

The origins and findings of the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation

Eric London
14 November 2018

Below is the text and audio of a lecture delivered by Eric London in Detroit, Michigan reviewing the monumental investigation conducted by the International Committee of the Fourth International titled Security and the Fourth International. The investigation, which was launched in 1975, was a significant milestone in the history of the Trotskyist movement. It marked the first time that the Trotskyist movement fought to expose the infiltration of the Trotskyist movement by the Stalinist GPU and FBI.

The assassination of Leon Trotsky in Mexico City on August 20, 1940 was the greatest crime of the 20th century and the highest expression of the counterrevolutionary character of Stalinist reaction. In the months prior to the attack, Ramon Mercader, alias Frank Jacson, an agent of the Stalinist secret police, the GPU, had ingratiated himself into Trotsky's compound, where the leader of the Russian Revolution had been living in exile since January 1937. Mercader entered the compound, and then Trotsky's guards, including Joseph Hansen, allowed the assassin to meet with Trotsky in his office, alone. Mercader pulled out the ice pick he had hidden in his raincoat and used it. Trotsky died the next day at the age of 60.

There was no doubt of Stalin's role. In the pages of *The Militant*, the newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the Trotskyist movement pointed the finger at Stalin and his global murder operation, which, in the years prior, had succeeded in killing a significant part of the leadership of the Fourth International, including Trotsky's son, Lev Sedov, the soon-to-be secretary of the Fourth International, Rudolph Klement, GPU defector Ignatz Reiss, and one of Trotsky's key political secretaries, Erwin Wolf.

Under the wave of counterrevolutionary pre-emptive civil war, known as the Great Terror, Stalin and the bureaucratic caste, which was suffocating the workers state in Russia, liquidated generations of socialists and leading figures in intellectual, scientific and cultural life. Hundreds of thousands of opponents of the regime and sympathizers of the Left Opposition and, after its founding in September 1938, of the Fourth International, were killed. The operations of the GPU had swept well beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union.

The damage created by this great crime was compounded by the fact that for thirty-five years—nearly half the period between the assassination and today—practically nothing was known about how the GPU had carried out the murder of Trotsky. It was not even until 1949 or 1950 that the killer's true name was known to the public, as a result of the investigation conducted by Mexican criminologist, Alfonzo Quiroz Cuaron.

In the days and weeks following Trotsky's assassination, even as the SWP was commemorating Trotsky's life, networks of agents within the party—operating on behalf of both the GPU and the American government—were continuing their work inside the SWP, sending detailed reports and party documents relating to members, their addresses, their children, their jobs, party finances, internal political disputes, and international correspondence, to the FBI and the GPU.

In May 1975, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) launched an initiative, called *Security and the Fourth International*, which was aimed at shedding light on the agents within the Fourth International, both past and present. In the introduction to *How the GPU Murdered Trotsky*, which was published in 1981 and reviewed many of the findings of the investigation, the ICFI explained that the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation was not a mere side campaign. Instead, it embodied the fight to maintain the historical continuity of Bolshevism and the legacy of the October Revolution against the betrayals of Stalinism and its allies:

[Security and the Fourth International] is both the continuation and the culmination of the struggle waged by Trotsky, co-leader of the 1917 October Revolution and founder of the Fourth International, to expose the crimes of Stalinism and rid the international workers' movement for once and for all of its counterrevolutionary legacy. In exposing the police agents who now lead the US revisionist Socialist Workers Party, the IC is settling historical accounts with the whole apparatus of counterrevolutionary violence employed by the combined state agencies of imperialism and the Soviet bureaucracy against the Fourth International.

In referring to *Security and the Fourth International* as an 'investigation,' it must be grasped that this word only partially embraces the full political and historical content of the struggle waged by the International Committee during the last six years. Like Trotsky's exposure of the Moscow Trial frame-ups of 1936–38, it is the highest conscious expression of the objective movement of the working class against the bourgeoisie and all its agencies.

The introduction continued:

The exposure and political destruction of these agents, along with their accomplices in revisionist organizations in every part of the world, is the supreme responsibility of the International Committee. The issue here is not vengeance for Trotsky's death. The essence of *Security and the Fourth International* is the struggle for working class power.

And further:

The findings of *Security and the Fourth International* constitute

an indispensable foundation for the training of Marxist cadre and a powerful material weapon of the World Revolution. The agents which this weapon has already exposed, and those whom it will ultimately destroy politically, represent the spearhead of the counterrevolution. This fact must be grasped by every class conscious worker and youth: all the historically-accumulated instinct of the bourgeoisie for self-preservation finds its greatest level of consciousness in the elaboration of its strategy for destroying the revolutionary leadership of the working class.

The six years that preceded this statement—and the years that would immediately follow, in particular through the Gelfand Case—marked a critical point of development in the history of the socialist movement. A generation of cadre that now leads the International Committee went through a formative political experience. The milestones in the history of the Fourth International over the last forty years, including the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) in Britain, the founding of the Socialist Equality Parties, and the launching of the *World Socialist Web Site*, were carried out by a leadership forged, in part, through the experiences of *Security and the Fourth International*.

What was involved in the investigation was staggering: an immense level of investigative work, spanning multiple continents, hundreds of hours of interviews and thousands of pages of historical documentation. For the first time, a systematic investigation was conducted into the penetration of the Trotskyist movement by agents of the GPU and the US government. Questions were posed which, had they been asked and investigated decades prior, could have prevented significant damage to the movement and its members, and saved lives.

The *Security and the Fourth International* investigation emerged out of events that form an important chapter in the history of the party. In August 1974, the Workers League (WL) learned that Workers League National Secretary Tim Wohlforth's personal partner, Nancy Fields, who had been rapidly elevated by Wohlforth into political leadership, had family connections to leading figures within the CIA. Fields, who had attended an international conference of the ICFI in England that May, interacted with members and sympathizers from a wide variety of countries, including those where military dictatorships were in power and whose attendance placed them at physical risk.

Despite the immense risk posed to the international movement, Wohlforth kept this information from the ICFI because of his personal relationship with Fields. He lied when asked in August whether Fields had any CIA connections, saying she did not. He later changed his answer and said he had known about her family connections, but did not consider them important. On August 31, 1974, the Workers League Central Committee voted unanimously to remove Wohlforth as national secretary and also to suspend Fields from membership, pending the outcome of an investigation by the inquiry commission into Fields' family ties.

These decisions were made, not because the party assumed Fields was in fact an agent. The offense was, rather, that Wohlforth and Fields had withheld this information from the movement. Wohlforth and Fields both voted in favor of the decisions taken by the Workers League Central Committee on August 31.

But less than a month later, on September 29, Wohlforth resigned from the Workers League, claiming, in his resignation letter, that he was "completely and utterly opposed" to the decisions of the Central Committee of August 31, which he called "monstrous." Regarding the security of the movement, he said, "I would suggest the place to find agents in the Workers League is among those who spread scandal against the leaders of the League and not among those who are the victims of slander."

The inquiry commission report, issued on November 9, 1974,

uncovered, in part through interviews with 22 current and former WL members, that concerns over Fields' ties were far from slanderous. Fields' uncle, who had raised her through much of her childhood, was Albert Morris, head of the CIA's computers division and a close compatriot of Richard Helms. Helms was a former CIA director, who had been a frequent visitor at Fields' home when she was growing up. The computers division, as journalist Seymour Hersh reported in the *New York Times* in December 1974, was then engaged in illegal surveillance of dissidents and left-wing groups in the US. The commission found that Fields and Wohlforth, despite having both voted in favor of the central committee resolution to set up the inquiry, refused to collaborate with it.

The inquiry report noted Fields' particularly destructive role in the party, which included travelling around the country and shutting down party branches in a ruthless and subjective manner. The commission concluded by determining that, because there was no direct evidence to suggest Fields or Wohlforth were connected to the work of the CIA, Wohlforth should rescind his resignation letter and return to party membership. But Fields and Wohlforth refused to accept these terms. Soon thereafter, Wohlforth joined the SWP, against whose degeneration he had waged a relentless struggle for roughly a decade, and began denouncing the Workers League. Fields ultimately became a high-ranking leader of the AFL-CIO.

In the March 22, 1975 statement of the Workers League, following Wohlforth's attacks on the party, we wrote: "The CIA is not an incidental question for our movement, but a question of indispensable tasks flowing from the principles of the construction of revolutionary parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International. Only someone who fails to take at all seriously the building of the world party of socialist revolution can dismiss the question of security against the CIA, the international center of the counterrevolutionary plans of the imperialists."

In the SWP's weekly journal *Intercontinental Press*, Joseph Hansen praised Wohlforth for his decision to leave the WL. In February and March 1975, *Intercontinental Press* published Wohlforth's denunciations of the WL, and on March 31, 1975, Hansen said Wohlforth's "sincerity is undeniable and one can only wish him better luck in his next venture." Attacking Gerry Healy, then principal leader of the WRP and ICFI, Hansen wrote:

Wohlforth describes Healy's performance as 'madness.' Would it not be preferable, and perhaps more precise, to use a modern term like 'paranoia'?

If the term fits, then the true explanation for Healy's obsessions about the CIA, police agents, and plots against his life, as well as his rages, 'extreme reactions,' and strange version of dialectics is to be sought not in his politics, philosophical methodology, or models like Pablo or Cannon, but in the workings of a mind best 'understood by psychiatrists.'

The IC recognized the significance of this unsettling denunciation of "paranoia" coming from Joseph Hansen, a man who had been a guard of Trotsky's in Coyoacan and who was present on the day Trotsky died at the hands of a GPU infiltrator. No genuine revolutionary who had lived through that disastrous breakdown in security would refer to security concerns as "paranoia." This deliberate distortion of the history of security threats against the party was an effort to confuse, disorient and isolate the revolutionary movement.

In an April 1975 statement, the WRP wrote, "Security is not an abstract or secondary question. A party that is not founded on revolutionary discipline in its own ranks cannot command the support of the working class in confronting the capitalist state machine, overthrowing it, and

establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.”

It continued, noting that Hansen’s attack on the Workers League and the IC “enables us to reopen vital pages in the history of Trotskyism. We are obliged to present this history, warts and all, since our movement has in the past, paid a terrible price when it has ignored and derided security training in its ranks. These are the pages that Hansen wants to suppress.”

The document explained that the ICFI, “is not going to be intimidated by the shouts and screams of the revisionists. They can call us ‘sectarians’ and ‘paranoids’ until they are blue in the face. In using these labels, they are in fact attacking the IC’s fight for principles and its attention to discipline and security vigilance in our ranks. We are not building a bucket shop for middle class free-booters and adventurers, which is the hallmark of Hansen’s international groupings. That road is an open invitation to the CIA and penetration by the police, because it is precisely among such elements that the police agencies operate so breezily. Hansen wants to hide the security question; we want to elevate it in the training and building of our movement. That is why we feel it necessary to reopen the pages of the history of Trotskyism to explain the background of why action was taken against Wohlforth and why similar steps will be taken again in the future if the necessity arises.”

And re-opening the pages of the history of Trotskyism is exactly what they did. It was remarkable how little was known about the assassination of Trotsky, until the decision to launch the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation took place in May 1975, the month after the above statement was written, at the Sixth Congress of the ICFI, held May 18–24, 1975.

At the Sixth Congress, the IC decided to propose to the United Secretariat (USec)—the post-reunification name of the international Pabloite grouping, to which the SWP belonged—the establishment of a parity control commission, consisting of equal members of the ICFI and USec, to investigate the state penetration of the workers movement. Such a commission was not proposed as a form of conciliation or unification on a common political program, but was intended to serve as a vehicle for a good faith investigation between opposed political tendencies into historical questions and questions of security, which, the IC explained, any socialist would consider to be questions of common fundamental importance. This offer was immediately rejected by the SWP and the USec in a facetious and mocking note sent by Joseph Hansen.

On June 5, 1975, Hansen replied to WRP leader Cliff Slaughter and mocked the latter’s physical signature, cynically joking it was suspicious and proved it was the WRP, not the SWP, which was riddled with agents. “I am sure that your central committee, in view of its expertise in such matters, will acknowledge the necessity to be alert to seemingly insignificant clues like these,” Hansen wrote. “They can lead to identifying an agent planted in the organization by the police or the CIA. Perhaps this will help you locate the police agent if it was written by one.”

The IC had uncovered documents in public government archives raising questions about Hansen’s motivation for using Wohlforth to prove the Workers League was “baseless” “paranoid” and “ultra-sectarian” in its inquiry into Fields’ family CIA connections.

Because many here are likely familiar with the content of these documents and for reasons of time, I will only summarize the most important elements. Ten days after Trotsky’s death on August 21, 1940, Hansen contacted the US Embassy in Mexico City with the hope of opening up a confidential relationship with the US government.

Hansen’s meetings were carefully followed in the highest levels of the American government, including by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Hansen’s points of contact included leading men such as George P. Shaw, Robert McGregor and B.E. Sackett. During this first meeting, Hansen provided the government with information surrounding Trotsky’s assassination. At this time, Hansen communicated to the US government that he had met, for three months in 1938, with agents of Stalin’s secret

police, the GPU. McGregor’s report, from the August 31 meeting, notes that Hansen said “he was himself approached by an agent of the GPU and asked to desert the Fourth International and join the Third.” The report states that Hansen met with a GPU handler named “John,” aka Dr. Gregory Rabinowitz, GPU spy ringleader in New York, for three months.

Hansen provided the US government with copies of the unpublished writings of Trotsky, a copy of the “W” Memorandum—a list of names of GPU agents the SWP had received from ex-Communist Party member Whittaker Chambers—and information regarding the SWP’s internal investigation into the assassination of Trotsky.

On September 25, 1940, American Consul to Mexico, George P. Shaw, wrote to top State Department official Raymond E. Murphy that Joseph Hansen “wants to be put in touch with someone” in order to pass on “confidential information” “with impunity.” FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover responded positively and encouraged his men to follow-up with Hansen, writing on October 1 that, “Should Hansen call at the New York Office, he should be handled tactfully and all information which he can supply and his assistance in this investigation should be obtained.”

Hansen did not inform the leadership of the SWP about his meetings with the FBI. A December 9, 1940 report by FBI Special Agent M.R. Griffin shows that the rest of the SWP leadership had no interest in discussing the matter with the FBI. His report reads:

The writer interviewed James P. Cannon and Joseph Hansen regarding the Trotsky affair and was advised by them that they had no information to offer. They appeared very reluctant to discuss the matter and gave very brief answers to questions put to them by the reporting agent.

The internal US government reports indicate that Hansen evinced no “reluctance” to talk to government officials in private. It was only when confronted by the FBI in the presence of James P. Cannon that Hansen kept silent.

None of this was even known by any leading members of the SWP. On June 2, 1977, David North, then national secretary of the Workers League, interviewed former SWP Political Committee member Felix Morrow, author of *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Spain* and one of the 18 SWP members jailed for sedition during the Second World War:

Q: I was wondering whether or not you had any recollection about the steps taken by the Socialist Workers Party at the time to learn more about the assassination, how it was carried out. Particularly whether it received any assistance from the American government in any way.

Morrow: None.

Q: None whatsoever?

Morrow: None.

Q: Well, what was the attitude of the FBI, in your opinion, toward the assassination?

Morrow: They weren’t involved in any way.

Q: Well, did the SWP to your knowledge have any policy of trying to obtain the assistance of the FBI?

Morrow: There would be no reason. It was an open and shut case. Jacson [pseudonym of Trotsky’s assassin, Ramon Mercader] had done it. The only problem was to establish that Jacson was a GPU agent.

Q: I see. Then to your knowledge the SWP made no initiative at any time toward establishing contact with the FBI?

Morrow: None. None...

On April 11, 1982, during the Gelfand Case (which we will address in more detail later) Farrell Dobbs, leader of the party’s trade union work, also jailed after the 1941 sedition trial, and who had later become national

secretary of the SWP, was questioned by the plaintiff Alan Gelfand's attorney, John Burton:

Burton: Did you know that in 1940 Mr. Hansen had face-to-face meetings with the FBI in New York City?

Dobbs: I did not...

Q: Did you ever talk to Mr. Hansen about his meetings with the FBI?

Dobbs: I told you I know nothing about it.

Morris Lewit, who led the SWP while Cannon, Morrow, Dobbs and others were imprisoned, was deposed on April 13, 1982 and gave similar testimony.

These and other interviews were conducted in the course of the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation, which, for those of us who did not live through this period, constituted a significant part of the day-to-day political activity of the party's leading cadre, and in particular Comrade David North. The articles and broadsides produced during this period were pored over by the party membership and studied with care and immense interest. It is essential to understand the impact of the struggle during the years 1974–1975 to 1983 on the entire party membership, which allowed the cadre to ground their day-to-day political activity in the struggle against Pabloism, and in the framework of the whole historical content of the Trotskyist movement.

It is not accidental that this time period—1974–75 to 1983—serves as a bridge between two milestone events in the history of the movement: the split with Wohlforth and the transition to a new political leadership, and the emergence of differences in 1982–83 between the Workers League and the WRP. When these differences were later brought to the full attention of the membership of the Workers League, the receptivity of the membership to Comrade North's criticisms of the opportunism of the WRP was prepared, in part, by the impact that *Security and the Fourth International* had had on the consciousness of the membership.

It is not possible here to review each blow dealt by the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation to those responsible for Trotsky's murder and the subsequent cover up by the Pabloites.

Less than forty years had passed since the Great Terror, when 800,000 were killed in Stalinist frame-ups and mass exterminations. At that time, the Trotskyist movement struggled against the overwhelming weight of Stalinist and liberal public opinion to expose the crimes of the Great Terror. Countless numbers of its leaders and rank-and-file members were killed in the reaction during the run-up to World War II. None of those responsible for the assassination of Trotsky, his family, or the leaders and members of the Fourth International, had been made to account for their crimes. *Security and the Fourth International* began to reveal the truth.

In August 1975, David North located Mark Zborowski, Lev Sedov's killer and Paris GPU ringleader, in San Francisco, where he was living a comfortable, affluent life. When photos of the interaction were published, older members of the movement from across the world, some of whom remembered hearing the news of Sedov's and Trotsky's assassinations, greeted North and the Workers League with profound gratitude.

These exposures produced a nervous hostility on the part of the Pabloite movement, which repeatedly denounced the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation and rallied supporters of various Pabloite tendencies in defense of Hansen's campaign to slander and isolate the IC. The SWP deepened its efforts to defend Hansen and Sylvia Callen, (aka Franklin, Caldwell) a GPU agent who had worked as former SWP leader James P Cannon's personal secretary.

Joseph Hansen denounced the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation as a "Geyser of Mud" in the November 24, 1975 edition of

Intercontinental Press. He rejected the ICFI's call for a commission of inquiry into Trotsky's assassination, writing:

Sylvia Caldwell, (that was her party name) worked very hard in her rather difficult assignment of managing the office of the Socialist Workers Party, which included helping Cannon in a secretarial capacity. In fact all the comrades who shared these often irksome chores with her regarded her as exemplary. They burned as much as she did over the foul slanders spread by [Louis] Budenz [GPU agent, member of the Communist Party and editor of its newspaper, the *Daily Worker*].

In early 1976, the SWP published a collection of essays memorializing the life of James P. Cannon, who had died in August 1974. Titled *James P. Cannon As We Knew Him*, the volume consisted of essays written by SWP members, including one by Joseph Hansen's wife, Reba Hansen, which contained the following extraordinary tribute to Callen:

When the load in the national office was heavy and Sylvia needed help, I gave her a hand, working very closely with her. Her efficiency impressed me. She knew how to do everything that was necessary to keep a one-person office running smoothly. Her devotion to the movement and her readiness to put in long hours of hard work inspired us all.

Sylvia and I became close collaborators and good personal friends. She was a warm human being.

There was no innocent explanation for the inclusion of this lying tribute to Sylvia Callen in a book that was supposedly intended to eulogize Cannon.

On January 14, 1977, the Pabloite campaign reached a low point. The leaders of the world Pabloite movement joined in London's Friends Hall to defend Hansen and denounce *Security and the Fourth International* in what the ICFI called "The Platform of Shame." When WRP leader Gerry Healy raised his hand, at the conclusion of the meeting, to respond to the slanders against him and the movement, he was denied the right to speak.

Even the bourgeois press acknowledged the shameful character of the Pabloite gathering. The *Sunday Observer* reported: "Mr. Healy quietly sat down again, feeling perhaps that he had made his point more eloquently than any words could have done." The WRP's *Newsline* wrote: "By avoiding all the main issues, the meeting has only intensified their crisis. It has settled nothing."

The International Committee responded, "Those acquainted with the history of the struggle against revisionism will find difficulty in suppressing a spontaneous desire to retch at the temerity of the organizers who defend the criminal activities of the GPU and their accomplices under the banner of a bogus 'workers democracy'... the exposure of Stalin's crimes and complicity of the revisionists in the cover-up of these crimes is central to this preparation of a new cadre of revolutionaries. Those who oppose this task in whatever form are serving the interests of counterrevolutionary Stalinism. We have been warned."

The investigation carried forward. In May 1977, North and Alex Mitchell located Sylvia Callen—whose new married name was Sylvia Doxsee—at a trailer park in Wheaton, Illinois.

When asked about her political past, Doxsee (aka Callen, Caldwell, Franklin) acknowledged working as Cannon's secretary, but sought to brush aside her years in the SWP as a minor episode in her life. As the *Bulletin*, newspaper of the Workers League, reported on May 31, 1977,

she said: “I don’t see why it’s even important. I was never really in politics. I never read. I never understood it. I was just an immature child, that’s about all I can say... It’s like I blacked it out. All that period of my life.”

Regarding James P. Cannon, with whom she had closely worked on a day-by-day basis for almost a decade, Callen said with unconcealed contempt, “He wasn’t an important man, in my opinion. Is he? What part did he play in the world?”

Pressed by North and Mitchell to explain why she was indicted as a co-conspirator in a GPU spy ring, Callen feigned amnesia.

The publication of the ICFI’s interview with Sylvia Callen produced further anxiety among the SWP leadership and the Stalinist bureaucracy. Those involved in penetrating the Trotskyist movement had good reason to believe the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation would publish further revelations exposing the GPU infiltration of the Trotskyist movement.

After the publication of the interview with Callen on May 31, 1977, Hansen responded in an *Intercontinental Press* article on June 20, 1977 titled “Healyites Escalate Frame-up of Trotskyist Leaders.” In the article, Hansen attempted to cast doubt on what he called the “purported” interview with Callen, stating that the ICFI had “escalated their slanders on the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party.”

Hansen attacked the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation by ridiculing the claim Callen was an agent. To support Callen, he referenced the 1947 Control Commission, which we will address in further detail later. The 1947 Control Commission, convened in May and June of that year by the SWP leadership, heard damning evidence presented to the SWP in the weeks before the revelation that Sylvia Callen was a GPU agent. Rather than investigate the allegations, the commission covered-up Callen’s role as an agent and swore those present to secrecy.

In his June 20, 1977 article, Hansen wrote:

The members of this select body of witch-hunters [i.e., the ICFI] commit themselves to a slander they had previously only hinted at; namely, that the control commission set up by the Socialist Workers Party in 1947 to examine the rumors circulating about Caldwell [i.e., Callen] was ‘rigged.’

Hansen also adopted the methods of Stalinist intimidation. Unable to challenge the Callen interview, Hansen wrote, “The Healyites are quite capable of initiating physical violence against other sectors of the labor movement.” In the same article, he threatened the International Committee, warning it that the investigation would bring “deadly consequences.”

Less than four months later, in the early morning of October 16, 1977, Tom Henehan, a 26-year-old member of the Workers League Political Committee, was assassinated in New York City by two professional gunmen while supervising a public party event at the Ponce Social Club. Though the killers were quickly identified, the New York police refused to make any arrests. Finally, after a three-year campaign waged by the Workers League, during which workers from across the country wrote letters of support, the gunmen were arrested, placed on trial, and convicted in July 1981 of murder and attempted murder. Following the trial, the private detective who had investigated the case for the killers’ defense attorney informed David North that “the word on the street” was that the killing was a “hit.”

In August 1977, two months before Henehan’s death, Alan Gelfand, an SWP member and a young public defender in Los Angeles, obtained copies of the *Security and the Fourth International* documents circulated by Workers League members outside the SWP’s National Convention in

Oberlin, Ohio.

Gelfand asked other SWP members and party leaders about the documents and particularly the 1940 State Department and FBI memos that referenced Hansen’s meeting with the GPU and with the US government.

In response, Gelfand was given different and contradictory explanations, leading him to carefully study the SWP’s official internal bulletin response. Gelfand concluded that the explanations given by the SWP were contradicted by documents uncovered by the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation.

He continued to ask for discussion regarding Hansen’s connections to the GPU and United States agencies, and of Callen’s connections to the GPU. The SWP leadership repeatedly barred him from speaking to other members about his concerns and threatened to discipline him. Gelfand concluded that this cover-up had to be tied to the activity of high-level state agents still operating within the party.

In December 1978, Gelfand filed a “friend of the court” advisory brief in support of a lawsuit by the SWP related to the FBI’s surveillance of the movement through COINTELPRO. This lawsuit, which the SWP had launched primarily to raise money, was not intended to expose past or active agents. The US government eventually settled the case by paying the SWP hundreds of thousands of dollars, but without identifying a single agent that it had infiltrated into the party. In the course of the trial, the FBI admitted that between 1960 and 1976 there were 300 informants serving as members of the SWP.

Gelfand’s brief, however, referenced the history of FBI and GPU penetration of the movement, and the recent revelations concerning Callen and Hansen, to demonstrate the need for the court to compel the government to identify the agents that had been sent into the SWP.

This demand outraged the SWP leadership, which accused Gelfand of violating party discipline. On January 11, 1979, the SWP Political Committee expelled him. This was the last meeting of the SWP Political Committee attended by Joseph Hansen. He died in New York City exactly one week later, on January 18, 1979, at the age of 68.

In a letter to the SWP Political Committee, dated January 29, 1979, Gelfand stated that he had been purged from the SWP to block the exposure of agents inside the party. “This purge,” he wrote, “is the result of my persistent and principled fight over the last 18 months to obtain satisfactory answers and explanations to the various questions raised by Joseph Hansen’s and Sylvia Franklin’s relationship with the FBI and GPU.”

On July 18, 1979, Gelfand filed a lawsuit in the federal court in Los Angeles, alleging that the government had violated his First Amendment rights by infiltrating the SWP with agents who had expelled him from the political party of his choosing. Gelfand named as defendants high US government officials—including the attorney general and the directors of the FBI and CIA—as well as leading members of the Socialist Workers Party.

The SWP immediately filed a motion to dismiss Gelfand’s lawsuit. The first oral arguments were made before United States District Judge Mariana R. Pfaelzer on November 19, 1979.

In June 1980, Pfaelzer denied the SWP’s motion, finding that Gelfand’s complaint raised fundamental constitutional issues. She wrote that “the government manipulation and takeover of plaintiff’s political party that is alleged ... is a drastic interference with the associational rights of its adherents and cannot pass constitutional muster.”

Gelfand and his lawyers took depositions of many current and former SWP members, some of whom have already been mentioned here. Sylvia Callen was the first to be deposed, and she invoked memory loss 231 times. She admitted, however, during the course of the deposition that she had previously appeared before at least two federal grand juries.

Gelfand’s attorneys petitioned to release the sealed transcripts of Sylvia

Callen's testimony from 1954 and 1958. This request was bitterly opposed by the SWP, which argued for continued secrecy on the basis that the "grand jury testimony is wholly irrelevant to any material issue in this litigation" and "should not be disclosed."

Judge Pfaelzer, who ruled in June 1980 that Gelfand's expulsion from the SWP would be unconstitutional if engineered by government agents to prevent their own expulsion, then blocked Gelfand, on "national security" grounds, from accessing the evidence he would need to prove that his First Amendment right had been denied by the government agents who expelled him from the SWP.

Gelfand and his attorneys explained in their closing brief on summary judgment:

Legally, this case presents a double paradox. For the court, there is the tension between the enforcement of First Amendment rights on the one hand and the duty to protect claims of national security on the other. In denying the motions to dismiss, the court in ringing terms affirmed the right to political association free from governmental interference. By upholding the government's claim of informer privilege on plaintiff's motion to compel, however, the court demonstrated its sensitivity to the countervailing concerns. Rarely does a case require the reconciliation of two such fundamentally opposing legal principles.

The plaintiff faces the other side of the coin. On the one hand he is told that, if he can prove that the leaders of the Party are agents of the United States government, he will establish the violation of his constitutional rights. Yet the most straightforward method of proof—examination of relevant government documents and direct responses to questions aimed at government agencies—has been denied to him.

Pfaelzer appeared concerned that Gelfand's evidence-gathering efforts would lead to the publication of state secrets regarding the penetration of the SWP. The SWP, meanwhile, was collaborating with the government to block the testimony of GPU agents, including Mark Zborowski, a leading GPU agent who was about to be made to answer for the murder of Sedov, Wolf, Reiss, and Klement under oath. The SWP opposed Zborowski's deposition, and the judge agreed. When denying Gelfand's request that Zborowski be compelled to testify and ruling in favor of the SWP to block the testimony, Judge Pfaelzer said:

Now, my feeling is that Mr. Zborowski, given the very nature of this case, when postured up against, since the case was filed, an enactment known as the Protection of Certain National Security Information, which has just become law this year, does or would run a possible risk of violating section 601(a) of that act, were he asked to identify either by name or description or anything else which might lead to the identity of possible intelligence agents who might be superficially participating in this Socialist Workers Party.

And that act specifically provides that if any person has such information and knowingly discloses it, regardless of whatever the motivation, can be prosecuted, fined \$50,000, and imprisoned up to ten years. And, therefore, I feel that his invoking the Fifth Amendment in that area, which is the pivotal point of this lawsuit, perhaps, nonetheless is a legitimate concern of the witness and his counsel that must be honored by this court. And, therefore, insofar as any invocation of the Fifth Amendment that has, up to now, been asserted in this deposition, I'm not going to order him to

further answer.

The highest levels of the US government and military-intelligence apparatus were closely monitoring the case. Those who falsely cite the relatively small size of the Trotskyist movement as proof of its "insignificance" should study a June 11, 1982 memorandum from Central Intelligence Agency General Counsel Stanley Sporkin to CIA Director William J. Casey which cites the Gelfand Case as an "item of major interest" for the CIA.

On the last day of the trial, March 9, 1983, SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes was called to testify. He concluded his testimony with an extraordinary tribute to Callen, the GPU agent, calling her "one of my heroes, after the harassment and what she's been through the last couple of years. I would even feel more strongly about her, her character, than I did then."

Following Barnes' testimony, Pfaelzer suddenly released the transcripts of both the 1954 and 1958 grand jury hearings, perhaps because Barnes' testimony was too much to stomach.

In her 1954 testimony, Callen employed the tactic that she would later use when confronted by North and Mitchell in 1977 and during her 1980 deposition, i.e., memory loss. In 1954, Callen did confirm that she had been married to Zalmond Franklin, and that they had attended meetings of the Stalinist Young Communist League. But in response to crucial questions, such as whether she had met with Louis Budenz, Callen stated: "I can't answer that because of possible self-incrimination," invoking the Fifth Amendment.

In her second grand jury appearance, on June 18, 1958, Callen told the story of her role as an agent inside the SWP. She recalled how she was paid to hand over confidential information from the desk of James Cannon to two leading GPU spies, Dr. Gregory Rabinowitz—the "Roberts" Budenz had worked with—and Jack Soble, the brother of Robert Soblen, both of whom were also GPU agents.

Callen acknowledged that the GPU had access to everything: international correspondence, internal discussion papers from Trotskyist movements worldwide, all of James P. Cannon's correspondence, and personal information about the membership. She admitted she would meet with Dr. Gregory Rabinowitz, GPU spy ringleader in New York, with whom Hansen also met in 1938. We quote at length her testimony in the four-part series we recently published. Here is an excerpt:

Q: Now, you described the mimeographed material which you gave, can you recall the contents of the material that you typed?

A: Well, I remember I used to just type up—it was mostly during faction fights in the party and political committee meetings, who was fighting with who, and then if there was correspondence from Leon Trotsky that I saw, I would try to remember what was in the letters and write that all out, who's going with who and that kind of thing, personal things like that, I remember, how much money they had—I knew, you know, bank balances and stuff like that.

Judge Pfaelzer, guided by a desire to prevent Gelfand from exposing the depth of the FBI's involvement in the SWP, ultimately denied his requests that she release information about specific agents operating in the party, relying on a pseudo-legal argument that Gelfand was not entitled to this information.

But the release of the grand jury testimony of 1958 was a devastating blow. It exploded the cover-up of the GPU's penetration of the SWP, and completely vindicated the investigation conducted by the International Committee.

Forty-three years after the launching of the investigation, its political significance now emerges even more clearly. What was involved was a staggering level of investigative work that became a tremendous blow for historical truth against the falsifications of the Stalinists and their allies.

The Workers League stated in its 1978 perspectives document, written before the Gelfand Case, that:

Security and the Fourth International represents nothing less than the reclamation of the whole historical continuity of Bolshevism through the Fourth International and the International Committee from the evil grip of Stalinist counter-revolution and falsification. All the lies and distortions and crimes committed by Stalinism against Trotskyism, the political embodiment of the struggle for the world October; all the monstrous acts committed to confuse and disorient generations of workers about the real history of the October Revolution and the role of Trotsky—these have been dealt a blow from which Stalinism and all the agencies of imperialist counter-revolution will never recover.

The investigation was a political struggle conducted under fire from an international network of Pabloites who responded with vitriolic denunciations. The detractors of *Security and the Fourth International* never provided an explanation for the facts about Hansen, Callen, or other proven GPU agents like Robert Sheldon Harte and Floyd Cleveland Miller.

But the ICFI insisted there was a political explanation for the attacks on *Security and the Fourth International*. To the Pabloites, the ICFI's unforgivable crime was to bring to light documents exposing the role of the GPU and the US government in destabilizing the Trotskyist movement and, in the case of the GPU, in murdering its leadership. This cut across the Pabloites' political aim of orienting to the Stalinist bureaucracies and, in the case of the SWP, to the Democratic Party in the US.

The collapse of the Stalinist parties and the reduced influence of their Pabloite supporters has weakened the ability of the corrupt and cynical middle class to find a broader audience for their denunciations of the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation. Those, like Louis Proyect and Susan Weissman, who continue to attack the ICFI for its investigation, are desperately concerned that a new generation of workers and youth recognize that the political and physical independence of the workers movement from agents of the state is a life or death question, upon which the fate of the socialist revolution depends.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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