

Fifty years since the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia: Part four

The split with the OCI and the degeneration of the WRP

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The large-scale intervention by the Pabloite International Secretariat (IS) in Eastern Europe in 1968-1985 was facilitated significantly by the lack of political clarification of the split of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) with its French section, the International Communist Organization (OCI), in 1971, and the subsequent degeneration of its British section, the Socialist Labour League (SLL), which became the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in 1973.

Under conditions where many sections of the International Committee had been all but destroyed by Pabloism, the OCI was, after the SLL, the most experienced section of the ICFI in the 1960s. Following the unprincipled reunification of the ICFI's American section, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), with the Pabloites in 1963, the SLL, headed by Gerry Healy, took the lead in defending the continuity of Trotskyism in these countries and building sections of the International Committee in Sri Lanka and the United States in the 1960s, and then in Australia and Germany in the early 1970s.

As part of a division of labor within the IC, the OCI had the major responsibility for working closely with a Hungarian group of supporters, led by Michel Varga, and supervising the political work in Central and Eastern Europe more generally (including work in West and East Germany).

However, already by 1966 differences between the SLL and the OCI had emerged that proved to be of a fundamental character. At the Third Congress of the ICFI in April 1966, the OCI adapted to forces that openly rejected the struggle against Pabloism as the essential basis for the historical continuity of the Fourth International.

While supporting the SLL in the struggle against these forces, the OCI insisted on introducing into the main resolution the formulation that the Fourth International had to be "reconstructed." This formulation suggested that the revisionist forces had been successful in destroying the Fourth International. By May 1967, the OCI was openly questioning the continuity of the Fourth International in the form of the ICFI, writing, "The IC is not the leadership of the Fourth International... The IC is the motive force for the rebuilding of the Fourth International." [1]

The SLL responded sharply:

It is a big mistake to see the long battle against Pabloite revisionism as an unfortunate gap, fifteen or twenty lost years in the history of our movement, assuming that the attack of the Pabloites diverted the cadres of the British and French sections from the principal tasks of building the Parties. This mistake is derived from the misunderstanding of revolutionary continuity and

from the linked theory that the Fourth International has been *dead* since 1952. On the contrary, the living struggle against Pabloism, and the training of cadres and Parties on the basis of this struggle, *was* the life of the Fourth International in these years. It contains the most important lessons of this whole period. If the French comrades do not consciously start from this theoretical struggle, they will pay a heavy price. [2]

This warning by the SLL was fully vindicated: When a revolutionary situation developed in France less than a year later, the OCI, while rapidly growing to an organization of tens of thousands, abandoned the conscious struggle to build the French section of the ICFI as the revolutionary leadership of the working class, in opposition to the Stalinist and trade union bureaucracies. (See: 1968: The general strike and the student revolt in France)

The OCI's centrism also found an expression in the IC's line on Eastern Europe. A statement by the ICFI on the events in Czechoslovakia of 1968 made certain concessions to the centrist tendencies of the OCI. While correctly linking the crisis of Stalinism to the crisis of imperialism and calling for the United Socialist States of Europe, the statement proclaimed that the "political revolution" had been completed more or less spontaneously in Czechoslovakia during the Prague spring. Moreover, the statement called for the "reconstruction of the Fourth International" and avoided calling for the formation of a Czechoslovak section of the ICFI. [1]

In 1971, the OCI invited representatives of the centrist POUM, which bore responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish proletariat in the Civil War of 1936-1938, and the CIA-funded US National Students Association to its youth rally in Essen, Germany. In Bolivia, the OCI supported the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) led by G. Lora, which had supported Pablo in 1953 and collaborated with bourgeois nationalists, including the military regime of General Torres, which was overthrown in a military coup in 1971.

In all major conflicts with the SLL, the Hungarian group under Varga sided with the OCI. In November 1971, the IC majority, led by the SLL, declared a split with the OCI, which it correctly criticized for centrism. The OCI would soon thereafter become a critical prop of bourgeois rule in France through its founding and participation in the Socialist Party in France.

Yet the split was carried out without clarifying the political issues involved and without even so much as an appeal to the OCI membership to support the IC against the opportunist OCI leadership. Instead, the SLL leadership largely limited the discussion to differences over the centrality of the dialectical materialist method, insisting that this was the central

question in the split.

As the ICFI noted in its 1986 analysis *How the WRP Betrayed Trotskyism*:

... the break with the OCI was carried out with a political haste which could only leave a legacy of confusion that played into the hands of the French centrists... The SLL could correctly point to the serious mistakes which the OCI had made in France in 1968-69. But the problem was that these differences had not been discussed within the IC prior to the split. Moreover, the critique of the OCI ended before it reached the point of developing, on the basis of a Marxist analysis of the OCI's abstentionism, a concrete revolutionary perspective for the French proletariat... Despite the strategic importance occupied by France in the development of the World Socialist Revolution, all work on the perspective of the ICFI for that country came to an end once the split was completed. Thus, despite the deep historical connections of the Trotskyist movement with the proletariat of that country—and whose problems had been the subject of some of Trotsky's greatest writings—the SLL simply abandoned the French working class.

The criticism that the SLL had advanced of the OCI, especially in 1967, had been entirely correct. Its main task in the split would have been to develop this criticism, especially with an analysis of the OCI's line in 1968, and fight it out within the membership of the ICFI both in France and internationally, including the Hungarian group and contacts in Eastern Europe who ended up breaking from the IC together the OCI.

A serious review of the OCI's political adaptation to opportunism would have involved a thorough analysis not just of their line in France and Bolivia, but also in Eastern Europe. It would have been accompanied by a revival and deepening of the discussion on the character of Stalinism and the deformed workers' states in Eastern Europe and the tasks of the Fourth International, which had developed in the early struggle against Pabloism.

Such a discussion within the ICFI would have contributed immensely to politically clarifying the issues confronting the working class in Europe as a whole. It would have oriented the IC toward an aggressive intervention in Eastern Europe and the USSR throughout the 1970s and 1980s, well in advance of the terminal crisis of Stalinism in 1985-1991.

The fact that the split was not carried in such a manner reflected a tendency to adapt to centrist pressures within the SLL leadership itself. The SLL increasingly abandoned its international responsibilities and instead focused on its work in Britain, where a radicalization of workers and youth in 1968 and the ensuing years enabled it to grow rapidly.

In 1973, the SLL moved to form a new party, the Workers Revolutionary Party, without any international discussion and on an essentially centrist basis. In the decade that followed, the WRP rapidly adapted to petty-bourgeois and nationalist forces in Great Britain and the Middle East, and to the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR. It largely abandoned direct intervention into and concrete analysis of events in Eastern Europe, and thus essentially left the field open to the Pabloites, who, in intervening in Eastern Europe, operated, above all, from France and West Germany.

When mass workers' struggles erupted in Poland in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the WRP press provided scant coverage, while conducting a major campaign in defense of a Stalinist newspaper in Britain. By 1985, the WRP openly proclaimed support for Gorbachev's capitalist restorationist "perestroika" policy.

Meanwhile, the Hungarian group around Varga, which had joined the OCI in its split with the ICFI, had by the early 1980s established ties with

Uhl's Pabloite group in Czechoslovakia. Coming full circle, Cliff Slaughter, a leader of the WRP who broke with the IC in 1986, joined forces with Varga in 1994 while advocating military intervention and support for Croatian far-right forces during the break-up of Yugoslavia. (See: Marxism, Opportunism and the Balkan Crisis).

The intervention of Pabloism in Eastern Europe and the USSR was critical in enabling the Stalinist bureaucracy to solve its terminal crisis in the late 1980s in its own interests through the restoration of capitalism, its own transformation into a constituent part of a new ruling class, and the breakup of the region into small, rival nation-states.

To understand the far-reaching impact that Pabloism had, one must look not only at the key role the Pabloites played in capitalist restoration, but also the powerful response that the ICFI received among workers and intellectuals once it *did* intervene in Eastern Europe and the USSR after the split with the WRP in 1985-1986.

Immediately recognizing in perestroika the move of the bureaucracy toward capitalist restoration and an expression of a deep crisis of imperialism, the ICFI intervened in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and the USSR to build sections of the Trotskyist movement and mobilize workers to advance their own, socialist response to the crisis of Stalinism. In East Germany, the German section of the IC, the Socialist Workers League (BSA), was able to distribute thousands of leaflets advocating a political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy and a joint struggle for socialism of workers in Eastern and Western Europe.

In the USSR, David North, the national secretary of the Workers League in the US and a leading member of the ICFI, was invited to speak at universities and public venues to present the Trotskyist analysis of the crisis in the Soviet Union. For the first time in decades, the Trotskyist movement could publish Russian translations of its theoretical works in the *Bulletin' Chetvertogo Internatsionala* (Bulletin of the Fourth International). In Ukraine, a sizeable group of supporters emerged expressing political agreement with this analysis.

In Russia, the IC was able to establish contact with the sociologist and historian Vadim Rogovin. Born in 1937, Rogovin had gotten hold of Left Opposition material already in the 1950s and had, in his own words, dreamed all his life of writing a history of the Left Opposition. Once he met the ICFI, he was able to write this history in seven volumes within just a few years, while fighting terminal cancer. This collaboration became a crucial component of the ICFI's struggle in defense of historical truth and against the post-Soviet school of historical falsification.

There is no question that the historical role, and the *historical crime*, of Pabloism in this region was precisely to prevent tendencies represented by Rogovin, who embodied the best traditions of the Soviet and Eastern European working class and intelligentsia, from getting in touch with the ICFI and helping to build the Trotskyist movement.

Today, amidst a profound crisis of the world capitalist system, with far-right forces on the rise and a growing danger of another world war, a final political reckoning with Stalinism and Pabloism is more important than ever. The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only force that can, with any historical legitimacy, lay claim to the leadership of the working class. Workers and intellectuals must draw the most-far reaching political conclusions from the crimes of Stalinism and Pabloism: the critical task is to build sections of the ICFI throughout Eastern Europe and the former USSR to lead the fight for revolutionary socialism in their own countries and internationally.

Concluded

End notes:

[1] "Statement by the OCI," May 1967, in *Trotskyism vs. Revisionism*, Vol. 5, p. 95.

[2] "Reply to the OCI by the Central Committee of the SLL," June 19, 1967, in *Trotskyism vs. Revisionism*, Vol. 5, p. 114 (Emphasis in the

original).

[3] "Imperialism and the Soviet Bureaucracy in Crisis: Political Revolution in Czechoslovakia," Statement by the International Committee of the Fourth International, October 21, 1968, in *Fourth International*, Winter 1968/1969, pp. 92-114.



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