

The End of the USSR

David North
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On December 26, 1991, the Soviet Union (also known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)—which emerged out of the socialist revolution of October 1917—was formally dissolved by the Stalinist regime led by Mikhail Gorbachev. The destruction of the Soviet Union was the outcome of the anti-socialist and nationalist policies of the ruling bureaucracy. On January 4, 1992, David North, national secretary of the Workers League (predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party), delivered a report which explained the historical background and significance of the end of the USSR. To mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of this critical event, the World Socialist Web Site is posting North's report.

This report can be purchased as a pamphlet at Mehring.com.

At meetings such as this, it has become virtually obligatory to preface the opening political report with the statement that the most recent events are of a historic character. Nearly five years ago, the International Committee of the Fourth International began to analyze the fundamental changes in the structure of world economy that were leading rapidly to a breakdown of the political equilibrium that had been developed in the aftermath of World War II. Since that analysis was initially presented, in mid-1987, we have witnessed a series of political explosions that have transformed the face of world politics. At almost every major gathering of the party, it has been necessary to concentrate the political discussion on an examination of the political implications of the most recent upheavals.

This meeting will proceed along the same lines. Just four months ago, at our Fifteenth Congress, we devoted a considerable amount of time to analysis of the August putsch in the Soviet Union. While opposing that putsch, which was organized by one faction of the discredited Stalinist bureaucracy, the International Committee and the Workers League warned that Yeltsin's so-called democrats represented "the most ruthless and frothing enemies of the working class" whose aim, we said, "is nothing less than the selling off of all the assets of the Soviet Union and its reduction to a semi-colonial status." Moreover, we stressed that "Without the independent intervention of the working class on the basis of a socialist program, the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union will lead to even more brutal forms of repression and social devastation."

This aggregate of the Midwestern branches is being held little more than three weeks after the meeting of Yeltsin, Shushkevich and Kravchuk in Minsk, where they proclaimed the end of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Confederation of Slavic States, which a few days later became the Confederation of Independent States. This event represents a historical milestone—not because we attribute any special qualities to the miserable and insignificant entity concocted by the three little pigs in Minsk, but because the dissolution of the USSR certainly represents the culmination of Stalinism's betrayal of the principles of the October Revolution and of the Soviet and international working class.

Trotskyism Vindicated

The oft-repeated warnings of the Trotskyist movement, dating all the way back to the 1920s, that Stalinism would lead the Soviet workers to a catastrophe, have been profoundly and tragically vindicated. The massive price increases that were implemented during the past week, whose devastating effect is being felt by tens of millions of Russians and Ukrainians, marks only the beginning of the social disaster that must arise out of the restoration of capitalism.

It is inevitable that the attempt to restore capitalism will lead to explosive struggles by the working class in all the republics, and especially within Russia and the Ukraine. And yet, it is not enough for our movement to await the development of a spontaneous movement against the horrors of capitalism. Rather, the International Committee and the Workers League must prepare the future movement of the working class, both in Russia and internationally, by objectively analyzing the far-reaching implications of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

We must begin by reviewing the historical development of our movement's analysis of the Soviet state and the Stalinist regime. The Left Opposition was formed in 1923 as a response to the growth of bureaucracy within the Soviet state apparatus and within the Communist Party. Bureaucratism emerged in the period of the New Economic Policy, and it fed upon the protracted isolation of the Soviet state, which was bound up with the defeats of the European revolution. The Left Opposition was formed to counteract the growth of these bureaucratic tendencies. Despite the farsightedness of its analysis and program, the Left Opposition was defeated primarily because of the continued defeats suffered by the working class in Europe—defeats, we must remember, that were more and more directly the product of the treacherous policies pursued by the Stalinists on the basis of the reactionary theory of "socialism in one country."

In 1927, Trotsky and the supporters of the Left Opposition were expelled from the Russian Communist Party. Thousands were exiled to the farthest reaches of the Soviet Union. Trotsky was exiled to Alma Ata, which, by the way, was recently the site of the pathetic gathering of the would-be leaders of the Confederation of Independent States. But despite the expulsion and exile of the Marxists who opposed Stalin, the leaders and ranks of the Left Opposition continued to fight for the reform of the Communist Party. The Left Opposition viewed itself as a faction inside the official party and within the Communist International.

This remained the position of our movement until 1933, when the defeat of the German working class by Hitler [1] forced the Trotskyist movement to revise its attitude to the Stalinist parties and to the Soviet regime. *The program of reforming the Stalinist parties was abandoned.* Instead, Trotsky issued the call for the formation of a new, Fourth, International. And arising from that change came the call for the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy inside the Soviet Union in a political revolution.

In defining this revolution as political, rather than social, the Fourth International explained that it still considered the Soviet state an expression of the proletarian dictatorship that had been established in 1917. While that workers state had suffered a profound degeneration, it had to be acknowledged that the property forms created by the October Revolution had not yet been liquidated. The Fourth International called

upon the workers to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy. It warned that the bureaucracy's defense of its own material interests was incompatible with the progressive development of the productive forces of the Soviet Union. But Trotsky explained that the bureaucracy, to the extent that its own privileges were based on the property forms established in the aftermath of the October Revolution, was still compelled to defend these property forms against imperialism.

What Was the USSR?

Trotsky emphatically opposed those within the Fourth International who, on the basis of Stalin's crimes, concluded that the Soviet state could not be defined as a proletarian dictatorship, degenerated or otherwise; that the bureaucracy itself represented some new sort of class formation; and that either capitalism had been restored or a new form of exploitative society, unforeseen by Marxism and ruled by a bureaucratic elite, had been created. Trotsky rejected these positions. Between 1934 and his death in 1940 he repeatedly argued that the Soviet Union remained a workers state, which had to be unconditionally defended by the working class against imperialism in spite of the crimes of the bureaucracy. He wrote:

"The class nature of the state is, consequently, determined not by its political forms but by its social content; i.e., by the character of the forms of property and productive relations which the given state guards and defends. ... The domination of the Social Democracy in the state and in the Soviets (Germany 1918-19) had nothing in common with the dictatorship of the proletariat, inasmuch as it left bourgeois property inviolable. But the regime which guards the expropriated and nationalized property from the imperialists is, independent of political forms, the dictatorship of the proletariat..."

"Stalin serves the bureaucracy and thus the world bourgeoisie; but he cannot serve the bureaucracy without defending that social foundation which the bureaucracy exploits in its own interests. To that extent does Stalin defend nationalized property from imperialist attacks and from the too impatient and avaricious layers of the bureaucracy itself. However, he carries through this defense with methods that prepare the general destruction of Soviet society. It is exactly because of this that the Stalinist clique must be overthrown. But it is the revolutionary proletariat who must overthrow it. The proletariat cannot subcontract this work to the imperialists. In spite of Stalin, the proletariat defends the USSR from imperialist attacks."

Later on in the same passage he wrote: "Hitler defends the bourgeois forms of property. Stalin adapts the interests of the bureaucracy to the proletarian forms of property ... It is necessary that the Soviet workers drive out Stalin and Company. If the proletariat drives out the Soviet bureaucracy in time, then it will still find the nationalized means of production and the basic elements of the planned economy after its victory ... That is a tremendous advantage!"

Trotsky repeatedly came back to this basic point: as long as the bureaucracy, though in the service of its own material interests, still found itself compelled to defend the property forms created on the basis of October, the Soviet Union remained, in its basic tendencies, a workers state and the perspective of the political revolution remained viable. That is, with the overthrow of the bureaucracy, the working class would still be able to build upon the property forms laid down in the aftermath of the October Revolution.

This analysis provided a clear orientation for the party and for the advanced workers. The defense of the USSR was bound up with a perspective which sought to mobilize the working class against the direct

threat posed by imperialist intervention and the long-term consequences of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union. Precisely because we unconditionally defended the Soviet Union against imperialism, we were for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. These different elements of our policy were inseparably connected.

This definition of the class nature of the Soviet state conceded nothing to the Stalinists. If the Soviet state survived for so many decades, despite all the crimes carried out by the bureaucracy, it demonstrated only the astonishing potential of the new property forms created by the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks never based their struggle for power on the potential of state property in a single isolated workers state, especially one that had been erected upon the impoverished foundations of a backward economy. Rather, they based themselves on the potential of the international working class and its revolutionary struggle against world capitalism. If there was any point on which Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg [2] and all the great Marxists of that era were absolutely united, it was the dependence of the Russian Revolution upon the development of the revolutionary movement of the international, and especially, the European proletariat.

For more than 55 years this analysis of the Soviet state has defined our orientation. We have defended it against countless attempts to revise the Marxist conception of the Soviet state and the Stalinist bureaucracy. There were those in the 1930s who claimed that the bureaucracy was a new class. Then, in the late '40s and early '50s, this revisionist conception was turned inside out by the Pabloites [3]—beginning with Deutscher [4], who attributed to the bureaucracy a progressive role. Deutscher argued that Trotsky had exaggerated the counterrevolutionary character of Stalinism, that Stalinism was engaged in a process of political reform, and that Stalin was a sort of proletarian Cromwell [5] who was carrying through the interests of the revolution, albeit in an unfortunately bloody fashion. He said that Trotsky's idea that Stalinism would lead to the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union was an unwarranted and even grotesque exaggeration, however understandable it was, given the tragic situation in which Trotsky found himself in the 1930s. All of these revisionist distortions of Marxism have been exposed. The correctness of Trotsky's evaluation of Stalinism as the gravedigger of the Russian Revolution has been totally vindicated.

The Class Nature of the CIS

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.

A revolutionary party must face reality and state what is. The Soviet working class has suffered a serious defeat. The bureaucracy has devoured the workers state before the working class was able to clean out the

bureaucracy. This fact, however unpleasant, does not refute the perspective of the Fourth International. Since it was founded in 1938, our movement has repeatedly said that if the working class was not able to destroy this bureaucracy then the Soviet Union would suffer a shipwreck. Trotsky did not call for political revolution as some sort of exaggerated response to this or that act of bureaucratic malfeasance. He said a political revolution was necessary because only in that way could the Soviet Union, as a workers state, be defended against imperialism.

The process of degeneration is not one which extends into infinity. At a certain point degeneration becomes death. For the dialectician, the study of the transformation of quantity into quality is among the most important tasks of scientific cognition—though it generally troubles those whose intellectual life is sustained by the stability provided by the supposedly timeless truths of formal logic. In his great document “A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party,” written in 1939 in reply to Burnham [6] and Shachtman [7], Trotsky explained the relation of dialectical logic to the analysis of the Soviet Union:

“Vulgar thought operates with such concepts as ‘capitalism,’ ‘morals,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘workers state,’ etc., as fixed abstractions, presuming that capitalism is equal to capitalism, morals are equal to morals, etc. Dialectical thinking analyzes all things and phenomena in their continuous change while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which A ceases to be A, a workers state ceases to be a workers state.

“The fundamental flaw of vulgar thought lies in the fact that it wishes to content itself with motionless imprints of a reality which consists of eternal motion. Dialectical thinking gives to concepts by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretization, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena. Not capitalism in general, but a given capitalism at a given stage of development. Not a workers state in general, but a given workers state in a backward country in an imperialist encirclement, etc.

“Dialectical thinking is related to vulgar thinking in the same way that a motion picture is related to a still photograph. The motion picture does not outlaw the still photograph but combines a series of them according to the laws of motion. Dialectics does not deny the syllogism, but teaches us to combine syllogisms in such a way as to bring our understanding closer to the eternally changing reality. Hegel in his *Logic* established a series of laws: change of quantity into quality, development through contradictions, conflict of content and form, interruption of continuity, change of possibility into inevitability, etc., which are just as important for theoretical thought as is the simple syllogism for more elementary tasks.”

Trotsky then observed:

“If Burnham were a dialectical materialist, he would have probed the following three questions: (1) What is the historical origin of the USSR? (2) What changes has this state suffered during its existence? (3) Did these changes pass from the quantitative stage to the qualitative?”

When Trotsky, in 1939, posed these questions, it was to refute Burnham’s allegation that one could not define the Soviet Union as a workers state because it no longer corresponded to our programmatic norms: that is, Burnham held that since the workers state which existed in the Soviet Union no longer corresponded to the ideal workers state of the pre-1917 Marxist program, socialists no longer had to pay attention to such concrete issues as, for example, the nature of property relations existing in the USSR.

But if we ponder the same questions posed by Trotsky in 1939, the answers lead us to the conclusion that the workers state has been destroyed. The changes in the policy of the Kremlin regime since 1985—the repudiation of the planning principle in favor of the unfettered operation of the market, the attacks on nationalized industry and agriculture, the constitutional guarantees provided to private ownership of

the means of production and the hiring of wage labor—culminated on December 8, 1991 in the juridical liquidation of the Soviet Union. The declaration in Minsk proclaimed that the new states will be based on the supremacy of the market and private ownership. The Soviet Union, even if in a distorted and degenerate form, still upheld the property forms of October. But no one can claim that this is the aim, stated or unstated, of the regimes which exist in the Confederation of Independent States.

State and Property

It could be argued—and this is the line of Torrance [8] and Slaughter [9], who lead the two factions of the anti-Trotskyist Workers Revolutionary Party in Britain—that at the present time the bulk of property in the various republics, including the Russian republic, remains state property. They infer from this fact that the state remains a workers state. By this logic, we must wait until at least 51 percent of the economy has been privatized before we are permitted to define the CIS as an association of bourgeois states, or of bourgeois states in the process of formation. This is nothing but a fetishistic approach to the forms of property, which holds that the character of the state is determined simply on the basis of an estimate of the numerical ratio between state and private property. Indeed, in the past, the Pabloites often sought to discover the existence of workers states on precisely such shallow empirical criteria.

This has nothing whatsoever to do with Marxism. The new states are actively engaged in the destruction of the old forms of property. They are concentrating all their efforts on the growth of a bourgeoisie—and, in fact, the new bourgeoisie is emerging out of the very bowels of the old Stalinist bureaucracy. If the regime is not able to abolish state property at one fell swoop, it is because the very logic of capitalist restoration dictates that long before most of this nationalized property is actually privatized, it will be destroyed. This process is finding its most extreme expression in what was once East Germany, but it is one which is being carried out all over Eastern Europe.

We certainly would not define the regimes of Havel [10] in Czechoslovakia or of Walesa [11] in Poland as “deformed” workers states. They are clearly bourgeois states. And the same is true for the regimes throughout Eastern Europe. Is there any reason to maintain that there exists a qualitative difference between the regimes of Havel and Walesa or Iliescu [12] and those of Yeltsin, Kravchuk or Shushkevich?

To dwell somewhat longer on the shifting relation between nationalized and private property, let us note that Trotsky foresaw that a counterrevolutionary petty-bourgeois or bourgeois government would rule, at least in the earliest stages of its power, on the basis of existing state property. He wrote:

“But does not history really know of cases of class conflict between the economy and the state? It does. After the Third Estate [13] seized power, society for a period of several years still remained feudal. In the first months of Soviet rule the proletariat reigned on the basis of a bourgeois economy. In the field of agriculture, the dictatorship operated for a number of years on the basis of petty-bourgeois economy. To a considerable degree it does so even now. Should a bourgeois counterrevolution succeed in the USSR, the new government for a lengthy period would have to base itself upon the nationalized property. But what does such a type of temporary conflict between the economy and the state mean? It means a revolution or a counterrevolution. The victory of one class over another signifies that it will reconstruct the economy in the interest of the victors.”

The governments which presently comprise the historical absurdity known as the CIS are committed to the denationalization of property and

to establishing the economic foundations for the rule of a new bourgeoisie. They are committed to the reintegration of their economies into the structure of world imperialism on the basis of the supremacy of the imperialist market, in which the local bourgeois and comprador elite will function as junior partners to the major imperialist powers.

Quite correctly, we refused to conclude that this had happened before it took place. We have sought to rouse the working class in the Soviet Union and internationally against its realization. But the possibility of capitalist restoration has now been transformed into a reality. It is necessary to proceed from the new conditions, not as we wish they were, but as they are. But we must point out that we recognized the imminent danger facing the Soviet Union. I wish to refer comrades to the resolution of our Fourteenth Congress, which was adopted nearly two years ago, in February 1990, and which is reprinted in the current issue of *The Fourth International* journal.

We wrote in section 50: “The Soviet Union, and the state property forms established through the expropriation of the landlords and capitalists of Russia in 1917, today face their greatest threat since the invasion of the Nazi armies 50 years ago.”

When this warning was first raised in discussions in the party, it was taken by some as a polemical exaggeration. After all, in 1941 several hundreds of thousands of German soldiers were inside the borders of the Soviet Union and that was certainly not the case in 1990. So how could one claim that the danger of 1990 was as great as the danger of 1941? The difference, we explained, was that in 1941 the bureaucracy still felt compelled, in the interests of its own privileges, to mobilize the masses to defend the property forms established on the basis of October. We pointed out that if in 1941 the bureaucratic regime had already shifted the axis of its rule to the restoration of private property—as it had by 1985—it would have joined wholesale with the fascists, and welcomed them into Moscow.

Another and even more critical factor was the political consciousness of the Soviet working class in 1941 of the implications of the revolution. Those conquests were very much alive in the political thinking of the masses; and the bureaucracy had, in the interests of its own privileges, to adapt itself to the revolutionary feelings of the workers and present itself as the defender of Lenin’s program.

Spontaneity and the Crisis of Leadership

In that same document we made a number of statements about the problems of the development of revolutionary leadership, and the dangers which arose from the fact that the overthrow of the Stalinist regimes had not been led by the workers under the leadership of Marxists. For example, we wrote in section 33:

“It would be one-sided and dangerous to focus merely on the purely ‘objective’ side of events, as if the breakdown of the East European regimes and emergence of a new revolutionary era proceeded entirely apart from the class struggle and the conscious clash of political forces. The present crisis carries with it the danger that, without the building of a revolutionary leadership, the working class can be thrown back catastrophically. In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, as in the imperialist and the backward capitalist countries, what is posed is not only the disintegration of the old labor bureaucracies, but also the destruction of all of the social gains won by the working class.”

Now, remember, that was written in the midst of the events which were then unfolding in Eastern Europe, when we were fighting against any facile or complacent conception that the fall of the Stalinist regimes would by itself open the road to the victory of the working class through some kind of spontaneous process. We added in section 35:

“The counterrevolutionary danger cannot be averted simply on the basis of the spontaneous movement of the working class. Four decades of Stalinist repression and corruption in Eastern Europe and six decades of its bureaucratic misrule within the Soviet Union and counterrevolutionary collaboration with imperialism internationally have profoundly disoriented the working class. To the extent that the crimes of Stalinism have discredited socialism in the eyes of many workers in Eastern Europe, who mistakenly identify Stalinism with socialism, the working class is in danger of being politically disarmed in the face of a counterrevolutionary conspiracy of imperialism, Stalinism and the petty-bourgeois “democrats.” The dangers that face the working class in Eastern Europe and the USSR arise from the fact that the disintegration of the Stalinist regimes has proceeded much more rapidly than the development of revolutionary consciousness in the proletariat.”

Finally, in section 37, we wrote:

“The historical issues can be posed as follows: will the political revolution in the Stalinist countries develop more rapidly than the restoration of capitalism? Will the socialist revolution in the capitalist countries develop more rapidly than the imperialist drive to World War III?”

Now we must acknowledge that the restoration of capitalism has unfolded more rapidly than the political revolution. We must confront the new tasks which are posed before this movement without in any way adapting to the petty-bourgeois skeptics who invariably will find in the latest turn of events new justification for their rejection of the revolutionary perspective and the historic role which Marxism has ascribed to the working class.

Is the Working Class to Blame?

It is always too easy to discover in the defeats of the working class proof of the nonrevolutionary character of the proletariat. But before one writes off the Soviet working class, or sees in the present developments proof of the impossibility of social revolution, it is necessary to consider the immense achievements and sacrifices which have been made by the Soviet working class in the course of this century: in 1905, in 1917, in the ensuing civil war, in the astonishing social transformation of the Soviet Union prior to World War II, and in the staggering defeat of the fascist armies between 1941 and 1945, in the face of losses whose magnitude is still difficult to comprehend. There is one statistic which provides an idea of the magnitude of losses. It is estimated that more than 90 percent of the male population born between 1923 and 1925 perished in the war.

After the war, the ruins of hundreds of cities, towns and villages were cleared away and the Soviet economy was rebuilt. Along with that came the achievements of the Soviet people in science and culture that up until only recently astonished the entire world. Despite everything, the achievements of the Soviet working class—in the face of harrowing difficulties and worldwide imperialist reaction—is the most powerful historical refutation of the supposedly “nonrevolutionary” role of the working class.

However, considering these achievements, the collapse of the USSR will perhaps seem all the more inexplicable. How is it possible, many socialist-minded workers will ask, that the Soviet workers failed to recognize the necessity of defending what they themselves had fought to create? How is it possible that the juridical liquidation of the Soviet Union was carried through by a miserable group of petty gangsters, acting in the interests of the scum of Soviet society?

We must reply to these questions by stressing the implications of the massive destruction of revolutionary cadre carried out within the Soviet

Union by the Stalinist regime. Virtually all the human representatives of the revolutionary tradition, who consciously prepared and led that revolution, were wiped out. And along with the political leaders of the revolution, the most creative representatives of the intelligentsia, which had flourished in the early years of the Soviet state, were also annihilated or terrorized into silence.

Furthermore, we must point to the deep-going alienation of the working class itself from the state property. Property belonged to the state, but the state “belonged” to the bureaucracy, as Trotsky noted. The fundamental distinction between state property and bourgeois property—however important from a theoretical standpoint—became less and less relevant from a practical standpoint. It is true that capitalist exploitation did not exist in the scientific sense of the term, but that did not alter the fact that the day-to-day conditions of life in factories and mines and other workplaces were as miserable as are to be found in any of the advanced capitalist countries, and, in many cases, far worse.

The Impact of the World Situation

Finally, we must consider the consequences of the protracted decay of the international socialist movement. Of course, Stalinism long ago proclaimed the goal of socialism in one country. But it did not entirely deny the significance of the international workers movement; and, if only for the most cynical reasons, the Kremlin sought to present the Soviet Union as the focal point of an international movement against capitalism. The bureaucracy treacherously betrayed the struggles of the international proletariat. But thousands of the most politically advanced workers in the USSR retained the hope that they would yet live to see the victory of world socialism. These internationalist convictions, which persisted for decades, sustained the morale of millions of Soviet workers.

But the increasing and ever more apparent weakness of the international workers movement had a profound effect on the thinking of Soviet workers. To ever broader layers of the Soviet working class, the goal of socialism, let alone communism, seemed a distant mirage. The chronic problems of the Soviet economy had long ago discredited the perspective of “socialism in one country.” And the more it was discredited, the heavier the burden of the international situation rested upon the Soviet working class.

Especially during the past decade, the collapse of effective working class resistance in any part of the world to the bourgeois offensive had a demoralizing effect on Soviet workers. Capitalism assumed an aura of “invincibility,” although this aura was merely the illusory reflection of the spinelessness of the labor bureaucracies all over the world, which have on every occasion betrayed the workers and capitulated to the bourgeoisie. What the Soviet workers saw was not the bitter resistance of sections of workers to the international offensive of capital, but the defeats and their consequences.

As the direct influence of the working class on the course of world politics steadily diminished, the position of the Soviet working class appeared to be more and more isolated. The situation, unfavorable to the Soviet workers, increased the arrogance and the appetites of the bureaucrat and the petty bourgeoisie. As the Soviet professionals and technocrats received glowing reports from their relatives who had emigrated to the United States, of cars and easy money, they became all the more dissatisfied with the relatively paltry privileges provided to them by the Soviet system. At the same time, the bureaucrats, noting the weakening position of the working class, became increasingly convinced of the possibility of carrying through the restoration of capitalism and basing their own privileges more firmly on the ownership of the means of

production.

Great Struggles Are Inevitable

There is, of course, a difference between the juridical liquidation of the Soviet Union and the liquidation of the fighting capacity of the working class. The two are not the same. We are not by any means implying that there will be no resistance of workers to the impact of capitalist restoration. We have stated many times that capitalism cannot be restored peacefully and democratically, and we maintain that position. There will be no shortage of violence, both in the form of state attacks on the working class and in the resistance of the working class. The state is preparing for a bloody confrontation with the working class. The *Financial Times* has reported that Yeltsin has been devoting most of his time to reorganizing the military forces to deal with opposition provoked by the fall in living standards.

Large sections of the Soviet working class are finding themselves impoverished. At the going world rate for the ruble, the monthly wage of the average worker in the Soviet Union is below \$5.00. That is, almost overnight the position of the Soviet worker is being reduced to virtually that which exists in countries such as Bangladesh.

A few days ago there was a report published in the *New York Times* on the decline of the birthrate in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, a decline which is of the magnitude of those found in periods of civil war and mass epidemics. The experts say the reason for this is that the old system artificially sustained a high birthrate by providing benefits which previously made children worthwhile. In the Soviet Union women were granted pregnancy leave and extended maternity leave of two to three years. But now, millions of people don't know how they're going to feed themselves, let alone how they're going to feed their families. The latest statistics show that in some major cities, the rate of deaths is surpassing the rate of births.

It is clear that the counterrevolution is on the offensive, but it has not consolidated itself. All analogies are limited and when we state that the working class has suffered a defeat, we don't intend to invoke a formal comparison to the events of 1933. Hitler's victory was characterized by a rapid consolidation of state power by his rather highly developed fascist cadre. He came to power on the basis of mass support in the petty-bourgeoisie and he was in a position to rather quickly draw into his hands the threads of power.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that a similar situation exists in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Confederation of Independent States is itself a historical abortion which in no way represents a viable alternative to what previously existed, if by viable we mean a structure that provides a stable foundation for economic development. Up until now, the policy pursued by the bureaucracy, the compradors and the “democrats” has had an entirely negative character. It has been exclusively aimed at destroying the nationalized economy. But the work of an arsonist is far less complex than that of an architect and builder. The arsonist needs only a match and rags soaked in kerosene to destroy what architects and builders labored years to create. Now the arsonists are brought face to face with the results of their own pyromania and it would be, I think, a very serious mistake to attribute to the CIS any enduring viability. Rather, the so-called Confederation of Independent States is only a transitional stage in the ongoing disintegration of the USSR and the republics themselves. Battles between the republics and within the republics are inevitable.

An Example of Lenin's Genius

One has only to contrast the flimsy confederation as it emerged at the end of 1991 to the Soviet Union, which was established in 1922, to see the vast difference in the work carried through by the Bolsheviks in the heroic period of the Soviet revolution and that of the Stalinist-comprador mafia.

Like so many of the original conquests of the October Revolution, the national policy implemented by the Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin, was betrayed by the Stalinists. It has been largely forgotten that the historical origins of the Soviet state, like the nationalized property, initially provided a highly creative solution to the problems of social, cultural and economic development among peoples who had previously lived under conditions of the most extreme backwardness.

I have been recently reading an excellent summary of the national policies implemented by the Bolsheviks in the first volume of E.H. Carr's *History of the Russian Revolution*. Carr insisted, though he himself was not a Marxist, that Lenin's achievement in the creation of the Soviet Union was a work of creative genius that surpassed even the triumph of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Carr stressed that Lenin's program of self-determination provided an answer to problems for which the bourgeoisie of the advanced capitalist states could find no solution:

"The Bolshevik policy of national self-determination," Carr wrote, "had completed its evolution from the recognition of the right of secession in a bourgeois society to the recognition of equality between nations and the cessation of the exploitation of one nation by another in a socialist community of nations. The link between them was Lenin's postulate of the 'voluntary union' through which this consummation would be reached, and which made union an expression and not a denial of the self-determining will of the nation. The postulate rested on Lenin's firm personal conviction that, under socialism, the element of coercion would disappear from government and be replaced by voluntary acceptance of administrative rules. ... What could be said in its favor was that the bourgeois theory of self-determination had by 1919 reached an impasse from which no escape was possible."

The impasse to which Carr referred was the fact that the bourgeois policy of self-determination of nations recognized only formal equality and disregarded the fact that there are oppressed and oppressor nations, that the world is ruled by a handful of imperialist states which hypocritically proclaim the equality of nations while ruthlessly exploiting the scores of backward countries. As Carr explained:

"The capitalist order, in the form which it had assumed of a division of labor between advanced or industrial nations and backward or colonial nations, had rendered real equality between nations unattainable; and that the conception of reunion in a socialist order between really and not merely formally equal nations was a bold and imaginative attempt to break the deadlock. The importance of the policy lay in the steps taken to establish equality by obliterating the division between industrial and agricultural nations ... It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of Soviet nationalities policy either in its historical setting or in its ultimate influence. It was at the outset the crucial factor in Lenin's astonishing achievement of the reassembly of nearly all the former dominions of the Tsars after the disintegration and dispersal of war, revolution and civil war; and it long remained an effective ingredient of Soviet foreign policy in many parts of the world."

The CIS Is Not Viable

To the extent that the Soviet Union promoted the economic development

of the more backward regions of the USSR, the central Asian republics, for example, at least something remained of the initial principles upon which the October Revolution had been based. Though compromised and violated in Stalinist practice, the Union initially provided a framework within which areas of the world, which capitalism had proven incapable of developing, were able to achieve a far higher level of economy and social culture. Had the Soviet workers been able to overthrow the Stalinist regime, there would have been a revival of the democratic potential of the Soviet federation. But there is nothing progressive in the inter-republic relations envisaged by the leaders of the CIS. This structure is as reactionary as it is anachronistic.

The reactionary character of the CIS is most graphically exposed by Yeltsin's statement that he intends to place relations between the republics within the CIS on the basis of "real market values." What does he mean? His argument is that the Russian federation has been unfairly compelled by the old Soviet Union to subsidize the central Asian republics and the others to the tune of some \$33 billion a year. Now Yeltsin intends to cut that subsidy, just as Russia has already cut the subsidy to Cuba.

The bourgeois press, commenting on the nature of relations within the CIS, astutely observes that the policies of self-interest being pursued by the Russian leaders exclude any viable collaboration.

The *Financial Times* noted last week: "Leaders of the new Commonwealth of Independent States meet in the Byelorussian capital of Minsk today. The signs are that the main members will be unable to agree on the basic economic and financial structures to protect them from disastrous disruptions to trade and protection. Only three weeks after Russia, the Ukraine and Byelorussia formed the new Commonwealth it is clear that they have adopted economic measures that will harm rather than support each other's economies."

Bloody fratricidal struggles, similar to those which have wracked Yugoslavia during the past few months, are unavoidable on the basis of such policies. In contrast to the Bolsheviks, who sought to overcome national divisions by centering the struggle along the line of classes and establishing the unity of all oppressed people in struggle against imperialism and its local agents, the national antagonisms will now be manipulated by the restorationists for the purpose of creating a blind alley for the masses.

Once Again on the Problem of Leadership

It is absolutely excluded that the states which comprise this confederation are going to consolidate themselves in the near future. But it would nevertheless be a strategic error to believe that the resurrection of the Soviet Union will somehow arise spontaneously out of a mere eruption of mass discontent. Blind reliance on the capacities of the spontaneous movement is always flawed and dangerous. For a mass movement to develop and to pursue a fruitful path, it must have a perspective. This remains the critical issue. There will be outbursts; there will be strikes. There may even be seizures of factories. But the future of the Soviet masses depends upon the development of revolutionary leadership and the assimilation of the lessons of the entire historic experience of the USSR.

It is this question which is, for us, the most important. It is not possible anywhere in the world for the working class to improvise a leadership. Trotsky's most profound remarks on this question are in one of the last articles he wrote. It was found on his desk at the end of his life, an article titled "The Class, the Party and the Leadership." He wrote the following:

"A great historic shock is necessary to reveal sharply the contradiction between the leadership and the class. The mightiest historical shocks are wars and revolutions. Precisely for this reason, the working class is often

caught unawares by war and revolution. But even in cases where the old leadership has revealed its internal corruption the class cannot immediately improvise a new leadership, especially if it has not inherited from the previous period strong revolutionary cadres capable of utilizing the collapse of the old leading party.”

When we consider the problems of leadership, we are not only dealing with the Soviet Union. In fact our appraisal of the nature of the CIS has as much to do with the problems of the international workers movement as it does with the immediate problems which confront the Soviet working class. The role played by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the liquidation of the Soviet state is the sharpest expression of the relationship of all the old labor bureaucracies in every country to the past conquests of the working class.

An International Phenomenon

What are the lessons which must be drawn from the juridical liquidation of the USSR? After all, the Soviet state and its economic foundations were not overthrown from below. They were dispensed with from above. These transformations have been carried out over the heads of broad masses of people by tiny bureaucratic cliques utilizing their positions of power to paralyze the workers movement and liquidate its past achievements. 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 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.

I would like to call to your attention a point Trotsky made in an article which I’ve already quoted called “Not a Workers Not a Bourgeois State.” He made the following point:

“But let us take a more familiar analogy; that between a workers state and a trade union. From the point of view of our program, the trade union should be an organization of class struggle. What then should be our attitude to the American Federation of Labor? At its head stand manifest agents of the bourgeoisie. Upon all essential questions, Messrs. Green, Woll and Company carry out a political line directly opposed to the interests of the proletariat. We can extend the analogy and say that if until the appearance of the CIO, the AFL accomplished somewhat progressive work, now that the chief content of its activity is embodied in a struggle against the more progressive (or less reactionary) tendencies of the CIO, Green’s apparatus has definitely become a reactionary factor. This would be completely correct. But the AFL does not because of this cease to be an organization of the trade unions.

“The class character of the state is determined by its relation to the

forms of property in the means of production. The character of a workers organization such as a trade union is determined by its relation to the distribution of national income. The fact that Green and Company defend private property in the means of production characterizes them as bourgeois. Should these gentlemen in addition defend the income of the bourgeoisie from attacks on the part of the workers; should they conduct a struggle against strikes, against the raising of wages, against help to the unemployed [in other words, if they were to do everything that Lane Kirkland and the UAW do today]; then we would have an organization of scabs, and not a trade union. However, Green and Company, in order not to lose their base, must within certain limits lead the struggle of the workers for an increase—or at least against a diminution—of their share of the national income. This objective symptom is sufficient in all-important cases to permit us to draw a line of demarcation between the most reactionary trade union and an organization of scabs.”

If we take Trotsky’s definition of a trade union as an organization whose class character is determined by its relation to the distribution of the national income, it is clear that a trade union can carry out policies which are opposed to the long-term interests of the working class without ceasing to be a workers organization.

But when these leaders and organizations actively collaborate with the bourgeoisie in lowering the living standards of the working class, smashing up strikes, framing up workers, and throwing workers onto the unemployment rolls, then, of course, we’re dealing with a profound change in the class character of such organizations.

All this has already happened. Workers are trapped inside organizations which have assumed the character of corporatist syndicates, controlled by petty-bourgeois bureaucracies whose own interests are in no way connected to even a residual defense of the rank and file’s share of the national income. As statistics show, the AFL-CIO, the UAW and its officials have prospered even as union membership falls drastically and workers’ standard of living is at its lowest point in decades.

The workers in the Soviet Union are discovering that they have been utterly and totally betrayed by the party to which they looked for leadership as no other class has ever been betrayed. There, the state power was conquered; but the protracted crimes of the bureaucracy have culminated in the liquidation of the USSR and the reestablishment of capitalism. In every part of the world, including the advanced countries, the workers are discovering that their own parties and their own trade union organizations are engaged in the related task of systematically lowering and impoverishing the working class.

The Historic Role of the Fourth International

Out of this terrible reality emerges the necessity of the Fourth International. It is the only political foundation upon which the international workers movement can be revived and raised to a higher level. Our party has never proceeded on the basis of the national potential of the Soviet state. We long ago explained the limitations of that national foundation. Our confidence stems from a historical analysis. The degeneration and collapse of the Soviet Union does not invalidate the 1917 revolution, especially as the leaders of that revolution explained again and again that the fate of the USSR depended upon the world socialist revolution.

The collapse of the Soviet state must lead to a period of protracted instability not only in those areas which were once part of the Soviet Union. Rather, the breakup of the USSR must exacerbate the global contradictions of the imperialist system.

This is for us, finally, the most critical element in our analysis. The

collapse of the Soviet state does not mean that the contradictions within imperialism that produced the 1917 revolution have been overcome. Here we must deal with the great paradox which no bourgeois commentator cares to notice.

According to the precepts of formal logic, the downfall of the Soviet Union and the supposed refutation of Marxism should have been realized in the midst of rapidly rising living standards and growing prosperity throughout the capitalist world. However, the opposite is taking place. Not since the 1930s has capitalism been in such a state of rotten decay. Mass unemployment, mass degradation, the stagnation of the productive forces, the preparations for World War III—all of this is indisputable.

And, in fact, the decay of world capitalism and the breakup of the Soviet Union are profoundly related. Imperialism did not directly overthrow the Soviet Union. This task was carried out for it by the bureaucracy. In a historical sense, the following happened. Ravaged by crisis, the world bourgeoisie approached Gorbachev and said, “My dear friend, we have reached the point where our system is finished. We ask of you one last favor. You’ve done everything for us. We know that. We appreciate it. You’ve betrayed countless revolutions. You’ve disoriented tens of millions of workers. But hasn’t the time come for you finally to close down the Soviet Union and at least give us the opportunity to exploit more directly the resources of the USSR?” And the Stalinists replied, “In view of the seriousness of your crisis, we agree that the time has come to place the resources of the USSR at your disposal.”

This dialogue might sound fantastic; but listen to what the *Financial Times* wrote last week:

“Perhaps our calendars should be adjusted by ten years for 1991 has a decidedly millennial feel to it. Communism collapsed in most of the countries which had adopted it, but if they had held out the former leaders might now be celebrating the collapse of capitalism under its internal contradictions.”

That’s how conscious the bourgeoisie is of the real state of affairs. In a historic sense, imperialism has been calling on the bureaucracies in the former workers states, in the trade unions, in the old Labor and social democratic parties to come and render unto Caesar what is due to Caesar in order to stave off the disintegration of its order and to unify with it against the working class.

Imperialism Is in Disarray

But even with their assistance it will not be possible for imperialism to restabilize its world order. Although the bourgeoisie may have dreamt for decades about the fall of the USSR, now that the event has finally come, it is hard-pressed to exploit it. Certainly for the American bourgeoisie, it is a dream which has been realized too late in the game.

All the old relationships which guaranteed or provided the stability to world imperialism, including the all-important relationship between Stalinism and imperialism, have broken down. All the basic elements of our perspective have, in the course of the past few months, been dramatically realized, not only in the collapse of the Soviet Union, but in the deepening conflict between the United States and the other major imperialist powers.

It may seem hard to believe that only one year ago the Gulf War began. The media became intoxicated with its euphoric celebrations of American victories. The Workers League was not in the least impressed, and maintained, based on the perspectives of the International Committee, that the war would not alter the more profound historical tendencies of American decline. We were quite confident that the euphoria would soon subside as the historical weakness of American imperialism became more

apparent. We did not have to wait too long.

As we meet, Bush is traveling to Japan as the leader of a pathetic group of corporate Babbitts who all are presiding over failing conglomerates incapable of maintaining their position in the world market. Far more important than Bush’s trip is the objective logic of the mighty force called world economy which is dominating events, throwing overboard all the subjective calculations of the capitalist leaders.

The breakup of the Soviet Union intensifies the world crisis, and this will provide the possibility for a fresh offensive of the working class. But its development and success depend upon the building of our movement. We base our work on an unshakeable confidence in the role of the Fourth International. To the extent that we are able to establish our authority in the working class, the confusion about Stalinism will be dissipated. If there is one clear advantage that arises from these developments, it is that Stalinism, the most accomplished and ruthless enemy of Marxism, has been utterly smashed. One might even say that with the collapse of Stalinist parties, the political lie has seen the end of its golden age. Stalinism no longer presents itself as a challenger or competitor for the leadership of the working class. We can take advantage of that situation if we confront the working class with the situation it faces, and provide leadership in its ever more bitter struggles.

Only the Fourth International can explain to workers what is happening. Only our movement emerges from this catastrophe with its integrity intact, not only in the Soviet Union, where our movement is gaining supporters consistently, but among the advanced workers in the capitalist countries who will come to realize the necessity of revolutionary leadership.

I said before that there can be no spontaneous revival of the USSR. This is true in a double sense. Not only is it impossible for the Soviet Union to be regenerated simply through the unconscious struggles of the working class; the reestablishment of a Soviet federation is only possible as a product of a European and, indeed, worldwide revolution. Let us not forget that the present borders of the USSR were themselves, to a great extent, determined not only by the victory of the Bolsheviks over the Whites, but also by the defeat of the European revolution between 1920 and 1923. The revival of the revolution in the USSR will draw its inspiration from the development of the international revolution led by the Fourth International.

The Lessons Must Be Drawn

Let me conclude with the following. The October Revolution constitutes the great event of our epoch. We don’t minimize the significance of the juridical liquidation of the USSR; but just as that does not mean the liquidation of the fighting capacity of the working class, it also does not negate the historical implications of October. The Paris Commune [14] lasted 73 days and changed world history. The workers state which issued from October lasted 74 years. The next stage in the revolutionary development of the working class will be based upon an assimilation within the working class of the essential historical lessons of that experience.

This education will proceed in the midst of the greatest convulsions in history. The 1990s is not going to be like any other decade since the end of the Second World War. Millions of people are going to see imperialism for what it really is. The democratic mask is going to be torn off. The idea that imperialism is compatible with peace is going to be exposed. The very elements which drove masses into revolutionary struggle in the past are once again present. The workers of Russia and Ukraine are going to be reminded why they made a revolution in the first place. The American workers are going to be reminded why they themselves in an earlier

period engaged in the most massive struggles against the corporations. The workers of Europe are going to be reminded of why their continent was the birthplace of socialism and Karl Marx.

In our 1990 document we asked: "Will the political revolution develop more rapidly than the restoration of capitalism? Will the world socialist revolution develop more rapidly than World War III?" As it happened, the political revolution did not develop in time to prevent the destruction of the USSR. Now, the danger is that if the world revolution does not develop in the historical period into which we are now entering, civilization will be destroyed. World economy is once again out of control. The ability of the bourgeoisie to coordinate their policy is being routed by the elemental force unleashed by the eruption of the contradiction between world economy and the nation-state system. The capitalists cannot control it. They have no answers. They've given up even trying to find an answer.

The GATT talks have disintegrated. International monetary policy is in disarray. Until recently, the world bourgeoisie attempted to coordinate the fluctuations of currency and interest rates. But during the very week when the United States dropped its interest rates to the lowest point in over a quarter of a century, the German bank raised the national interest rates to their highest level since the founding of the Bundesrepublik, thus driving a chasm between the monetary policies of the most powerful imperialist nations in the world and creating an instability which no government can control.

When we say that everything depends upon the development of world revolution, this is not an idle phrase. In the final analysis, the collapse of the Soviet Union is the product of the terrible delay of world socialist revolution. The Stalinists were a mechanism utilized by imperialism to hold back the world socialist revolution; but ultimately the basic cause of the collapse of the USSR was the impossibility of maintaining a workers state in one country. As Lenin, Trotsky and all the great Marxists said: either the world socialist revolution comes to the rescue of the Soviet Union or the Soviet Union will be destroyed. One might add that even if there had existed a regime in the Soviet Union that did everything right, if the Soviet Union remained isolated it would be destroyed.

Luxemburg made this point in 1917-1918 in some of her great articles on the Russian Revolution. She was critical of the politics of the Bolsheviks. This is not the place to go into that at great length. Certain of her criticisms were very farsighted. Some were wrong. But the most important thing she said in her criticism was that all the mistakes of the Bolsheviks, so to speak, came out of the impossible position in which the Russian Revolution had been placed due to the betrayal of the international proletariat by social democracy. In other words, she attributed all the problems of the Bolsheviks to the betrayal and delay of the world socialist revolution.

In the period after the death of Lenin, the primary cause for the defeats of the working class became the politics of Stalinism. But we must stress again that the ultimate cause of the breakdown of the Soviet Union was the fact that the Russian Revolution did not extend into the advanced countries. And we must again warn that if the world socialist revolution is unable to advance in the midst of the deepening world crisis, then mankind is doomed.

The Education of the Working Class

As a practical question, the development of the world socialist revolution is linked to a working class rebellion against the old organizations. Things in the next period are not going to be easy. In every country of the world the working class is going to face a brutal struggle,

but that struggle will have a beneficial effect. It is going to purge and expose all that is rotten. A better and healthier layer will emerge to the forefront of the struggles of the working class. There is a changed relation between our movement and this emerging spontaneous development within the working class. We will develop it, train it, guide it, and provide it with a perspective. That is what has been lacking everywhere in the world. There will be no absence of opportunities. A social and political crisis is developing rapidly all over the world and within the United States. The bourgeoisie itself is deeply divided and disoriented and it is possible to detect in their media an element of desperation.

More and more the capitalists depend entirely on the ability of the old bureaucracies, the old workers organizations that have been transformed into bureaucratic concentration camps, to hold the working class under control. Yes, there was an aura of invincibility; but there is a hell of a difference between an aura and the real thing. The first real resistance of the working class will unleash a panic within the ruling class.

Though it raises great dangers, the smashup of the Soviet bureaucracy also clears the decks. The greatest source and material foundation of corruption and opportunism has been put out of business. The Communist Party was being subsidized to the tune of millions by the Kremlin. Rotten, corrupt intellectuals were being paid to flatter the Soviet bureaucracy. Now all those who based themselves upon Stalinism have lost their credibility within the working class.

The workers must draw the lessons of these events. We don't, however, expect them to draw the lessons by themselves. We do expect the workers to fight. That is not the problem. They have fought inside the Soviet Union. There have been big strikes. There were big strikes in America during the last decade; but these strikes were not based on a historic perspective. The working class cannot come to consciousness without the intervention of the Marxist party. That is our role. We have to educate the working class. We will educate the working class on the basis of the great historical lessons through which the class has passed in the course of the century.

Everything our movement has stood for over the last 69 years has been vindicated. All the old pretentious Stalinist boasts about "real existing socialism," "peaceful coexistence"—all of that has gone into the dustbin of history. What stands out is the astonishing prescience of the analysis advanced by Trotsky and developed by the International Committee in the struggle against all those who attacked the perspective and program of the Fourth International: of the world revolution, of building the independent revolutionary party of the working class on a world scale. That perspective has now been irrefutably vindicated, even if in a manner which is initially tragic.

History, as Trotsky once said, is a wicked stepmother from which the working class learns only through the most bitter experience. The movement of the working class is full of great tragedy and proceeds through great pain; but that is the way in which a class learns its lessons. But our movement, precisely because it has stood for principles, emerges from this tremendous crisis, in which everyone else has been disgraced, with its integrity intact. We are confident that our analysis and program will find a world audience. Trotskyism is on the march. Our task is to fight for our program within the working class. We must recognize the immense historical authority with which our movement speaks. Every comrade should be proud of that and determined to make 1992 the year which sees a great transformation in the practical relationship between the Workers League and the International Committee to the international working class.

Notes:

1. **Adolf Hitler** (1889-1945), a fascist demagogue, became the spokesman and all-powerful dictator on behalf of decaying German imperialism. From petty-bourgeois origins, Hitler was embittered by Germany's defeat in World War I and the conditions of veterans under

the Weimar Republic. A sworn enemy of the proletariat and communism, he expounded his racist and reactionary views in *Mein Kampf*. He became a leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazis), which, backed by big capital and taking advantage of the impotence of the Communist and Social Democratic parties, took power in 1933. Trotsky described Hitler's role in this way: "Political art consisted in fusing the petty bourgeoisie into oneness through its common hostility to the proletariat. What must be done to improve things? First of all, throttle those who are underneath. Impotent before big capital, the petty bourgeoisie hopes in the future to regain its social dignity through the ruin of the workers." [return]

2. **Rosa Luxemburg** (1871-1919) was one of the outstanding leaders in the history of the Marxist movement and a prominent opponent of revisionism and opportunism before World War I. A founder of the Polish Social Democratic Party and a leader of the left wing of the German Social Democratic Party, she opposed the party's support of World War I. Although jailed in 1915, she and Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919) organized the Spartakusbund, which later became the Communist Party of Germany. Freed by the revolution of November 1918, she helped lead the Spartacist uprising. This was crushed in January 1919, and she and Liebknecht were assassinated on the orders of Gustav Noske, Social Democratic minister of war in the Ebert-Scheidemann government. Her best-known work is *Reform or Revolution*, a polemic against the German revisionist Eduard Bernstein. [return]

3. **Pabloites**. Members of a revisionist current which developed inside the Fourth International during the late 1940s and early 1950s under the leadership of Michel Pablo. Its best-known spokesman was the Belgian professor Ernest Mandel. Pabloism developed into a pro-Stalinist tendency, necessitating a split in the Fourth International in 1953, when the orthodox Trotskyists, under the leadership of the American SWP leader, James P. Cannon, formed the International Committee of the Fourth International. The Pabloites initially claimed that the establishment of "buffer states" in Eastern Europe after World War II by the Soviet bureaucracy (Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc.) revealed that under the pressure of the movement of the working class, Stalinism would be obliged to play a revolutionary role, in spite of its treacherous past. Pabloism hailed the Eastern European states as the first examples of the way in which socialism was to be achieved in the next historical period, which could last for centuries. In fact, these states collapsed in 1989. Later they asserted that the petty-bourgeois leadership of Fidel Castro had established a workers state in Cuba independently of the revolutionary mobilization of the working class. In many countries of Latin America, the Pabloites promoted the theory of peasant-based guerrilla warfare, leading to the wholesale extermination of the cadre of Trotskyism throughout the continent. Although the Pabloites have presented themselves as representatives of Trotskyism, their role has been that of an agency of imperialism and their opportunist influence decimated the forces of Trotskyism during the 1950s and 1960s. Following the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Pabloites have entered into an open alliance with Stalinism. Ernest Mandel evolved into a bourgeois politician. [return]

4. **Isaac Deutscher** (1907-1967) was active in the Left Opposition in Poland. He became a centrist critic of Trotskyism and broke with Trotsky over the founding of the Fourth International. He authored the arguments put forward by the Polish delegates at the founding conference of the Fourth International opposing its establishment. Deutscher emigrated to England in 1942 and became a contributor to *The Economist*. In 1948 he published a critical but ultimately favorable biography of Stalin, whom he credited with having, in a contradictory way, realized the conquests of the October Revolution. Deutscher wrote a biographical trilogy of Trotsky, *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed* and *The Prophet Outcast*, the third volume of which contains a diatribe against the Fourth International,

which he characterized as a fiasco. His views profoundly influenced a layer within the Fourth International, in particular, Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. [return]

5. **Oliver Cromwell** (1599-1658) was the leader of the English bourgeois revolution. One of the most uncompromising of the Puritans, he achieved prominence as a military commander in the civil war, raising a New Model Army of those with strong religious convictions and military skill. This army defeated the Royalists, and also rebellions in Scotland and Ireland. After the civil war, Cromwell not only pushed hard for the execution of the king, he also opposed and defeated movements inside and outside the army, such as the Levelers and Diggers, which demanded greater democracy and social equality. After this he became virtual dictator, though refusing the title of king. Cromwell did much to extend the basis of capitalism, not only in domestic affairs, but through colonial wars. Cromwell tried many forms of government such as military rule and a nominated Parliament, but died as Lord Protector without having discovered a satisfactory political alternative to the monarchy. Though the Stuarts were restored less than two years after his death, the movement he led irrevocably altered the relations between the classes and the balance of political power. [return]

6. **James Burnham** (1905-1987) was the ideological leader of the petty-bourgeois opposition in the American Socialist Workers Party in 1939-40 and a declared opponent of dialectical materialism. The opposition sought to revise the party's position of defense of the Soviet Union following the Stalin-Hitler pact. Burnham deserted to the camp of imperialist reaction little more than a month after the split in April 1940. In his book, *The Heritage We Defend*, David North observes: "The struggle waged by Trotsky and the SWP against the Burnham-Shachtman tendency was a political milestone in the development of the SWP into a proletarian Marxist party. It marked a decisive break by the SWP with petty-bourgeois propagandists who were alien to the workers movement and who succumbed to the class pressures exerted by imperialism upon the revolutionary vanguard on the eve of America's entry into World War II." [return]

7. **Max Shachtman** (1903-1972), together with James Burnham, led the petty-bourgeois opposition in the SWP. Shachtman had been a founder of the American Trotskyist movement in 1928, and edited several books and pamphlets by Trotsky. After the split in 1940, Shachtman organized the Workers Party, later renamed the Independent Socialist League. In 1958 he joined the right wing of the Socialist Party. [return]

8. **Sheila Tarrance** (1943-) broke from the Trotskyist movement in 1985 at the time of the collapse of the British Workers Revolutionary Party, of which she was then the assistant general secretary. Active during her teens in a Zionist youth organization and the Labour Party youth movement, Tarrance was won to the Trotskyist movement in the early 1960s, during the entry work carried out in the Labour Party by the British Trotskyists. In her capacity as assistant general secretary of the WRP, her work focused exclusively on organization. Attracted by the activism which characterized the WRP during the years of its decline, she became notorious within the movement for her indifference to political questions. Following her break with Trotskyism, she initially supported Gerry Healy, who was expelled in 1985 from the International Committee of the Fourth International and the WRP, then its British section. An ardent supporter of bourgeois nationalism, Tarrance promoted the line that those who build working class parties in countries such as Iran should be executed. Little more than one year after breaking with the ICFI, the Healy-Tarrance tendency underwent a further split, with Healy arguing that Gorbachev was the leader of the political revolution in the Soviet Union. Tarrance currently heads a petty-bourgeois radical group, one of the remnants of the WRP, and is uncritically promoting a variety of petty-bourgeois nationalists such as Fidel Castro, Muammar Gaddafi and the leadership of the PLO. [return]

9. **Cliff Slaughter** (1928-) was a leading member of the Trotskyist of Communist Youth in 1944 and the Romanian Communist Party in movement in Britain from the time he left the Communist Party in the late 1950s until February 1986, when he led a split from the ICFI. Slaughter's break was based on an attack on the history of the Fourth International written by the former general secretary of the WRP, Michael Banda, who left the WRP to join the Communist Party later in 1986. While a member of the ICFI, Slaughter played an important role in the struggle against Pabloite revisionism. During the period of the degeneration of the WRP, beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he provided the theoretical justification for the increasingly opportunist political line of the leadership. Beginning in the early 1970s, he led a consistent onslaught on the program of Trotskyism. In 1972 Slaughter wrote that revolutionary parties would not be built simply "by bringing the program of Trotskyism onto the scene of political developments." From 1982 onwards, Slaughter played the crucial role in attempting to suppress the criticisms of the WRP's line which were raised in the ranks of the IC. At the time of the 1985-86 split, Slaughter, having collaborated closely with Healy on an unprincipled basis for many years, developed the theory of "equal degeneration" of the IC sections and attempted to steer the IC in a pro-Stalinist direction. After the split he developed political relations with a number of Pabloite tendencies, including Nahuel Moreno of Argentina. In December 1990 Slaughter wrote: "We must not simply proceed as if there is some 'real' Marxism which we have always known and somehow preserved and counterpose it to the false consciousness resulting from years of Stalinism." Following a trip to the Soviet Union, he claimed: "Marxists cannot start from the assumption that the working class must defend itself against the restoration of capitalism." Slaughter today leads one of the factions of the WRP. [return]

10. **Vaclav Havel** (1936-2011), a Czech playwright and anticommunist political dissident during the 1970s and 1980s, replaced the Stalinist Gustav Husak as president of Czechoslovakia in December 1989. Havel participated in the mass demonstrations of students and workers in the closing weeks of 1989, a movement he dubbed the "velvet revolution." As the leader of the petty-bourgeois Civic Forum, he played an important role in calling off the strikes of factory workers, which convinced the Stalinist bureaucracy to enter into negotiations with Civic Forum. Havel's first prime minister was Marian Calfa, a leading Stalinist who had been responsible for the crackdown on dissidents in the first part of 1989. In the following two years Havel allied himself with imperialism to reintroduce the capitalist market into Czechoslovakia at the expense of the living standards of the working class. [return]

11. **Lech Walesa** (1942-), one of the principal leaders of the Solidarity trade union formed in Poland in 1980 following a strike in the shipyards in the northern port of Gdansk. Walesa, an electrician, was on the right wing of the Solidarity movement and was promoted into the leadership by figures such as Jacek Kuron. Walesa was one of several leaders of Solidarity who were opposed from the outset to the overthrow of the Stalinist regime. When martial law was declared on December 13, 1981 by Stalinist President Wojciech Jaruzelski, Walesa was initially detained under house arrest. He was later imprisoned along with other leaders of the union. In April 1989, an accord was reached between the government and Solidarity leaders and, with the support of Walesa, Solidarity leader Tadeusz Mazowiecki became prime minister under Jaruzelski following elections in June. Walesa backed the Solidarity-Stalinist government, which was the first in Eastern Europe to implement an economic policy of "shock therapy," the rapid introduction of capitalist measures. He became president of Poland in December 1990. [return]

12. **Ion Iliescu** (1930-), Romanian Stalinist, became president of Romania in December 1989, following the fall of the Stalinist regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. Iliescu formed a National Salvation Front government which executed Ceausescu on December 25. A former classmate of Mikhail Gorbachev at Moscow State University, Iliescu joined the Union

in 1953. Under Ceausescu, he became minister of youth problems in 1967, served for 19 years on the Central Committee and was a candidate member of the party's Politburo before his removal in disgrace in 1981. Upon assuming office as president in 1989, he declared his allegiance to private property and the market economy. [return]

13. **Third Estate.** Trotsky is referring to the revolutionary bourgeoisie which seized power from the feudal nobility in the French Revolution beginning in 1789. In medieval France three "estates," or social groupings, the clergy, nobles and burghers, were represented in a body known as the States-General. They met in May 1789 after a 175-year interval and on June 17 were transformed by the decision of the deputies of the third estate into the National Assembly, which proclaimed itself the Constituent Assembly on July 9 and became the supreme organ of revolutionary France. [return]

14. **Paris Commune.** The working class revolutionary government set up by the proletarian revolution in Paris on March 18, 1871. In the aftermath of the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, the bourgeoisie of France had wanted to surrender Paris to the Germans, so as to protect themselves from the revolutionary anger of the proletariat. The Commune was the first example of proletarian dictatorship in history, described by Karl Marx as "essentially a working-class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labor." The Commune existed for 73 days until May 28, 1871 when it was cruelly suppressed by the bourgeoisie, led by Thiers. Marx and Engels concluded from the experience of the Commune that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes." The state of the bourgeoisie would have to be smashed. [return]



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