

# Preface to the thirtieth anniversary edition of *The Heritage We Defend*

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*The Heritage We Defend* was published thirty years ago, in 1988, in the aftermath of the desertion of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) of Britain from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). As the International Committee subsequently proved in numerous documents, the WRP's renegacy was the outcome of its retreat, over a period spanning more than a decade, from the Trotskyist principles that it had once played a critical role in defending. [1] The WRP, founded in 1973, was the successor organization of the British Trotskyist movement, which, in 1953, had formed the International Committee in alliance with the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the French Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI). Gerry Healy (1913–1989), the leader of the WRP, had signed the historic "Open Letter to the World Trotskyist Movement," written by James P. Cannon (1890–1974), which denounced the Pablo-Mandel revisions of the program of the Fourth International. The "Open Letter," issued in November 1953, articulated the foundational principles of the ICFI:

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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. [2]

The "Open Letter" summarized concisely the strategic conceptions of Trotskyism that had been repudiated by Pablo and Mandel. Pabloism replaced the Trotskyist movement's characterization of Stalinism as counterrevolutionary with a theory that attributed to the Kremlin bureaucracy and its agencies a historically progressive and revolutionary role. Rather than working for the overthrow of the Stalinist regimes in a series of political revolutions, the Pabloites foresaw a process of bureaucratic self-reform, with Trotskyists acting as advisers to the Stalinist leaders, urging them toward a more left-wing course. The "deformed workers states" of Eastern Europe, ruled by the local Stalinist agents of the Kremlin regime, were destined, according to Pablo and Mandel, to last for centuries.

As amazing as it may seem in light of all that has occurred in the past thirty years, this apologetic attitude toward Stalinism remained the perspective of the Pabloite organizations right up to the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes of Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union between the years 1989 and 1991. The International Committee's defense of the programmatic heritage of the Fourth International—above all, its insistence on the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism—was derided by its Pabloite opponents as "sectarianism." And yet, little more than one year after the publication of *The Heritage We Defend*, the historical analysis, theoretical conceptions, and program defended in this book were to be vindicated by the political events that erupted throughout Eastern Europe and within the USSR itself.

The Pabloites' capitulation to Stalinism was just one aspect of their abandonment of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. They rejected the fight for Marxist consciousness in the working class and the establishment of the political independence of the working class from all national bourgeois and petty-bourgeois agencies of imperialism.

Despite the central role that the British Trotskyists played in defense of the Fourth International in the 1950s and 1960s—especially in their opposition to the American SWP's break with the International Committee and reunification with the Pabloites in 1963—their own drift toward revisionism became increasingly evident in the 1970s, particularly after the founding of the Workers Revolutionary Party in November 1973. In the early 1960s, the British Trotskyists of the Socialist Labour League (predecessor of the WRP) had subjected the SWP's glorification of Fidel

Castro's radical nationalism to withering criticism, rejecting the claim that the Cuban leader's petty-bourgeois guerrilla army had proven that the path to socialism did not require the building of a Trotskyist party, based on and rooted in the working class.

But by the mid-1970s, the WRP began to exaggerate the anti-imperialist program of bourgeois national movements in the Middle East—such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the radical nationalist regime of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi—in a manner that closely resembled the anti-Trotskyist policies of the Pabloites. The WRP's reversion to Pabloism was not merely the product of the personal errors of individual leaders. Under conditions in which the organized workers' movement throughout the world was still dominated by the Stalinist and Social Democratic parties and trade unions, the Trotskyist organizations were vulnerable to the social and ideological pressure exerted by the mass radicalization of broad sections of the petty bourgeoisie, especially student youth, during the 1960s and early 1970s.

The challenge of integrating recruits from the petty-bourgeoisie into the Trotskyist movement required not only a firm political and practical orientation to the working class, based on an unrelenting struggle against the Stalinist and Social Democratic bureaucracies. It also demanded a persistent theoretical critique of the many forms of pseudo-Marxism promoted by the Pabloites—especially the “Frankfurt School” (i.e., Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Reich and Marcuse), “Western Marxism” (such as Gramsci), anti-Trotskyist “state capitalists” and “New Class” theorists (Lefort, Castoriadis and Djilas), and, of course, the innumerable forms of radical nationalism (Castroism, Guevarism, the writings of Fanon and the speeches of Malcolm X), to name only the most widely celebrated forms of petty-bourgeois radical thought and politics. To this lengthy list we can also add the influence of Maoism, a viciously reactionary variant of Stalinism, embraced by innumerable petty-bourgeois intellectuals, which led workers and youth all over the world into one bloody defeat after another.

The WRP's opportunist policies encountered opposition within the International Committee. Between 1982 and 1984, the Workers League, the American Trotskyist organization, developed a comprehensive critique of the WRP's neo-Pabloite policies. The principal WRP leaders—consisting of Healy, Michael Banda (1930–2014) and Cliff Slaughter (1928–)—suppressed the Workers League's efforts to organize a discussion of its criticisms within the International Committee. [3] These unprincipled efforts led to a political crisis within the WRP in the autumn of 1985. Still determined to evade a discussion of the theoretical and political issues underlying the breakdown of the WRP, Slaughter and Banda attempted to blame the International Committee for the opportunist course that the British section had pursued over the previous decade.

In February 1986, the WRP published a document announcing its break with Trotskyism. Written by Michael Banda, it was titled “27 Reasons Why the International Committee Should Be Buried Forthwith and the Fourth International Built.” The WRP released this document with great fanfare, predicting that it would take its place among the classics of Marxism. In reality, Banda's document was an amalgam of distortions, outright lies and half-truths, whose purpose was to discredit not only the International Committee, but also the entire history of the Fourth International. The very title of Banda's essay exposed its political dishonesty. If only a fraction of his “27 Reasons” was sustainable, it would be impossible to justify the continued existence of the Fourth International. Following the conclusions that flowed inexorably from his own arguments, Banda—less than a year after completing his document—published a vile denunciation of Trotsky and declared his limitless admiration for Stalin. Banda's political evolution anticipated the repudiation of Trotskyism by all those in the leadership and membership of the WRP who had endorsed his document. A substantial number joined the Stalinist movement. Others passed over to the imperialist camp and

became active participants in the NATO war against Serbia. The largest group, encouraged by Cliff Slaughter, repudiated the entire legacy of the Lenin-Trotsky conception of the revolutionary party, abandoned the fight for socialism, and concentrated on making their personal lives as comfortable as possible.

From the moment it received Banda's document, the International Committee understood the necessity for a detailed reply. I was charged with this assignment. Within two months, weekly installments of *The Heritage We Defend* began appearing in the newspapers published by the sections of the International Committee. I had not expected that the reply to Banda would require a book of more than 500 pages. However, as I studied Banda's document, I realized that he was seeking to take advantage of the fact that the history of the Fourth International—particularly of the critical years between the assassination of Trotsky in 1940 and the 1953 split with the Pabloites—had never been adequately researched and was largely unknown to the existing cadre of the Trotskyist movement. It was necessary to review the history of the Fourth International and, on this basis, educate its cadre of the International Committee.

Three decades after its initial publication, I believe that *The Heritage* has stood the test of time. While retaining substantial contemporary value as an introduction to the history of the Fourth International, *The Heritage* also examines problems relating to Marxist theory, program and strategy that remain highly relevant to the present-day struggle to build the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

*The Heritage We Defend* is the only account of the history of the Fourth International that employs the method of historical materialism in explaining the emergence of political tendencies and the struggle between them. Rejecting the subjective approach (which Banda's diatribe exemplified) that proceeds from the characteristics of individual leaders, good or bad, and their motives, noble or ignoble, *The Heritage* seeks to identify the objective social and political processes—arising from the contradictions of world capitalism and the global and national development of the class struggle during and in the aftermath of the second imperialist world war—that underlay the conflicts within the Fourth International. This history places central emphasis not on the subjectively conceived intentions of the main political actors—Cannon, Pablo, Mandel and Healy—but, rather, on the real objective driving forces of the class struggle, which, to borrow the words of Engels, “in the minds of the acting masses and their leaders—the so-called great men—are reflected as conscious motives...” [4]

*The Heritage* analyzes, within the context of the complex and rapidly changing conditions of the World War and its aftermath, the conflicts within the Fourth International that foreshadowed the struggle following the Third World Congress of 1951 that culminated in the split in November 1953. The book draws attention to revisionist tendencies that emerged in the 1940s, which reflected the rightward shift in the political orientation of large sections of the petty-bourgeois radical intelligentsia.

The conflicts that developed in the 1940s are best understood as the continuation of the 1939–40 factional struggle inside the Socialist Workers Party. The fight led by Trotsky in the last year of his life against the “petty-bourgeois opposition” of James Burnham (1905–1987), Max Shachtman (1904–1972) and Martin Abern (1898–1949) was of such an intense character that it has generally been treated as a distinct and self-contained episode in the history of the Fourth International. It began in September 1939 with the outbreak of World War II and continued until April 1940. The minority split from the SWP and formed the Workers Party. One month later, James Burnham, who had functioned as the principal theoretician of the minority, resigned from the Workers Party and announced his repudiation of Marxism and socialism.

Trotsky's contribution to the struggle within the Socialist Workers Party

ranks among his greatest writings. Though enclosed within the walls of a besieged villa in Coyoacán, constantly menaced by GPU assassins, his political vision was unimpaired. The “Old Man” saw further into the future than all his contemporaries.

The central political issue that dominated the factional struggle concerned the “Russian Question,” that is, the class nature of the Soviet Union. Shachtman argued that the Soviet Union, in the aftermath of Stalin’s non-aggression pact with Hitler in late August 1939, followed by the joint Nazi-Stalinist invasion of Poland, could no longer be defined as a workers’ state. The Soviet bureaucracy, he claimed, had evolved into a ruling class at the summit of a new form of exploitive society.

Trotsky opposed Shachtman’s redefinition of the Soviet Union on the basis of its reactionary alliance with Nazi Germany. The signing of the Non-Aggression Pact was certainly an act of unspeakable treachery. But, Trotsky insisted, the “social character of the USSR is not determined by her friendship with democracy or fascism.” [5] He called attention to the underlying issue of historical perspective involved in the fight over the correct definition of the Soviet Union:

The USSR question cannot be isolated as unique from the whole historic process of our times. Either the Stalin state is a transitory formation, it is a deformation of a worker state in a backward and isolated country, or ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ ... is a new social formation which is replacing capitalism throughout the world (Stalinism, Fascism, New Deals, etc.). The terminological experiments (workers’ state, not workers’ state; class, not class; etc.) receive a sense only under this historic aspect. Who chooses the second alternative admits, openly or silently, that all the revolutionary potentialities of the world proletariat are exhausted, that the socialist movement is bankrupt, and that the old capitalism is transforming itself into ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ with a new exploiting class.

The tremendous importance of such a conclusion is self-explanatory. It concerns the whole fate of the world proletariat and mankind. [6]

Trotsky acknowledged that the working class in the advanced imperialist countries had not yet succeeded in building a revolutionary party equal to the tasks of an epoch of unprecedented capitalist crisis. But the example of Bolshevism and the October Revolution demonstrated that the creation of such a party was possible. Therefore, the great historical question, Trotsky argued, “stands as follows”:

Will objective historical necessity in the long run cut a path for itself in the consciousness of the vanguard of the working class; that is, in the process of this war and those profound shocks which it must engender, will a genuine revolutionary leadership be formed capable of leading the proletariat to the conquest of power?

The Fourth International has replied in the affirmative to this question, not only through the text of its programme, but also through the very fact of its existence. All the various types of disillusioned and frightened representatives of pseudo-Marxism proceed *on the contrary* from the assumption that the bankruptcy of the leadership only ‘reflects’ the incapacity of the proletariat to fulfill its revolutionary mission. Not all of our opponents express this thought clearly, but all of them—ultra-lefts, centrists, anarchists, not to mention Stalinists and social-democrats—shift the responsibility for the defeats from themselves to the shoulders of the proletariat. None of them indicate under precisely what

conditions the proletariat will be capable of accomplishing the socialist overturn.

If we grant as true that the cause of the defeats is rooted in the social qualities of the proletariat itself then the position of modern society will have to be acknowledged as hopeless. [7]

Trotsky identified the historical and political pessimism that motivated Shachtman and Burnham. Trotsky’s characterization of the Shachtman-Burnham faction as “petty bourgeois” was not a mere epithet. The minority gave political expression to the views of a broad section of the middle-class intelligentsia who were politically demoralized by the defeats of the 1930s and morally ravaged by skepticism. Ironically, on the very eve of the outbreak of the faction fight in the SWP, Burnham and Shachtman had co-authored an essay, published in the January 1939 issue of *The New Internationalist*, that provided a scathing portrait of “Intellectuals in Retreat”:

Every period of reaction that follows a revolutionary defeat produces a variety of superficial and transient “new” and “stylish” doctrines, which eschew Marxism as “outlived.” It would be instructive to compare the history of the “factional struggles” following the defeat of the Russian revolution of 1905 with their analogues of the last decade or more. It is the present reactionary moods of depression, discouragement, loss of confidence in the recuperative powers of the proletariat and its revolutionary movement, which are rationalized into the widespread attacks against revolutionary Marxism. The radical intellectuals, by the very nature of their social position, are generally the first to yield to these moods, to capitulate to them instead of resisting them deliberately. In an entirely different degree, to be sure, they are as much the victims of our prolonged period of reaction as the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the temporary rise of fascism are its products.

The main intellectual disease from which these intellectuals suffer may be called Stalinophobia, or vulgar anti-Stalinism. The malady was superinduced by the universal revulsion against Stalin’s macabre system of frameups and purges. And the result has been that most of the writing done on the subject since then has been less a product of cold social analysis than of mental shock, and where there is analysis, it is moral rather than scientific or political. [8]

It is reasonable to surmise that Burnham and Shachtman described so accurately the “intellectual disease” to which the intelligentsia was succumbing because they themselves were already experiencing its symptoms. Before the year was out, the disease with which they were afflicted had progressed to its terminal stage.

One of the striking characteristics of the anti-Trotskyist variant of revisionism that emerged in the 1939–40 struggle was the totality of its repudiation of the philosophical foundations, class basis, political program, and historical perspective of Marxism. It was directed not toward the reformist modification of the revolutionary struggle for socialism, but toward rejection of the goal itself. As it developed its criticism of “orthodox Trotskyism,” it was drawn to the conclusion that there was no element of Marxism with which it was in agreement.

Of course, different individuals in the minority arrived at this conclusion at different times. But the essential right-wing trajectory of the Burnham-Shachtman opposition was clearly stated in Burnham’s letter of resignation, dated May 21, 1940, from the Workers Party. This document

has been generally viewed as nothing more than an embarrassment for Shachtman, who was suddenly and unceremoniously deserted by his closest political ally. But viewed in a broader historical and political context, Burnham's letter defined and anticipated not only the political evolution of Max Shachtman in the aftermath of his break with the Fourth International, but also of all other oppositional tendencies that were to emerge from within the Fourth International and the Socialist Workers Party during the 1940s. Burnham declared:

Of the most important beliefs, which have been associated with the Marxist movement, whether in its reformist, Leninist, Stalinist or Trotskyist variants, there is virtually none which I accept in its traditional form. I regard these beliefs as either false or obsolete or meaningless; or in a few cases, as at best true only in a form so restricted and modified as no longer properly to be called Marxist. ...

Not only do I believe it meaningless to say that 'socialism is inevitable' and false that socialism 'is the only alternative to capitalism'; I consider that on the basis of the evidence now available to us a new form of exploitive society (what I call 'managerial society') is not only possible as an alternative to capitalism but is a more probable outcome of the present period than socialism. ...

I disagree flatly and entirely, as Cannon has understood for a long while, with the Leninist conception of a party—not merely with Stalin's or Cannon's modifications of that conception, but with Lenin's and Trotsky's. ...

In the light of such beliefs, and others similar to them, it goes without saying that I must reject a considerable part of the programmatic documents of the Fourth Internationalist movement (accepted by the Workers Party). The 'transitional programme' document seems to me—as it pretty much did when first presented—more or less arrant nonsense, and a key example of the inability of Marxism, even in the hands of its most brilliant intellectual representative, to handle contemporary history. [9]

Burnham, finally, acknowledged that his political positions were not unrelated to the sort of personal demoralization that he and Shachtman had described in "Intellectuals in Retreat":

I should be the last to pretend that any man should be so brash as to imagine that he knows clearly the motives and springs of his own actions. This whole letter may be an over-elaborate way of saying the single sentence: 'I feel like quitting politics'. It is certainly the case that I am influenced by the defeats and betrayals of the past twenty and more years. These form part of the evidence for my belief that Marxism must be rejected: at every single one of the many tests provided by history, Marxist movements have either failed socialism or betrayed it. And they influence also my feelings and attitudes, I know that. [10]

The last sentence was certainly a remarkable rationalization for Burnham's own renegacy. Rather than participate in a future failure or betrayal of socialism, Burnham decided to carry out his personal preemptive desertion from the revolutionary movement. Following his resignation from the Workers Party, Burnham moved rapidly to the extreme right of bourgeois anti-communist politics. In the aftermath of World War II, he became a strategist of American imperialism, calling for

a "World Federation" dominated by the United States to fight the Soviet Union and communism. In the 1950s he collaborated with the arch-reactionary William F. Buckley, Jr. in founding the *National Review*. Recognized as a major intellectual leader of neo-conservatives in the United States, Burnham was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan in 1983.

Burnham's repudiation of Marxism anticipated the path that was to be taken, not only by the Shachtmanites, but also by the other oppositional tendencies that emerged inside the SWP and the Fourth International during the 1940s. Borrowing and amending a well-known phrase coined by Trotsky, it can be said that while not every demoralized petty-bourgeois ex-Trotskyist is a Burnham, there is a little bit of Burnham in every demoralized renegade from Trotskyism. [11]

The first and most significant of these tendencies was the "Three Theses" group (also known as the "Retrogressionists"), which emerged from the Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands (IKD). This organization of émigré German Trotskyists was led by Joseph Weber (1901–1959). Prior to the publication of *The Heritage*, its critical role in the development of anti-Trotskyist conceptions within the Fourth International had been more or less forgotten. It is not possible to understand the origins and positions of the Morrow-Goldman opposition, which emerged somewhat later, without reference to the documents written by Weber. The politics of the IKD is examined in Chapter 8 of this volume. But given recent efforts (to which I shall shortly refer) to promote Felix Morrow (1906–1988) and Albert Goldman (1897–1960) as prophets whose political martyrdom at the hands of Cannon spelled the doom of Trotskyism, it is necessary to provide a concise summary of the demoralized, defeatist and anti-Marxist perspective of the IKD.

The IKD published a statement in October 1941 that rejected the perspective of world socialist revolution as a political pipedream. The victories of fascism in Europe meant that the working class had been thrown back to pre-1848 conditions. The modern world, it insisted, was not advancing toward socialism, but regressing toward barbarism. This regression was not the temporary consequence of political defeats, which could be reversed by a new upsurge of revolutionary struggles of the working class, led by a Marxist party. The regression, rather, was to be understood as an inevitable process. The military victory of the Nazis, which the IKD believed to be irreversible, marked a new stage of world history.

The prisons, the new ghettos, the forced labor, the concentration and even war-prisoners camps are not only transitional political-military establishments, they are just as much forms of new economic exploitation which accompanies the development toward a modern slave state and is intended as the permanent fate of a considerable percentage of mankind. [12]

The "Three Theses" group concluded that the fight for socialism had been, through a process of historical retrogression, superseded by the "drive for national freedom." [13] In a later document, written in 1943 and published in *The New Internationalist* (co-opted by the Shachtmanite minority following the 1940 split) in October 1944, the IKD explicitly rejected the historical analysis of the imperialist epoch that Lenin had developed in the struggle against the betrayal of the Second International and upon which the strategy of the Bolshevik Party in 1917 was based. It asserted:

If we glance back at the first world war and the total constellation at the time, we must recognize that the first world

war, despite all causal connections which led to its outbreak, was no more than a *historical misfortune of capitalism*, an *accidental* event which staged the collapse of capitalism within the framework of historical necessity *earlier than historically necessary*. [14]

But if the World War was an accident, so were the collapse of the Second International, the victory of the October Revolution and the founding of the Communist International. The entire objective foundation of revolutionary Marxist strategy in the twentieth century, as formulated by Lenin and Trotsky, was effectively denied.

The IKD formulated its political pessimism in the starkest terms. The working class, it declared, was finished as a revolutionary force. It was “dismembered, atomized, split up, counterposed to each other in its various strata, politically demoralized, internationally isolated and controlled...” [15] Although capitalism was putrefying, the working class was incapable of overthrowing it. The IKD asserted that the “most common mistake” of the Trotskyist movement, which arose from “a complete misunderstanding of Marxism,” consisted “in *conceiving the negation of capitalism only as the task of the proletarian revolution...*” In the face of the impotence of the working class as a revolutionary force, declared the IKD, the only political option was to return to the “century-old” fight for democracy. [16] It opposed the Fourth International’s call for the United Socialist States of Europe:

Before Europe can unite itself into “socialist states,” it must first separate itself again into independent and autonomous states. It is entirely a matter of the split-up, enslaved, hurled-back peoples and the proletariat constituting themselves again as a nation...

We can formulate the task in the following way: To reconstruct the whole screwed-back development, to regain all the achievements of the bourgeoisie (including the labor movement), to reach the highest accomplishments and excel them. ...

However, the most pressing political problem is the century-old problem of the springtime of industrial capitalism and of scientific socialism— *conquest of political freedom, establishment of democracy* (also for Russia), *as the indispensable precondition for national liberation and the founding of the labor movement*. [17]

The IKD insisted that its call to turn back the political calendar to the pre-1848 era, to abandon the fight for international socialism and return to the struggle for national sovereignty and bourgeois democracy, applied to all countries.

With appropriate modifications this problem [of democracy and national liberation] exists for the whole world; for China and India, Japan and Africa, Australia and Canada, Russia and England. In a word, for all Europe, North and South America. Nowhere is there a country that does not have a *powerfully intensified democratic and national question, nowhere does there exist a politically organized labor movement*. [18]

The central slogan that had to be adopted, the IKD proclaimed, was “national freedom.”

By this, we mean to say: the national question is one of those

historic episodes which *necessarily* become the strategic transition point for the reconstitution of the labor movement and the socialist revolution. Whoever does not understand this historically necessary episode and does not know how to use it, knows and understands *nothing* of Marxism-Leninism. [19]

In fact, it was the IKD that was repudiating the program of Lenin and Trotsky. The separation of the fight for democratic demands from the struggle to overturn capitalism meant the abandonment of the theory and program of permanent revolution. In countries with a belated bourgeois development, the theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky explained, “signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.” [20]

While separating democratic from socialist demands in the less developed countries, the IKD’s efforts to resuscitate a bourgeois program of national liberation in the advanced centers of world capitalism, and reject as untimely the fight for socialism, demonstrated a pathological level of political demoralization. Collaborators and friends of Joseph Weber, the IKD leader, later recalled that he frequently expressed the view, in the mid-1940s, that Nazi rule over Europe would continue for at least thirty, if not fifty, years. [21]

The Shachtmanites welcomed and promoted the position of the IKD. The IKD’s arguments, which dismissed the October Revolution as untimely, were entirely compatible with their rejection of the definition of the Soviet Union as a workers’ state and the defense of the USSR against imperialism.

The demoralized perspective of the IKD—which separated itself from the Fourth International—eventually found support within the Socialist Workers Party, in the form of the Morrow-Goldman tendency, which emerged as a distinct oppositional group within the Socialist Workers Party in 1944. Prior to the writing of *The Heritage*, this rightward-moving tendency had been falsely presented as a farsighted alternative to Cannon’s supposedly dogmatic, ill-informed and unrealistic response to the political situation at the conclusion of the World War. Its two principal leaders had played significant roles in the Fourth International and the American party. Albert Goldman served as Trotsky’s lawyer, representing him at the Dewey Commission in 1937. In the 1941 Smith Act trial, Goldman defended the SWP members accused of sedition. He was among the defendants and was one of the eighteen party members found guilty and sent to prison. Felix Morrow was a member of the SWP Political Committee and an outstanding socialist journalist, best known for his book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*. He, too, was among the party members sentenced to prison at the conclusion of the 1941 trial. Another important member of the Morrow-Goldman faction was Jean van Heijenoort (1912–1986), who had served as Trotsky’s political secretary during the 1930s and as de facto secretary of the Fourth International during World War II.

*The Heritage We Defend* reviews the positions of the Morrow-Goldman tendency in detail. However, since the publication of *The Heritage*, the availability of SWP internal discussion bulletins, to which I did not have access in 1986–87, makes possible a fuller appreciation of the extent of the IKD’s influence upon the Morrow-Goldman tendency. In 1942, Morrow, Goldman and Van Heijenoort (writing as Marc Loris) had opposed the arguments advanced in the “Three Theses” resolution. But by late 1943 their positions had undergone a radical change. In the course of the political struggle within the SWP and Fourth International that developed over the next three years, Morrow argued that the Fourth International’s adherence to the program of socialist revolution in Europe rendered it politically irrelevant in the conditions that existed at the end of

World War II. Interpreting events in Europe—especially in France and Italy—in the most conservative and defeatist manner, the Morrow-Goldman faction insisted that there was simply no possibility of socialist revolution. The Fourth International, it claimed, had no viable political option except to convert itself into a movement for bourgeois democratic reforms, allied with the Social Democracy and various democratically inclined bourgeois movements.

While advocating the transformation of the Fourth International into an appendage of bourgeois democracy, Morrow, Goldman, and Van Heijenoort also repudiated the SWP's defense of the USSR. As late as March 1943, Morrow had written: "Great masses throughout the world are rejoicing at the victories of the Red Army. Without a rounded theory but nevertheless with a basically *class* loyalty, they understand that the Soviet victories are their victories too. They are definitely aware of a distinction between the Workers' State and its capitalist 'allies.'" [22] But with the breathtaking speed that is characteristic of those breaking with Trotskyism and moving to the right, Morrow swung over to the absolutely opposite view. In 1946 he denounced the SWP's insistence that the victory of the Soviet army over the Nazis contributed to the political radicalization of the European masses, and argued: "All the reasons we gave for defending the Soviet Union have disappeared." [23]

The Morrow-Goldman tendency called for political reunification with the Shachtmanites, whose earlier rejection of the defense of the Soviet Union was rapidly evolving into outright support for American imperialism's struggle against "communist totalitarianism." The Fourth International and the SWP forcefully and correctly rejected the demoralized perspective of Morrow and Goldman.

The evaluation of the arguments over a "correct line" toward events in Europe was not merely a matter of abstract intellectual discourse. In a highly fluid and unstable situation, where the outcome of the post-war political crisis was in doubt, the Trotskyists were trying to give full expression to the revolutionary potential in the situation. They based their work on the objectively existing potential for the overthrow of capitalism, not on a priori assumptions that capitalist restabilization was inevitable. In the grave hours before Hitler's rise to power, Trotsky was asked if the situation was "hopeless." That word, he answered, was not in the vocabulary of revolutionists. "Struggle," Trotsky declared, "will decide." The same answer had to be given to those who claimed, amid the disorder and chaos of post-war Europe, that the revolutionary cause was hopeless and the stabilization of capitalism inevitable. Had they conceded defeat in advance, as advocated by Morrow and Goldman, the Trotskyists would have become one of the factors working in favor of capitalist restabilization.

In any case, Morrow's analysis of the objective situation that existed in Europe and internationally during the final stages and in the immediate aftermath of World War II vastly underestimated the depth and extent of the crisis confronting world capitalism. The undoubted fact that European capitalism was eventually stabilized, following the introduction of the Marshall Plan in 1947, does not invalidate the perspective advanced by the Fourth International as the World War drew to a close. With the bourgeoisie of much of Western and Central Europe in a state of political prostration, utterly discredited by its fascist atrocities, the potential for the conquest of power by the working class dwarfed that which had presented itself at the conclusion of World War I. In France and Italy, masses of workers were armed and anxiously anticipating a final settlement of accounts with the capitalist class. The problem was not the absence of an "objectively" revolutionary situation. It was self-evident to all astute bourgeois strategists that the mood of the masses was extremely radical. Dean Acheson, who was to become US secretary of state, described the crisis as "in some ways more formidable than the one described in the first chapter of Genesis." [24] In a December 1944 memo to President Roosevelt's special assistant Harry Hopkins, Acheson warned of an

imminent bloodbath throughout Europe. "The peoples of the liberated countries," he wrote, "are the most combustible material in the world ... They are violent and restless." Unless means were found to stabilize Europe, escalating "agitation and unrest" would lead to "the overthrow of governments." [25]

In a recently published book on the origins of the Marshall Plan and the Cold War, historian Benn Steil writes:

People also wanted political change. Communist parties throughout Europe were promising a radical alternative to capitalism. History seemed to be on their side. The Soviet Union was victorious in war, and now far and away the most powerful country on the continent. Communists received 19 percent of the vote in Italy, 24 percent in Finland (where Communist Mauno Pekkala became prime minister), and 26 percent in France in 1945–46. And although no national elections in Germany would take place before 1949 (in the west), Communists took up to 14 percent in some regional contests. Together with the Socialists, the total left-wing vote was 39 percent in Italy and 47 percent in France. In Italy, many thought the revolutionary left was destined to take control of the country. The merging of the left parties in the Soviet zone of Germany seemed a template for wider Europe. [26]

The decisive factor in containing the working class, suppressing the powerful insurrectionary impulses, and providing American imperialism and the terrified European elites the time they needed to salvage capitalist rule was, above all, the leadership of the Stalinist parties. In Italy, the role of the Stalinist leader Palmiro Togliatti was critical. As a recent study of the period states:

The Stalinist leadership's confidence that the PCI [Partito Comunista Italiano] would exert a moderating influence and prevent spontaneous actions was not misplaced. Given this turbulent and even explosive situation, it is to Togliatti's credit that the revolutionary incitements that regularly surfaced in the party during the resistance period were largely contained. His role in preventing a civil war immediately after the liberation of northern Italy should not be underestimated. The fact that the revolutionary impulse, which continued to come to the surface during the Resistance within the party, was curbed was largely due to Togliatti's own efforts. [27]

The historian Paul Ginsborg provides a vivid account of Togliatti's opposition to demands by the PCI rank and file for a revolutionary socialist overturn of the bourgeois state:

On his arrival in Salerno, Togliatti outlined to his comrades, amidst a certain astonishment and some opposition, the strategy which he intended the party to pursue in the near future. The Communists, he said, were to put into abeyance their oft-expressed hostility to the monarchy. Instead, they were to persuade all the anti-Fascist forces to join the royal government, which now controlled all of Italy south of Salerno. Joining the government, Togliatti argued, was the first step towards realizing the overriding objective of the period—national unity in the face of the Nazis and the Fascists. The main aim of the Communists had to be the liberation of Italy, not a socialist revolution. Togliatti made this

explicit in the instructions he wrote for the party in June 1944: 'Remember always that the insurrection that we want has not got the aim of imposing social and political transformations in a socialist or communist sense. Its aim is rather national liberation and the destruction of Fascism. All the other problems will be resolved by the people tomorrow, once Italy is liberated, by means of a free popular vote and the election of a Constituent Assembly.'

This last phrase revealed Togliatti's commitment to re-establishing parliamentary democracy in Italy. Unlike Tito, he had no intention of making the dictatorship of the proletariat the short-term aim of his party. Nor was his objective the simple restoration of a parliamentary regime on pre-Fascist lines. [28]

In France the Communist Party and the trade unions controlled by the Stalinist-led CGT played a no less counterrevolutionary role. Recognizing that the Communist Party had sufficient power, if it was so inclined, to threaten the overthrow of the capitalist system, American diplomats closely monitored its activities. The Stalinists played into the hands of the United States:

The CGT leaders and individual Communists cultivated relations with American officials from 1945 to 1947, in accordance with the Communist party's strategy of international detente and internal political collaboration. Communist officials of the CGT kept the Americans abundantly supplied with information, most of it reassuring. ... the CGT did not seek immediate transition to Socialism and supported the limited aims of the National Council of the Resistance. The CGT was the defender of small business, the battle for higher production remained the basis of Communist policy, and no strikes would occur in plants or ports "controlled by our people." [29]

In the context of the explosive situation in Europe, made still more intense by the expanding wave of anti-imperialist struggle sweeping through virtually all the old colonies, Morrow's insistence that the Fourth International limit its program and agitation to democratic demands would have served no other purpose than to lend Trotskyist support to the Stalinists' betrayal of the revolutionary movement of the working class and facilitate the restabilization of capitalism.

In a 2014 essay published in the journal *Science and Society*, titled "Strategy and Tactics in a Revolutionary Period: U.S. Trotskyism and the European Revolution, 1943–1946," historians Daniel Gaido and Velia Luparello mount a full-throated defense of the Morrow-Goldman tendency. The title of the essay is problematic, for the essential premise of Morrow's argument, endorsed by Gaido and Luparello, is that no revolutionary situation existed. They quote with approval Morrow's demand that the SWP and Fourth International should rid themselves "of all traces of a conception of the 'objectively revolutionary' situation today." [30] The biased account they provide of the debate within the Fourth International endorses Morrow's anti-Marxist and demoralized perspective:

Actually, Morrow argued, revolution was not "an objective function of the social process," and the situation in Europe was in no way comparable to the aftermath of the First World War. "We are not repeating 1917–1923," Morrow warned. The situation in 1945 was "far more backward" because, in the absence of a rallying point for revolutionized masses like the Bolshevik

revolution and the Third International, the development of the revolutionary parties was far slower, and therefore the whole process would be far more protracted. [31]

But from where did the Bolshevik Revolution and the Third International emerge? Lenin and Trotsky had waged throughout 1917 an unrelenting struggle against the Mensheviks and those elements within the Bolshevik Party who claimed that the situation was not revolutionary, and that there was no possibility of going beyond the limits of a bourgeois democratic program. The Bolsheviks fought to bring to full expression the revolutionary potential lodged in the objective situation. Gaido and Luparello take no note of the paralyzing and self-contradicting sophistry that underlay Morrow's defeatism: The fight for socialist revolution was impossible because the situation was not objectively revolutionary. But the situation was not revolutionary because there was no "rallying point" for revolutionary action.

There is little, from a theoretical standpoint, that is new in the arguments advanced by Gaido and Luparello. They largely follow the essentially social-democratic critique of Trotskyism advanced in two essays published four decades ago: the 1975 essay by Geoff Hodgson, titled "Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism," and the 1977 article by Peter Jenkins, titled "Where Trotskyism Got Lost: World War II and the Prospect for Revolution in Europe." Hodgson—sounding very much like Eduard Bernstein—claimed that Trotsky's conception of the epoch as one of relentless economic upheaval, the breakup of the bourgeois nation-state system, interimperialist wars and socialist revolution, was fundamentally false. Trotsky bequeathed to the Fourth International an exaggerated and unrealistic emphasis on crisis. Morrow, wrote Hodgson, challenged this false perspective: "As a result, Morrow and others were driven out of the SWP." [32]

Following Hodgson, Jenkins praised Morrow for having challenged the "revolutionary catastrophism" of the Fourth International, and for developing an early critique of "a consistent tendency on the part of the Trotskyist movement to underestimate the viability of bourgeois democracy in Europe, and the strength of reformist ideas amongst the working class." [33] Trotskyism, Jenkins concluded, "got lost" because it failed to convert itself into a social-democratic reformist movement.

Gaido and Luparello draw essentially the same conclusion, arguing that the defeat of Morrow and Goldman "precluded any serious analysis of the consequences of the policies pursued by the SWP leadership, and by the European Secretariat of the Fourth International in its wake, policies that would help reduce Trotskyism to political impotence for most of the century." [34] Precisely what do Gaido and Luparello mean by "political impotence"? Within the framework of their argument, it can only mean that the Trotskyist movement should have adopted the political persona and program of a social-democratic reformist organization. It should have avoided "political impotence" by acquiring influence within the framework of bourgeois parliamentarism. Trotsky's World Party of Socialist Revolution should have been converted into national parties of social-democratic reformism.

In 1940, in analyzing the arguments of the minority, Trotsky noted: "Shachtman has left out a trifle: his class position." [35] The same "trifle" has gone missing in the Gaido-Luparello essay. Entirely absent is any consideration of the actual class nature—that is, the objective social-political trajectory—of the Morrow-Goldman tendency. The essay never addresses the essential question: For what class interests did Morrow and Goldman speak? This is a regrettable omission, especially for Professor Gaido, who has been engaged for many years in serious scholarly work on the history of the Marxist movement. This usually conscientious scholar includes in his essay only a cursory reference to the "Three Theses" of Joseph Weber and the IKD, and he does not call attention to its critical

influence on Felix Morrow. Even more indefensible is Gaido's flippant attitude toward the political evolution of Morrow, Goldman and Van Heijenoort.

All the leading representatives of the Morrow-Goldman tendency left the Trotskyist movement, abandoned socialist politics, and turned sharply to the political right. Clearly, this evolution developed logically out of the positions they had advanced in the factional struggle. They all followed, more or less, the trajectory of James Burnham. Van Heijenoort deserted the Fourth International, denounced the Soviet Union as a "slave state," ended his personal involvement in socialist politics and became a noted mathematician. Goldman left the SWP, briefly joined the Shachtmanite movement, and, soon after, repudiated Marxism. Morrow, after being expelled from the SWP in 1946, abandoned socialist politics, supported American imperialism's Cold War, and became a wealthy publisher of occult literature.

In November 1976, while conducting research on behalf of the International Committee relating to the assassination of Leon Trotsky, I met with Felix Morrow. He was then 71 years old, and lived in a suburb of New York. Recalling the factional struggle of 1943–46, Morrow acknowledged that for all their political differences, Cannon was right on one critical point. Morrow no longer believed in the possibility of socialist revolution. Morrow recalled that in his final speech to the SWP membership, prior to his expulsion, he declared that he could never be separated from the party. But after he left the meeting hall, Morrow knew that a stage in his life had ended, and that he would never again be active in socialist politics. He felt almost as if he had never been a member of the Trotskyist movement. I asked Morrow if he had any regrets about the past. Only one, he replied: "I should have negotiated to receive royalties for my book, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*."

As for Max Shachtman, he became, by the 1950s, an adviser of the virulently anti-communist AFL-CIO trade union bureaucracy. In the 1960s, Shachtman supported the 1961 CIA-orchestrated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and, later, the US intervention in Vietnam.

The political evolution of Shachtman, Morrow, Goldman and Van Heijenoort was part of a broader social process, as the Cold War climate, the economic restabilization of post-war Europe, and the bureaucratic stifling of the revolutionary movement of the working class affected the political outlook of the leftist petty-bourgeois intelligentsia. Marxism gave way to existentialism. The earlier focus on social processes was replaced with a fixation on personal problems. The scientific appraisal of political events was dropped in favor of their interpretation from the standpoint of psychology. Conceptions of the future, based on the potential of economic planning, gave way to utopian daydreaming. Interest in the economic exploitation of the working class declined. Preoccupation with ecological problems—separated from the issues of class rule and the economic system—rose to prominence.

The evolution of the leader of the IKD is illustrative of the socially determined process of intellectual "retrogression." The IKD severed its relationship with the Fourth International, of which Joseph Weber wrote with unrestrained contempt. In a letter dated October 11, 1946, Weber asserted: "The Fourth International is dead, and, moreover, it has never existed." He claimed that it had been built on a false foundation, and its documents read as if they were intended for "political illiterates." [36] Weber soon broke entirely with Marxist politics, denounced the Soviet Union as a state capitalist society, and eventually became the prophet of a semi-anarchistic ecological utopianism. Among his major disciples was a former member of the Socialist Workers Party, Murray Bookchin (1921–2006), who, in 1971, dedicated his book, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, to Joseph Weber. Bookchin, who had become a bitter opponent of Marxism, thanked his mentor for having "formulated more than twenty years ago the outlines of the Utopian project developed in this book." [37] Bookchin's writings came to the attention of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader

of the bourgeois nationalist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), after his capture and imprisonment by the Turkish government in 1999. Öcalan found, in the writings of Bookchin, ideas compatible with his own proposals for "Democratic Confederalism." Upon Bookchin's death, the PKK honored him as "one of the greatest social scientists of the 20th century." [38]

Politics is ruled by the logic of class interests. This is a basic truth that is frequently forgotten, especially by academics, who tend to evaluate political factions on the basis of subjective criteria. Moreover, their judgments are influenced by their own unstated political biases, particularly when it is a matter of evaluating a dispute between opportunists and revolutionists. To the petty-bourgeois academic, the policies advocated by the opportunists usually appear more "realistic" than those advanced by the revolutionaries. But, just as there is no innocent philosophy, there are no innocent politics. Whether foreseen or not, a political program has objective consequences. The Fourth International and the SWP correctly recognized, in the 1940s, that the IKD program of a supra-historical national liberation and universal democracy was an expression of alien class interests, hostile to socialism.

At the conclusion of their essay, Gaido and Luparello write that "the crisis of the Fourth International began, not, as often argued, with the controversy sparked off by Michel Pablo's 'deep entrism' tactics in 1953, but ten years earlier, due to the SWP leadership's inability to adapt its tactics to the new situation that developed in Europe as a result of the fall of Mussolini in 1943..." [39] The gist of this argument is that the Trotskyist movement should have liquidated itself in the 1940s. Its ill-conceived efforts to uphold an unrealistic revolutionary program doomed it to "political impotence," and was the source of later crises in the Fourth International. The aim of the new narrative proposed by Gaido and Luparello is to shift responsibility for the crises of the Fourth International away from those who sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement and on to the shoulders of those who sought to defend it.

To his great political credit, James P. Cannon defended the world revolutionary perspective of Trotskyism against the Morrow-Goldman tendency, which—following the path of Burnham and Shachtman—advocated capitulation to "democracy" under the aegis of American imperialism. In the aftermath of the fight against these capitulators, the Fourth International was confronted with another, no less dangerous, and insidiously persistent form of anti-Trotskyist revisionism, associated with the program and tactics advanced in the late 1940s and early 1950s by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel.

However different their program and orientation, there was a significant link in the historical conceptions that underlay the two main forms of revisionism (Burnham-Shachtman and Pablo-Mandel) that emerged within the Fourth International between 1940 and 1953. Within the international social and political context of the 1940s and 1950s, the essential political conception that connected the Shachtmanites (and their followers in the "Three Theses" group and the Morrow-Goldman tendency) with the somewhat later emergence of Pabloite revisionism was the rejection of the revolutionary potential of the working class. The precise forms taken by this rejection differed. Shachtman and Burnham speculated that the Soviet Union represented a new form of "collectivist" society, controlled by a bureaucratic elite that was in the process of becoming, or already was, a new ruling class. A variant of the Shachtmanite theory was that the Soviet Union was a form of "state capitalism." The "Three Theses" group, followed by the Morrow-Goldman tendency, arrived at the conclusion that the socialist revolution was a historically lost cause.

The revisions of Pablo and Mandel, which emerged in the late 1940s, cloaked their abandonment of Trotskyism with a superficially leftist rhetoric. But in their perspective, the leading force in the establishment of socialism was the Stalinist bureaucracy, not the working class. Pabloite



theory was a peculiar inversion of Shachtmanite theory. While the Shachtmanites denounced the Stalinist regime as the progenitor of a new form of exploitative “bureaucratic collectivist” society, the Pabloite tendency proclaimed the bureaucratic Stalinist regimes established in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II to be the necessary form of the historical transition from capitalism to socialism. All these tendencies, each in their own way, based their political perspective on the *non-revolutionary* role of the working class. It ceased to be an active, let alone decisive, force in the historical process.

The pessimism—one might even describe it as despair—that underlay Pabloite revisionism, found consummate expression in its theory of “war-revolution,” developed in advance of the Third World Congress of 1951. “For our movement,” the Pabloite document declared, “objective social reality consists essentially of the capitalist regime and the Stalinist world.” The fight for socialism would assume the form of a war between these two camps, from which the Stalinist system would emerge victorious. Arising upon the ashes of a thermo-nuclear war, the Stalinists would establish “deformed workers states”—similar to those already existing in Eastern Europe—that would last for centuries. In this bizarre scenario, there was no independent role for the working class or the Fourth International. Its cadres were instructed to enter the Stalinist parties and act within them as a left pressure group. This liquidationist perspective was not limited to entry into the Stalinist parties. As explained in Chapter 15 of this volume:

The adaptation to Stalinism was a central feature of the new Pabloite outlook, but it would be a mistake to see this as its essential characteristic. Pabloism, was (and is) liquidationism all down the line: that is, the repudiation of the hegemony of the proletariat in the socialist revolution and the genuinely independent existence of the Fourth International as the conscious articulation of the historical role of the working class. The theory of war-revolution provided the initial setting for the elaboration of the central liquidationist thesis: that all Trotskyist parties must be dissolved into whatever political tendencies dominate the labor or mass popular movement in the countries in which the sections of the Fourth International worked.

The split that occurred in November 1953 ranks among the most critical events in the history of the socialist movement. Nothing less than the survival of the Trotskyist movement—that is, the conscious and politically organized expression of the entire heritage of the struggle for socialism—was at stake. At the most critical moment in the history of the Fourth International, Cannon’s “Open Letter” clearly restated the foundational principles of Trotskyism, drawn from the strategic lessons of the revolutions and counterrevolutions of the twentieth century. The liquidation of the Fourth International would have meant the end of a politically organized Marxist opposition to imperialism and its political agencies in the Stalinist, Social Democratic and bourgeois nationalist parties and organizations. This is not a speculative hypothesis. It is a matter of historical fact, which can be verified by examining the disastrous consequences of Pabloism in the many countries, on virtually every continent, where its liquidationist policies were implemented.

With respect to the fate of the Soviet Union, it must be recalled that the Pabloite leaders adhered to the theory of bureaucratic self-reform right up to the very end of the Stalinist regime. While the International Committee warned, as early as 1986, that the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev to power, and the implementation of his *perestroika* reforms, marked the final preparation for the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union, the Pabloites hailed his reactionary policies as a decisive advance toward socialism. Ernest Mandel described Gorbachev in 1988 as “a remarkable

political leader.” Dismissing as “absurd” the warnings that Gorbachev’s policies were leading to the restoration of capitalism, Mandel declared: “Stalinism and Brezhnevism are definitively at an end. The Soviet people, the international proletariat, the whole of humanity can breathe a great sigh of relief.” [40]

Mandel’s apprentice, the British Pabloite Tariq Ali, was even more unrestrained in his enthusiasm for the policies of the Gorbachev regime. In his book *Revolution From Above: Where is the Soviet Union Going?*, published in 1988, Ali combined several characteristic features of Pabloism: limitless support for the Stalinist bureaucracy, grotesque political opportunism and a total incapacity to understand political reality. In his preface, Ali summed up the book’s thesis:

*Revolution From Above* argues that Gorbachev represents a progressive, reformist current within the Soviet elite, whose programme, if successful, would represent an enormous gain for socialists and democrats on a world scale. The scale of Gorbachev’s operation is, in fact, reminiscent of the efforts of an American President of the nineteenth century: Abraham Lincoln. [41]

Apparently concerned that his elevation of Gorbachev to the political heights of Abraham Lincoln did not express sufficiently the full measure of his own devotion to Stalinism, Tariq Ali humbly dedicated his volume to “Boris Yeltsin, a leading member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, whose political courage has made him an important symbol throughout the country.” [42]

The unconcealed support of the Pabloite leaders for the two central architects of the final destruction of the Soviet Union—Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin—provided an irrefutable historical confirmation of the reactionary character of Pabloism and the legitimacy of the struggle, spanning decades, waged by the International Committee against this pernicious petty-bourgeois political agency of imperialism.

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Since the publication of *The Heritage We Defend* in 1988, the world has witnessed profound economic, technological and social changes, not to mention explosive political developments. The dissolution of the Soviet Union did not bring about a new era of peace, let alone the “end of history,” as promised in the heyday of post-Soviet imperialist triumphalism. To state that the world is in “crisis” is an understatement. “Chaos” is a more appropriate description. The last quarter century has been wracked by perpetual war. Ever larger portions of the globe are being drawn into the maelstrom of imperialist geopolitical conflict. The United States, frustrated in its expectation that it would rule the world after 1991, is compelled to escalate, with ever-greater recklessness, its military operations. But the very foundations of the imperialist world order, as it emerged from the catastrophe of World War II, are falling apart. Even in the midst of Washington’s intensifying conflicts with Russia and China, political relations between the United States and its major imperialist “partners,” especially Germany, are rapidly deteriorating.

On the economic front, the capitalist system staggers from crisis to crisis. The effects of the economic crash of 2008 have not been overcome. The principal legacy of the crash has been intensifying social inequality, which has reached levels that are unsustainable within the framework of democracy. The staggering concentration of wealth within a small elite is a global phenomenon that underlies the growing political instability of bourgeois governments. Class conflict is on the rise in every part of the world. The globalization of capitalist production and financial transactions is drawing the international working class into a common struggle.

Objective conditions are providing the impulse for an immense expansion of revolutionary class struggle. But these objective impulses must be translated into politically conscious action. And this raises the all-important question of the leadership of the working class.

Despite the immense crisis of the global capitalist system and the general political disarray within the highest levels of the bourgeoisie, the efforts of the working class to find a way forward remain blocked by the parties and organizations that employ their influence to contain and misdirect its movement. And yet, the experiences of the past two decades have left their imprint on the consciousness of the masses. The bankruptcy of the official “socialist” parties is widely recognized. But as the masses turn to new organizations that promise a more radical approach to social problems, such as Syriza in Greece, the hollowness of their promises are rapidly exposed. It took only a few months for Syriza, having been brought to power on a wave of popular protests against the European Union, to repudiate every pledge it had made to its supporters. Were Podemos in Spain or Corbyn in Britain or Sanders in the United States to come to power, the outcome would be no different.

The resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership remains the central historical task confronting the working class. This immense task can only be undertaken by an international party that has assimilated the entire historical experience of the Fourth International, which now spans eighty years. Only the International Committee of the Fourth International is able to provide a politically coherent and consistent account of its entire history. Its practice is rooted in the conscious defense of the theoretical and political heritage of Leon Trotsky’s struggle for the World Socialist Revolution. It is my hope that the republication of *The Heritage We Defend* will contribute to the revolutionary education of a new generation of workers and youth, radicalized by the objective crisis of capitalism, in the history, program and traditions of the Fourth International.

David North  
Detroit  
June 20, 2018

Notes:

[1] A detailed analysis of the opportunist degeneration of the British section is provided in *How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism 1973 – 1985*, published in *Fourth International*, Vol. 13, no. 1, Summer 1986. All the major documents of the split with the WRP are available in the Autumn 1986 edition of *Fourth International* (Vol. 13, no. 2).

[2] See pp. 231–32 of this volume.

[3] The documents of the Workers League are published in *The ICFI Defends Trotskyism 1982–1986*, in *Fourth International*, Vol. 13, no. 2, Autumn 1986.

[4] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990), p. 389.

[5] Leon Trotsky, “A Letter to James P. Cannon,” September 12, 1939, *In Defense of Marxism* (London: New Park Publications, 1971), p. 1.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

[7] “The USSR in War,” *In Defense of Marxism*, p. 15.

[8] James Burnham and Max Shachtman, “Intellectuals in Retreat,” *The New International*, Vol. 5, no. 1, January 1939. Available at [www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/burnham/1939/intellectuals/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/burnham/1939/intellectuals/index.htm)

[9] Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, pp. 257–58.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

[11] I am referencing the phrase: “Not every exasperated petty bourgeois could have become Hitler, but a particle of Hitler is lodged in every exasperated petty bourgeois.” [Leon Trotsky, “What is National Socialism?,” *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971), p. 523.

[12] “The National Question in Europe: Three Theses on the European

Situation and the Political Tasks,” dated October 19, 1941, published in the December 1942 edition of *Fourth International*, pp. 370–372. Available

at

[www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/fi/vol03/no12/3theses.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/fi/vol03/no12/3theses.htm).

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] “Capitalist Barbarism or Socialism,” *The New International* (Vol. 10, no. 10), October 1944 (emphasis in the original). Available at [www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/ni/vol10/no10/ikd.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/ni/vol10/no10/ikd.htm)

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*, (emphasis in the original).

[17] *Ibid.*, (emphasis in the original).

[18] *Ibid.*, (emphasis in the original).

[19] *Ibid.*, (emphasis in the original).

[20] Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution* (London: New Park Publications, 1962), p. 152, (emphasis in the original).

[21] Marcel Van Der Linden, “The Prehistory of *Post-Society Anarchism*: Josef Weber and the Movement for a Democracy of Content (1947–1964),” *Anarchist Studies*, 9 (2001), p. 131.

[22] Felix Morrow, “The Class Meaning of the Soviet Victories,” *Fourth International*, Vol. 4, no. 3, March 1943, available at [www.marxists.org/archive/morrow-felix/1943/03/soviet.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/morrow-felix/1943/03/soviet.htm)

[23] SWP Internal Bulletin, Vol. 8, no. 8, July 1946, p. 28.

[24] Cited in Benn Steil, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster), p. 26.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

[27] Elena Agarossi and Victor Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti: Italy and the Origins of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011), p. 95.

[28] Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: 1943 – 80* (Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition), p.43.

[29] Irwin M. Wall, *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945–47* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 97.

[30] Daniel Gaido and Velia Luparello, “Strategy and Tactics in a Revolutionary Period: U.S. Trotskyism and the European Revolution, 1943–1946,” *Science & Society*, Vol. 78, no. 4, October 2014, p. 504.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 503.

[32] Geoff Hodgson, *Trotsky and Fatalistic Marxism*, (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1975), p. 38.

[33] Peter Jenkins, *Where Trotskyism got lost: The restoration of European democracy after the Second World War*, (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1977). Available at [www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/ww/essay01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/ww/essay01.htm)

[34] Gaido and Luparello, p. 508.

[35] Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism*, p. 131.

[36] Joseph Weber, *Dinge der Zeit, Kritische Beiträge zu Kultur und Politik* (Hamburg: Argument, 1995), p. 21, (translation by David North).

[37] Murray Bookchin, *Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1986), p. 32.

[38] Joris Leverink, “Murray Bookchin and the Kurdish Resistance,” *ROAR* magazine, August 9, 2015, available at <https://roarmag.org/essays/bookchin-kurdish-struggle-ocalan-rojava/>

[39] Gaido and Luparello, p. 508.

[40] Ernest Mandel, *Beyond Perestroika* (London: Verso Books, 1989), p. xvi.

[41] Tariq Ali, *Revolution From Above: Where is the Soviet Union Going?* (Surry Hills, Australia: Hutchinson, 1988). p. xiii.

[42] *Ibid.*



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