The Historical Foundations of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit

Part seven

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The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) of Germany held its Founding Congress May 22-24, 2010, in Berlin. The Congress adopted the document "The Historical Foundations of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit" on May 23.

We are publishing the document in serialized form. Below is the seventh of eleven parts.

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XVII. The founding of the International Committee

126. The post war events posed new political and theoretical challenges for the Fourth International that led to the emergence of new revisionist tendencies. In 1942, a group of German Trotskyists, who had emigrated to the US, had published "Three Theses on the Political Situation and the Political Tasks" which drew very pessimistic conclusions from the defeats of the working class and ruled out the perspective of socialism until the distant future. Rather than comprehending National Socialism as an expression of the decay of capitalism the "retrogressionists" saw it as the birth of a new social system, a modern form of "slave state", which had propelled human development backwards by generations. Before there could be any consideration of socialism, an epoch of national democratic revolutions was on the agenda, in which the working class would play no independent role, but rather subordinate itself unconditionally to bourgeois-led resistance movements. The theses of the retrogressionists, which had much in common with the pessimistic conclusions drawn at the same time by leading representatives of the Frankfurt School, amounted to an argument in favour of class collaboration of the People's Front variety. 68

127. While the retrogressionists and similar tendencies quickly quit the ranks of the Fourth International, the growth of an opportunist tendency led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel produced a major split in 1953. The orthodox Trotskyists, who organised themselves in the International Committee, regarded the stabilization of capitalism as a temporary phenomenon, a product of the combined betrayals of Stalinism and social democracy and the resultant defeats of the working class. They defended the program of the Fourth International and sought ways and means to break the working class from the influence of the bureaucratic apparatuses, and, in this way, prepare for future class struggles. The Pabloite opportunists capitulated to the strengthened bureaucratic apparatuses and ascribed to them a progressive character, thereby liquidating the program of the Fourth International.

128. The conflict developed over the assessment of the states that had been formed at the end of the 1940s in Eastern Europe. The Fourth International hesitated to term the GDR and other so-called "People's Republics" workers' states. The nationalizations were not sufficient, by themselves, for such a definition. Equally important was who had carried them out, and in whose favour and under what conditions. Finally, the Fourth International decided upon the definition "deformed workers' states". The term "workers' states" was utilised to acknowledge that capitalist private property had been eliminated through the expropriation of large estates and capital holdings, and that the property relations developed in this way had to be defended. But the emphasis was on the term "deformed". From their very birth, these states exhibited major deformations, which weighed far more heavily than the progressive character of the nationalizations. They lacked the most important precondition for a socialist society—the active and democratic participation of the working class. There were neither Soviets nor other organs of workers' democracy. The bureaucracy, a privileged caste, exercised a dictatorship, controlling not only the state and political parties, but also the trade unions. The working class had neither political nor any independent union representation.

129. What weighed even more heavily was the damage caused by the Stalinists' crimes to the socialist consciousness of the international working class. The catastrophic defeats in Germany, Spain and other countries, for which Stalinism was responsible; the execution of tens of thousands of communists in the context of the Moscow Trials, and finally the suppression of workers' rebellions in the GDR, Poland and Hungary, repelled millions of workers from supposed communism and pushed them back into the arms of social democracy. "From the world point of view, the reforms realized by the Soviet bureaucracy in the sense of an assimilation of the buffer zone to the USSR weigh incomparably less in the balance than the blows dealt by the Soviet bureaucracy, especially through its actions in the buffer zone, against the consciousness of the world *proletariat*, which it demoralizes, disorients and paralyzes by all its politics and thus renders it susceptible to some extent to the imperialist campaign of war preparations", the Fourth International stated in 1949. "Even from the point of view of the USSR itself, the defeats and the demoralization of the world proletariat caused by Stalinism constitute an incomparably greater danger than the consolidation of the buffer zone constitutes a reinforcement." 69

130. This evaluation, however, was quickly challenged. Michel Pablo, Secretary of the Fourth International at the time, regarded the deformed workers' states as the model for the transition from capitalism to socialism, which would take centuries. In place of the class struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie, he posed the conflict between imperialism and the Soviet Union. "For our movement objective social reality consists essentially of the capitalist regime and the Stalinist

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world," 70 he wrote in 1951, and claimed that a forthcoming war between the United States and the Soviet Union would take the form of a world-wide civil war, which would force the Soviet bureaucracy to play the role of midwife to the social revolution.

131. This perspective amounted to the liquidation of the Fourth International and its sections. If the Stalinist bureaucracy could be transformed into a tool for socialist revolution under the pressure of objective events, then the construction of independent revolutionary parties was rendered obsolete, and even a hindrance; then it was necessary to subordinate "all organizational considerations, of formal independence or otherwise, to real integration into the mass movement wherever it expresses itself in each country". Pablo forced entire sections to dissolve themselves as independent organizations and enter Stalinist parties; a tactic that he called "entrism sui generis". 71

132. The Pabloites applied this same perspective to the reformist parties, the trade unions and the bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonial countries. Under the leadership of Ernest Mandel, the Pabloite United Secretariat specialized in finding theoretical and political formulae that ascribed a revolutionary role to the bureaucratic apparatuses and other nonproletarian forces. Pabloism substituted for Marxism the method of objectivism, which denies the significance of the party for the development of the world revolution: "The standpoint of objectivism is contemplation rather than revolutionary practical activity, of observation rather than struggle; it justifies what is happening rather than explains what must be done. This method provided the theoretical underpinnings for a perspective in which Trotskyism was no longer seen as the doctrine guiding the practical activity of a party determined to conquer power and change the course of history, but rather as a general interpretation of a historical process in which socialism would ultimately be realized under the leadership of nonproletarian forces hostile to the Fourth International. Insofar as Trotskyism was to be credited with any direct role in the course of events, it was merely as a sort of subliminal mental process unconsciously guiding the activities of Stalinists, neo-Stalinists, semi-Stalinists and, of course, petty-bourgeois nationalists of one type or another." 72

133. Pabloite revisionism met with resistance inside the Fourth International. In 1952, the majority of the French section rejected Pablo's course and were therefore bureaucratically expelled. In 1953, the American Socialist Workers Party subjected Pabloite revisionism to a devastating critique. In an open letter, SWP leader James P. Cannon turned to all orthodox Trotskyists around the world. He affirmed the principles on which the Fourth International had been based since its establishment, and summarized them as follows:

• The death agony of the capitalist system threatens the destruction of civilization through worsening depressions, world wars and barbaric manifestations like fascism. The development of atomic weapons today underlines the danger in the gravest possible way.

• The descent into the abyss can be avoided only by replacing capitalism with the planned economy of socialism on a world scale and thus resuming the spiral of progress opened up by capitalism in its early days.

• This can be accomplished only under the leadership of the working class in society. But the working class itself faces a crisis in leadership although the world relationship of social forces was never so favorable as today for the workers to take the road to power.

• To organize itself for carrying out this world-historic aim, the working class in each country must construct a revolutionary socialist party in the pattern developed by Lenin; that is, a combat party capable of dialectically combining democracy and centralism—democracy in arriving at decisions, centralism in carrying them out; a leadership controlled by the ranks, ranks able to carry forward under fire in disciplined fashion.

• The main obstacle to this is Stalinism, which attracts workers through exploiting the prestige of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, only later, as it betrays their confidence, to hurl them either into the arms of the Social Democracy, into apathy, or back into illusions in capitalism. The penalty for these betrayals is paid by the working people in the form of consolidation of fascist or monarchist forces, and new outbreaks of wars fostered and prepared by capitalism. From its inception, the Fourth International set as one of its major tasks the revolutionary overthrow of Stalinism inside and outside the USSR.

• The need for flexible tactics facing many sections of the Fourth International, and parties or groups sympathetic to its program, makes it all the more imperative that they know how to fight imperialism and all its petty-bourgeois agencies (such as nationalist formations or trade union bureaucracies) without capitulation to Stalinism; and, conversely, know how to fight Stalinism (which in the final analysis is a petty-bourgeois agency of imperialism) without capitulating to imperialism. 73

134. The Open Letter made clear the political consequences of Pabloite revisionism by referring to the GDR uprising of June 17, 1953. Pablo had reacted to the uprising by declaring that the leaders of the communist parties would now be forced to make "still more ample and genuine concessions to avoid risking alienating themselves forever from support by the masses and from provoking still stronger explosions." The Open Letter commented: "Instead of clearly voicing the revolutionary political aspirations of the insurgent East German workers, Pablo covered up the counterrevolutionary Stalinist satraps who mobilized Soviet troops to put down the uprising. … Instead of demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops—the sole force upholding the Stalinist government—Pablo fostered the illusion that 'more ample and genuine concessions' would be forthcoming from the Kremlin's *Gauleiters*. Could Moscow have asked for better assistance as it proceeded to monstrously falsify the profound meaning of those events, branding the workers in revolt as 'fascists' and 'agents of American imperialism,' and opening a wave of savage repression against them?" 74

135. The Open Letter came to the conclusion: "The lines of cleavage between Pablo's revisionism and orthodox Trotskyism are so deep that no compromise is possible either politically or organizationally." It was time "for the orthodox Trotskyist majority of the Fourth International to assert their will against Pablo's usurpation of authority." Cannon's Open Letter was supported, amongst others, by the British section and by the expelled French majority. It formed the basis for the foundation of the International Committee of the Fourth International. 75

XVIII. The liquidation of the German section by Pabloism

136. Despite their bloody persecution, the National Socialists and the Stalinists did not succeed in destroying the Trotskyist movement in Germany during the Second World War. As soon as the war came to an end, the International Communists of Germany (IKD) resumed political activity inside the country. The Berlin group alone comprised more than 50 members. Its leader, Oskar Hippe, who had survived the Nazi regime in Germany, was arrested in 1948 by the Stalinists, and spent the following eight years in East German prisons. But it fell to Pabloism to liquidate the German section, thereby interrupting its historical continuity. As a result, petty bourgeois and Stalinist currents were able to set the tone in the student movement of the 1960s unchallenged. When the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (Socialist Workers League) was established in 1971 as the German section of the International Committee, there were no longer any Trotskyist cadre in Germany.

137. After the war, the German Trotskyists opposed the collective guilt thesis of the Stalinists, which deflected attention away from their own

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responsibility in Hitler's seizure of power, and made the working class responsible for fascism. They fought for the building of a new revolutionary party. A political platform of the IKD from 1948 reads: "The first and fundamental condition, from which each German socialist must proceed today, is the realization that the policy of the two traditional 'workers' parties', KPD-SED and SPD, has run into a dead end. In their actions, both parties are directed not by the interests of the working class, but by the great power interests of the Soviet bureaucracy and Western imperialism. Every attempt at 'reforming' one or both these parties is doomed to failure. … After the collapse of the fascist regime, the creation of a new revolutionary party of the proletariat is the first task of a socialist policy in Germany." 76

138. But the IKD soon broke with this perspective. It called for the establishment of a centrist melting pot, or, as it formulated the task, "the aggregation of the independent left groups into an organization which is a visible factor for the workers". 77 In 1951 it joined together with KPD members who supported the Yugoslav leader Tito, to form the *Unabhängige Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (UAPD, Independent Labour Party of Germany). Its programme was limited to reformist demands and contained no reference to socialism or to the Fourth International. Despite financial support from Yugoslavia, the UAPD collapsed within a few months.

139. The IKD followed Pablo's tactic of *entrism sui generis* and dissolved itself into the SPD. It explained that its goal was not to fight within the SPD for the program of the Fourth International: "In the present stage of the development of mass consciousness, discussions of program are not the centre of attention within the broad organizations." The IKD attributed a revolutionary potential to the SPD. It was driven by "social forces ... independently of the will of their present leadership, into ever sharper confrontation with the entire bourgeoisie". In the 1950s and 1960s the prominent German Pabloites Georg Jungclas and Jacob Moneta occupied important posts inside the SPD and trade union bureaucracy. They were in close contact with prominent SPD members such as Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski and Peter von Oertzen. Starting in 1962, Moneta edited the influential trade union newspapers *Metall* and *Der Gewerkschafter*. In 1961, when the SPD expelled the *Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (SDS, Socialist German Student Federation) from the party, the publication *Sozialistische Politik* (SOPO), controlled by the Pabloites, refused to defend them because it was afraid of being "included in the incompatibility resolutions and of being robbed of its existence". 78

140. Only in 1969—three years after the SPD had entered the grand coalition and a powerful extra-parliamentary opposition had developed against it—did the Pabloites again make an independent appearance, with the *Gruppe Internationale Marxisten* (GIM). They adapted completely to the leaders of the student movement. The editorial board members of the GIM's newspaper *Was Tun?* included well-known SDS leaders such as Rudi Dutschke, Gaston Salvatore and Günter Amendt. In 1986, the GIM dissolved itself. The majority united with the Maoist KPD/ML into the *Vereinigte Sozialistische Partei* (VSP), while a minority went into the Greens. After German reunification, the most well-known German Pabloites joined the Party of Democratic Socialism and advised the successors to the SED around Gregor Gysi. For four years, Jakob Moneta sat on the PDS executive committee.

XIX. The defense of Trotskyism by the Socialist Labour League

141. The international stabilisation of capitalism in the 1950s and 60s expanded the room to manoeuvre for reformist, Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist movements. Social reforms and the independence of former colonies encouraged illusions that policies based on national reforms could lead to long term improvements and help overcome the contradictions of capitalism. The International Committee fought uncompromisingly against such illusions and the corresponding pressure of revisionism. The leading role in this struggle was played by the British Trotskyists, under the leadership of Gerry Healy.

142. In 1963, the American SWP capitulated to Pabloism. It rejected all the principles that it had defended ten years earlier in the Open Letter, and fused with the Pabloites in the United Secretariat. The reunification took place without clarifying the points at issue in 1953; referring to a "new world reality" these were declared irrelevant. At the centre of the common view of the SWP and the Pabloites was that a workers' state had developed in Cuba after the seizure of power by the bourgeois-nationalist guerrilla movement of Fidel Castro. The SWP drew the conclusion that the nationalizations carried out by the Castro regime meant a revolution could be made with "blunt weapons" under the leadership of "unconscious Marxists", who would introduce socialism under the pressure of objective circumstances and without the active participation of the working class. The admiration of the SWP for Castroism and the guerrilla war in Latin America was accompanied by an adaptation to petty bourgeois protest politics in the United States. 79

143. The British Socialist Labour League vigorously opposed the SWP. The claim that petty bourgeois guerrilla leaders could establish workers' states without a trace of independent organs of rule of the working class placed the entire perspective of the proletarian revolution in question. In 1961, the SLL wrote in a letter to the SWP: "An essential of revolutionary Marxism in this epoch is the theory that the national bourgeoisie in under-developed countries is incapable of defeating imperialism and establishing an independent national state." With reference to similar movements in Africa and Asia, the SLL continued: "It is not the job of Trotskyists to boost the role of such nationalist leaders. They can command the support of the masses *only* because of the betrayal of leadership by Social-Democracy and particularly Stalinism, and in this way they become buffers between imperialism and the mass of workers and peasants. The possibility of economic aid from the Soviet Union often enables them to strike a harder bargain with the imperialists, even enables more radical elements among the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders to attack imperialist holdings and gain further support from the masses. But, for us, in every case the vital question is one of the working class in these countries gaining political independence through a Marxist party, leading the poor peasantry to the building of Soviets, and recognizing the necessary connections with the international socialist revolution. In no case, in our opinion, should Trotskyists substitute for that the hope that the nationalist leadership should become socialists. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves." 80

144. In another letter from the same year, the SLL categorically rejected any rapprochement with the Pabloites: "The greatest danger confronting the revolutionary movement is liquidationism, flowing from a capitulation either to the strength of imperialism or of the bureaucratic apparatuses in the Labour movement, or both. Pabloism represents, even more clearly now than in 1953, this liquidationist tendency in the international Marxist movement. … It is because of the magnitude of the opportunities opening up before Trotskyism, and therefore the necessity for political and theoretical clarity, that we urgently require a drawing of the lines against revisionism in all its forms. It is time to draw to a close the period in which Pabloite revisionism was regarded as a trend within Trotskyism. Unless this is done we cannot prepare for the revolutionary struggles now beginning." 81

145. Just one year after the unification of the SWP and the Pabloites, the SLL's warning was confirmed in Sri Lanka. In 1964, for the first time, a Trotskyist party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), joined a

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bourgeois coalition government. The LSSP, which had previously enjoyed much support among Tamil, as well as Sinhalese workers, submitted to Sinhala chauvinism and thus heralded the fatal development that led to the twenty-six-year civil war, with nearly 100,000 victims. The Pabloite United Secretariat shared responsibility for this betrayal. It had systematically suppressed discussion over the opportunist course of the LSSP.

146. The systematic struggle waged by the British Trotskyists against the unification of the SWP with the Pabloites created the basis for the founding of the American Workers League (WL) and the Sri Lankan Revolutionary Communist League. The Workers League emerged from a minority faction led by Tim Wohlforth, which, between 1961 and 1964 fought against the growing opportunism of the SWP. The minority faction worked closely with the SLL and, based on the latter's advice, sought to clarify the central questions of international perspective and avoid factional conflicts over secondary or organisational issues. Even after the unification congress of 1963, the minority fought for a principled political discussion inside the SWP. But the events in Ceylon exacerbated the conflicts inside the SWP. The minority was expelled after it demanded, in a letter to the SWP membership, a discussion over the betrayal of the LSSP. The minority went on to form the American Committee for the Fourth International (ACFI) and, in November 1966, founded the Workers League. In Ceylon, Gerry Healy intervened personally to lead a political offensive against the betrayal of the LSSP. It won a response from the best layers of students who, following years of political clarification, founded the Revolutionary Communist League in 1968. The General Secretary of the RCL was Keerthi Balasuriya. Due to their long struggle against Pabloite opportunism, the cadre of the WL and RCL were deeply rooted in the principles of the Fourth International. This proved to be decisive in the struggle against the degeneration of the British section, which broke with the International Committee in 1985-86.

To be continued

NOTES:

68 On the views of the Frankfurt School see point 175; on the "retrogressionists" see David North, *The Heritage We Defend*

69 Quoted in: David North, *The Heritage We Defend*, http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage_index.shtml

70 Ibid

71 Ibid

72 Ibid

73 Ibid

74 Ibid

75 Ibid

76 „George Jungclas 1902-1975. *Eine politische Dokumentation*, Hamburg: Junius 1980, pp150-151

77 Ibid. p156

78 Ibid. p175, 190, 253

79 See: David North, *The Heritage We Defend*, chapter 20 et seq., http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage_index.shtml

80 Quoted in: David North, *The Heritage We Defend*, http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage_index.shtml

81 Ibid

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