeoisie and its ideological apologists an eruption of euphoric triumphalism. The socialist nemesis had, for once and for all, been laid low! The bourgeois interpretation of the Soviet Union's demise found its essential expression in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History*. Employing a potted version of Hegel's idealist phenomenology, Fukuyama proclaimed that the weary march of history had arrived at its final station — a US-style liberal bourgeois democracy based on the unfettered capitalist market. This was the summit of human civilization! This theme was elaborated in countless variations by gullible and impressionistic petty-bourgeois academics, always anxious to be on what they take to be, at any given moment, the winning side of history. The conclusion that was to be drawn from the collapse of the Soviet Union was that socialism was an illusion. 'In sum,' wrote historian Martin Malia, 'socialism is a utopia, in the literal meaning of that term: a 'non-place' or a 'no-where' viewed as an ideal 'other.'"[134] The triumphalism of the bourgeoisie went largely unchallenged by those on the left who, up until almost the moment of the final collapse, had looked to the Stalinist bureaucracy as the guarantor of socialism. Indeed, they were no less convinced than Fukuyama and Malia that the demise of the USSR signified the failure of socialism. In many cases, the demoralized repudiation of socialism as a legitimate historical project stemmed from an unwillingness to examine their earlier premises and perspectives. Not a small number of those who were anxious to abandon and curse Marxism had no desire to confront the political issues behind the collapse of the USSR — least of all the Trotskyist critique of Stalinism. The question that they sought to avoid was whether there had existed an alternative to Stalinism — that is, whether the history of the Soviet Union, and of the twentieth century, might have developed along very different lines if the political program of Trotsky had prevailed in the crucial inner-party struggles of the 1920s.

223. The English historian Eric Hobsbawm, a long-time member of the Communist Party, explicitly declared that considerations of the possibility of a different development other than that which actually occurred were inappropriate for a historian. 'The Russian Revolution was destined to build socialism in one backward and soon utterly ruined country....'[135] The revolutionary project was itself based on an utterly unrealistic appraisal of political possibilities. Hobsbawm argued that it was pointless to even consider an alternative outcome of the Russian Revolution. 'History must start from what happened,' he declared. 'The rest is speculation.'[136]

224. Replying to Hobsbawm's contemptuous dismissal of any consideration of historical alternatives to Stalinism, North stated:

This is a rather simplistic conception, for 'what happened' — if taken as nothing more than what was reported in the newspapers of the day — is certainly only a small part of the historical process. After all, history must concern itself not simply with 'what happened,' but also — and this is far more important — why one or another thing happened or did not happen, and what might have happened. The moment one considers an event — i.e., 'what happened' — one finds oneself compelled to consider process and context. Yes, in 1924 the Soviet Union adopted the policy of 'socialism in one country.' That 'happened.' But the opposition to 'socialism in one country' also 'happened.' The conflict between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the Left Opposition, about which Hobsbawm says not one word, 'happened.' Inasmuch as he deliberately excludes, or dismisses as

unimportant, the forces of opposition which sought to impart to the policies of the Soviet Union a different direction, his definition of 'what happened' consists of nothing more than a one-sided, one-dimensional, pragmatic and vulgar simplification of a very complex historical reality. For Hobsbawm, starting from 'what happened' simply means starting, and ending, with 'who won'.[137]

225. The fatalistic apologetics of Hobsbawm were a refined and sophisticated expression of a vast campaign of historical falsification that followed the collapse of the USSR. A major role in this campaign was played by ex-Stalinists from the former Soviet Union, who almost overnight transformed themselves into the most embittered anti-Communists. They endlessly proclaimed that the Russian Revolution was a criminal conspiracy against the Russian people. General Dmitri Volkogonov was only the best known of this type. In his biography of Lenin, Volkogonov — perhaps admitting more than he intended — acknowledged that the change in his own attitude toward Lenin developed 'above all because the 'cause', which he launched and for which millions paid with their lives, has suffered a major historical defeat'.[138] Among the 'crimes' for which Volkogonov indicted Lenin was the January 1918 dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, an event in which not one person was injured. But this did not prevent Volkogonov, in his capacity as President Boris Yeltsin's military adviser, from overseeing the tank bombardment in October 1993 of the Russian White House, the seat of Russia's democratically-elected parliament. Estimates of the number of people killed were as high as 2,000.

226. At its plenum in March 1992, the International Committee discussed the relationship between the development of the crisis of capitalism and the class struggle as an objective process and the development of socialist consciousness:

The intensification of the class struggle provides the general foundation of the revolutionary movement. But it does not by itself directly and automatically create the political, intellectual and, one might add, cultural environment that its development requires, and which prepares the historic setting for a truly revolutionary situation. Only when we grasp this distinction between the general objective basis of the revolutionary movement and the complex political, social and cultural process through which it becomes a dominant historical force is it possible to understand the significance of our historical struggle against Stalinism and to see the tasks that are posed to us today.[139]

227. The renewal of a socialist culture in the international working class required a systematic struggle against the falsifiers of history. It was necessary to educate the working class in the real history of the 20th century, to reconnect its struggles with the great traditions of revolutionary socialism, including the Russian Revolution. In the aftermath of the March 1992 plenum, the ICFI launched a campaign in defense of historical truth to refute the claims of the post-Soviet School of Historical Falsification. Beginning in 1993, the IC initiated a close collaboration with Vadim Rogovin, a leading Soviet Marxist sociologist and historian. Under conditions in which vast sections of Soviet academia were moving sharply to the right and supporting capitalist restoration, Rogovin had begun working to rehabilitate Trotsky and the Left Opposition. In 1993, having just completed a book that examined the emergence of the Left Opposition, entitled *Was There an Alternative?*, Rogovin met for the first time with representatives of the International Committee. He had already been reading the ICFI's Russian-language *Bulletin of the Fourth International* for several years. He welcomed enthusiastically the proposal to conduct an international campaign against the Post-Soviet School of Historical Falsification. With the assistance of the International Committee, Rogovin, though seriously ill with cancer, completed, before his death in September 1998, six more volumes of *Was There an Alternative?*

228. Based on its analysis at the March 1992 plenum, of the problems

confronting the development of socialist consciousness in the working class, the International Committee expanded its work on cultural questions, seeking to revive the intellectual traditions of the Left Opposition, which had assigned to them immense importance. This outlook found its consummate expression in such works of Leon Trotsky as *Problems of Everyday Life* and *Literature and Revolution* and in Alexander Voronsky's *Art As the Cognition of Life*. Working within and building upon this tradition, the International Committee recognized that the development of revolutionary consciousness did not occur in an intellectual vacuum, that it required cultural nourishment, and that the Marxist movement had a vital role to play in encouraging and contributing to the creation of a more advanced, intellectually critical and socially perceptive environment. In a lecture delivered in January 1998, David Walsh stated:

The Marxists face a considerable challenge in creating an audience that can grasp and respond to their political program and perspectives. To belittle the need for the enrichment of popular consciousness under the current conditions seems highly irresponsible.

How does a revolution come about? Is it simply the product of socialist agitation and propaganda brought to bear in favorable objective conditions? Is that how the October Revolution came about? We have spent a good deal of time as a party thinking about this in recent years. One of our conclusions has been that the revolution of 1917 was not simply the product of a national or even international political and social process, that it was as well the outcome of a decades-long effort to build up an international socialist culture, a culture which brought into its orbit and assimilated the most critical achievements of bourgeois political and social thought, art and science. The essential intellectual bases for the revolution of 1917 were established of course by those political theorists and revolutionists who had consciously made the end of capitalist rule their goal. But the streams and tributaries that feed into and make possible a revolutionary torrent are vast in number, a complex system of influences that interact, contradict and reinforce one another.

The creation of an environment in which it becomes suddenly possible for large numbers of people to rise up and consciously set about the dismantling of the old society, casting aside the prejudices, habits and learned behavior built up over decades, even centuries; prejudices, habits and behavior which inevitably take on a life of their own, with their own apparently independent powers of resistance — the overcoming of this historical inertia and the creation of an insurrectionary climate cannot possibly be conceived of as merely a political task.

We recognize that the all-rounded socialist human being is only a creature of the future — the not-too-distant future, we trust. But that is not the same thing as saying that there need to be no changes in the hearts and minds of masses of people before the social revolution can become a reality. We live in an age of cultural stagnation and decline, in which technical marvels are primarily used in an effort to numb and anaesthetize masses of people and render them vulnerable to the most backward conceptions and moods.

The sharpening of the critical faculties of the population — its collective ability to distinguish truth from lies, the essential from the inessential, its own elementary interests from the interests of its deadliest enemies — and the raising of its spiritual level to the point where large numbers of people will demonstrate nobility, make great sacrifices, think only of their fellow men and women — all of this arises out of an intellectual and moral heightening which must be the product of the advance of human culture as a whole.[140]

To be continued

Notes:

116. *The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International: Perspectives Resolution of the International Committee of the Fourth International* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1988), pp. 48-49.

117. Ibid., p. 49.
118. Ibid., p. 6.
119. *The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1988) pp. 6-7.
120. D. North, Report to the Thirteenth National Congress of the Workers League, in *Fourth International*, July-December 1988, pp. 38-39.
121. Ibid., pp 7-8.
122. Leon Trotsky, *Revolution Betrayed*, p. 235.
123. 'The Workers' State, Thermidor, and Bonapartism' in *Writings of Leon Trotsky 1934-35* (New York: Pathfinder, 2002) p. 246.
124. *Beyond Perestroika: The Future of Gorbachev's USSR* (London: Verso, 1989), p. xi.
125. Tariq Ali, *Revolution From Above: Where Is the Soviet Union Going?* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), p. vi.
126. Ibid., p. xi.
127. Ibid., p. xii.
128. Ibid., p. xiii.
129. Cited in *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 498.
130. *The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, pp. 30-31.
131. 'After the August Putsch: Soviet Union at the Crossroads' in *The Fourth International*, Volume 19, No. 1 [Fall-Winter 1992], p. 109.
132. David North, *The End of the USSR* (Detroit, Labor Publications, 1992), p. 6.
133. Ibid., p. 20.
134. Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* [New York: The Free Press, 1994], p. 23.
135. 'Can We Write the History of the Russian Revolution,' in *On History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), p. 248.
136. Ibid., p. 249.
137. *Leon Trotsky and the Fate of Socialism in the Twentieth Century*, *World Socialist Web Site* [<http://www.wsws.org/exhibits/trotsky/trlect.htm>]
138. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. xxx.
139. 'The Struggle for Marxism and the Tasks of the Fourth International,' Report by David North, March 11, 1992, *Fourth International*, Volume 19, Number 1, Fall Winter 1992, p. 74.
140. David Walsh, 'The Aesthetic Component of Socialism' (Bankstown, NSW: Mehring Books, 1998), pp. 35-37.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](http://www.wsws.org/contact)