From the arsenal of Trotskyism

The Political Report by David North to the International Committee of the Fourth International—February 11, 1984

12 February 2019

Thirty-five years ago this week, on February 11, 1984, David North, then the national secretary of the Workers League (predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party), presented at a meeting of the International Committee of the Fourth International a critique of the British Workers Revolutionary Party's abandonment of key theoretical conceptions and programmatic principles of Trotskyism. Speaking for over two hours, North provided a comprehensive analysis of the political degeneration of the WRP, then the British section of the ICFI. It placed the adaptation of the WRP to bourgeois nationalist movements in the Middle East within the context of the ICFI's decades-long struggle against Pabloism, a liquidationist tendency that first emerged within the Fourth International in the early 1950s. The report also reviewed the WRP's opportunist relations with reformist tendencies in Britain.

For many years, the defense of the principles of Trotskyism had been led by the WRP (founded by the British Socialist Labour League in 1973) and its principal leaders, Gerry Healy, Michael Banda and Cliff Slaughter. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, the SLL/WRP developed an increasingly national-opportunist orientation and practice.

Differences between the Workers League and the WRP first emerged openly in October 1982. North submitted to the WRP a detailed critique of Studies in Dialectical Materialism, a pamphlet written by Healy. This critique established that Healy's philosophical method involved a repudiation of materialism and a reversion to a form of subjective idealism that was fundamentally anti-Marxist. The critique of Healy's idealist mystification of dialectics was linked to an analysis of the WRP's relations with bourgeois nationalist regimes in the Middle East.

Although North's critique was initially supported by Michael Banda and Cliff Slaughter, who pledged that there would be an exhaustive discussion of his written criticisms within the International Committee, the two senior WRP leaders executed an about-face within a matter of weeks. At the subsequent meeting of the International Committee in December 1982, Banda and Slaughter opposed discussion of North's criticisms. They supported Healy's threat to orchestrate a split within the International Committee and sever relations with the Workers League if North persisted with his criticisms. Seeking to avoid a split under these unfavorable conditions, North withdrew his criticisms.

However, the political line of the WRP continued to assume an ever more openly opportunist character. In November 1983, North rejected Cliff Slaughter's criticism of the Workers League's "heavy emphasis" on the political independence of the working class. In a further lengthy letter to Banda, dated January 23, 1984, North stated that the Workers League was "deeply troubled by the growing signs of a political drift toward political positions quite similar—both in conclusions and methodology—to whose which we have historically associated with Pabloism."

North concluded his letter by calling upon the International Committee to utilize "the opportunity presented by the scheduled IC meeting to prepare the foundation for an exhaustive discussion on international perspectives, aimed at the drafting of a comprehensive international resolution;" and that the ICFI reassert its conviction that the Theory of Permanent Revolution "remains the indispensable scientific foundation for the building of the World Party of Socialist Revolution."

But the WRP refused to engage in a discussion of these differences. The WRP arbitrarily excluded from the meeting, which opened on February 11, 1984, a number of leading sections of the ICFI. The WRP leaders responded to North with unprincipled denunciations of the Workers League, without answering any of the issues of the report. The leader of the Greek section, Savas Michael, whose visit to Tehran and public endorsement of the Iranian regime's persecution of left-wing parties was specifically criticized by North, lost his self-control and responded with a hysterical tirade.

Once again, the WRP threatened an immediate split. Under conditions in which the content of North's criticism was still not known within most sections of the International Committee, or even among the rank-and-file membership of the WRP, the Workers League delegation, following extended deliberation, decided to bide its time and withdraw the criticisms.

In his letter of January 23, 1984, North had warned that the political line foisted upon the International Committee by the WRP, unless examined and corrected, "will produce political disasters within the sections."

The political disaster struck the Workers Revolutionary Party little more than one year later, in the summer and autumn of 1985. The WRP was shattered by an organizational crisis for which not a single leader of the organization could provide a credible explanation. As the WRP descended into a factional civil war, the documents written by North between 1982 and 1984 began to circulate rapidly throughout the International Committee and the membership of the British section.

A decisive majority of the International Committee, and a substantial section of the British section's rank-and-file membership, insisted on a thorough examination of the WRP's opportunist policies and practices. Banda and Slaughter sought to evade an examination of the theoretical and political issues that underlay the crisis in the party by focusing on a sex scandal, which they used to incite hysteria among the most disoriented and right-wing members of the WRP.

Slaughter concocted the flagrantly dishonest claim that all the sections of the International Committee had undergone "equal degeneration." But the documents prepared by the Workers League between 1982 and 1984 established that there had existed a principled opposition to Healy and the

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WRP prior to 1985. Moreover, the documents produced by the Workers League provided the theoretical and programmatic foundation for the revival and triumph of Trotskyist principles within the International Committee.

On December 16, 1985, following the completion of a report that documented the corrupt relations established by the WRP with bourgeois national governments and organizations, the International Committee suspended the WRP's membership. Its resolution stipulated that the WRP's readmission into the ICFI would depend upon its unequivocal acceptance of the historically developed principles of the Fourth International. Healy's faction had already split from the International Committee. Banda and Slaughter's faction voted against accepting the Trotskyist principles upon which the WRP's readmission into the ICFI was contingent. However, Dave Hyland, representing an internationalist tendency within the WRP, voted in support of the resolution presented by the International Committee. This tendency established the International Communist Party (predecessor of the British SEP) in February 1986 as a section of the ICFI. The WRP, having broken with the ICFI, rapidly fell apart. Banda, after writing a vitriolic attack on the entire history of the Fourth International, declared himself a supporter of Stalin. By the early 1990s, the remnants of the WRP had severed all connections to Trotskyism. Slaughter proclaimed his rejection of a Leninist-Trotskyist party.

A comprehensive analysis of the political degeneration of the WRP and the split with the ICFI is contained in the statement of the ICFI, "How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism," *published in the summer of 1986. The documents of the split, including David North's report to the ICFI meeting of February 11, 1984, are contained in a companion volume,* "The ICFI Defends Trotskyism: 1982-1986."

Banda's attack on Trotskyism was answered by David North in The Heritage We Defend, *which was serialized in the press of the International Committee in 1986-87 and published as a book in 1988. A new edition of The Heritage was issued by Mehring Books, the publishing house of the International Committee, in 2018.*

The struggle that unfolded in the International Committee between 1982 and 1986 is of immense historical and contemporary significance. It provided the foundation for the entire subsequent theoretical, political and practical development of the ICFI.

The report of February 11, 1984 and the entire record of the 1982-86 struggle within the ICFI represent a concentrated summation of the theory and principles that remain to this day the essential foundation of the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Joseph Kishore

Political Report by David North to the International Committee of the Fourth International

February 11, 1984

1. The 30-year history of the International Committee of the Fourth International has been the record of the continuous struggle of the world Trotskyist party to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership. This has been a history of struggle against all those forces—Stalinist, Social Democratic, and Pabloite—through which the working class is subordinated to the bourgeoisie. The International Committee is based upon the traditions and principles established through the political, theoretical and organizational struggles of all previous generations of Marxists—and the way in which this continuity of the IC with these previous generations has been developed is through the struggle against every variety of anti-Marxism that has emerged within the workers' movement, especially within the Trotskyist movement itself. The form assumed by each of these struggles has always been determined by the actual content of the international class struggle. Basing itself on the dialectical method and historical materialism, the International Committee has constantly fought to uncover the class forces at work in each of these struggles and to expose in each new manifestation of revisionism the ideological forms through which imperialism seeks to vanquish Marxism.

2. Throughout the history of the revolutionary movement such forms of ideological attack on Marxism have emerged precisely when the class struggle was undergoing a rapid development and posed a very direct threat to the rule of the bourgeoisie. Bernsteinism emerged with the development of imperialism and the beginning of the epoch in which the socialist revolution would be posed (as was already seen very clearly in the 1905 Russian Revolution). Stalinism was the political and theoretical expression of the pressure of imperialism upon the first workers' state—the greatest challenge ever to the rule of the world bourgeoisie. Within the Trotskyist movement, the connection between the growth of revisionism and the pressing needs of imperialism has been even more direct. There was nothing "coincidental" about the emergence of Burnham and Shachtman at the very beginning of World War II—the point of the greatest crisis of imperialism. We have stressed many times the historical significance of Pabloism, which emerged within the Trotskyist movement precisely under conditions of the great post-war crisis of the Stalinist bureaucracy which reflected the over-all crisis of world imperialism. The vulnerability of cadre to the class pressures which become exceptionally powerful at the point in which the imperialist contradictions become exceptionally acute is bound up with fundamental questions of method. For empiricists and pragmatists like Pablo and his American counterpart, Clarke, who substitute their superficial impressions for a scientific study of class relations based on the dialectical materialist method and historical materialism, the need for a revision of Trotskyism and an abandonment of principled positions in line with the "reality of living events" becomes all consuming. Those who stand on principle are habitually denounced as "ultra-left" and "sectarian." In each stage of the struggle against Pabloism, however, its "new reality" was shown to be nothing more than an uncritical adaptation to the illusory stability of imperialism and those political forces who temporarily predominate within the workers' movement and the national liberation struggles.

3. The struggle waged by the Socialist Labour League against the SWP between 1961 and 1964 brought to the fore all the fundamental theoretical and political issues involved in the struggle against Pabloism: the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class as the gravedigger of capitalism and the builder of a socialist society; the rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat; the denial of the struggle against spontaneity and the necessity for a conscious struggle for Marxist theory; the renunciation of the historical role of the Fourth International. In its very first letter to the SWP, the national committee of the SLL issued this warning:

> "The greatest danger confronting the revolutionary movement is liquidationism, flowing from a capitulation either to the strength of imperialism or of the bureaucratic apparatuses in the Labour movement, or both. Pabloism represents, even more clearly now than in 1953, this liquidationist tendency in the international Marxist movement. In Pabloism the advanced working class is no longer the vanguard of history, the center of all Marxist theory and strategy in the epoch of imperialism, but the plaything of 'world-historical factors', surveyed and assessed in abstract fashion ... Here all historical responsibility of the revolutionary movement is denied, all is subordinated to panoramic forces; the questions of the role of the Soviet bureaucracy and of class forces in the colonial revolution are left unresolved. That is natural, because the key to these problems is the role of the working class in the advanced countries and the crisis of leadership in their labour movements ...

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"Any retreat from the strategy of political independence of the working class and the construction of revolutionary parties will take on the significance of a world-historical blunder on the part of the Trotskyist movement." (*Trotskyism Versus Revisionism,* Vol. 3, pp.48-49)

In direct response to the efforts of the SWP to revise Trotskyism on the basis of the defeats inflicted upon US imperialism by Castro, the SLL wrote in May 1961:

"An essential of revolutionary Marxism in this epoch is the theory that the national bourgeoisie in underdeveloped countries is incapable of defeating imperialism and establishing an independent national state. This class has ties with imperialism and it is of course incapable of an independent capitalist development. In national liberation movements the workers' organizations must follow Lenin's slogan: 'March separately, strike together' against the foreign imperialists and their immediate collaborators. Following Marx, we say: support the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois parties insofar as they help strike common blows against our enemy; OPPOSE them on every issue in which they want to stabilize their own conditions of existence and their own rule ... It is not the job of Trotskyists to boost the role of such nationalist leaders. They can command the support of the masses ONLY because of the betrayal of leadership by Social-Democracy and particularly Stalinism, and in this way they become buffers between imperialism and the mass of workers and peasants." (Vol. 3, pp. 64-65)

4. The speech delivered by Jack Barnes on December 31, 1982 and published in the first edition of "New International" is a powerful vindication of the struggle waged by the International Committee. The SWP, some 20 years after the split, is now stating unambiguously that it rejects the theory of permanent revolution and the programmatic foundation of the Fourth International as it was elaborated in the Transitional Program of 1938. Let us pay some attention to what Barnes has written, because the published edition gives us a much richer picture than the abbreviated transcription upon which the statement published by the Workers League this past summer was based.

5. Barnes claims that he is not rejecting the important role Trotsky played in the fight against Stalin's abuse of power, and he leaves open the possibility that "Trotsky's contributions will find their place in the political arsenal of the international communist movement as the world revolution **progresses." (p.83) However, these "contributions" must be** disentangled from Trotsky's error on the theory of permanent revolution.

"This usage of the term poses the biggest *political* problem for us, because it has brought weaknesses into our movement associated with Trotsky's wrong pre-1917 theory. Above all, it has led to a tendency to concentrate solely on the proletariat's alliance with the agricultural laborers and poor peasants against the rural exploiters, undoubtedly a central task in the countryside, to the exclusion of recognizing the centrality of the proletariat's alliance with the broadest possible layers [of] the rural producers in the fight against imperialism and against the landlord-capitalist regimes in the colonial world. The world class struggle since World War II, especially in this hemisphere since 1959, should convince us that to the extent those who are identified as Trotskyists base themselves on these weaknesses in Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, the door is open to leftist biases and sectarian political errors.

"Permanent revolution does not contribute today to arming either ourselves or other revolutionists to lead the working class and its allies to take power and use that power to advance the world socialist revolution. As a special or unique frame of reference it is an obstacle to reknitting our political continuity with Marx, Engels, Lenin, and the first four congresses of the Communist International. It has been an obstacle in our movement to an objective reading of the masters of Marxism, in particular the writings of Lenin.

"If we are to learn what we can learn as part of the political convergence under way among proletarian revolutionists in the world today, and bring into that process Trotsky's enormous political contributions, then our movement must discard permanent revolution." (*New International,* Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 12-13)

What Barnes is saying is that Trotsky placed a one-sided emphasis on the class struggle of the proletariat at the expense of a correct appreciation of the anti-imperialist struggle which binds together the working class and all sections of the peasantry. According to Barnes, the post-war developments—above all, those beginning in 1959 with the victory of Castro—prove that the anti-imperialist movement as a form of struggle uniting all sections of the population is far greater than anticipated by Trotsky and the Fourth International's relations with such movements, and the prospects of a "convergence" of all anti-imperialist forces, have been limited due to the incorrect emphasis placed by the theory of permanent revolution upon the independent role of the proletariat and the class struggle.

6. Let us continue with Barnes:

"The Comintern taught us that the democratic, anti-imperialist, agrarian revolution, and the socialist revolution are combined in the oppressed nations. It charted a course toward building anti-imperialist united fronts and fighting for proletarian leadership of them. It taught us that communists, while supporting every concrete struggle against imperialism, no matter how limited or under what leadership, have to distinguish between revolutionary nationalist movements based on the workers and peasants, and bourgeois-dominated nationalist movements that are an obstacle to the oppressed toilers' fight for national liberation." (p.33)

"Trotsky counterposed the proletariat's alliance with the peasantry as a whole to an alliance with the rural poor. Lenin, on the other hand, pursued a course aimed at advancing the working class along a line of march that would enable it to lead the democratic revolution and be in the strongest possible position to move forward from there toward the expropriation of the exploiters. Unlike Trotsky, Lenin presented a strategy for the transition from the democratic to the socialist revolution based on a concrete understanding of the shifting class alliances at each stage of this gigantic process of political, social and economic transformation." (p. 44)

7. In placing this great emphasis on the democratic revolution as a distinct transitional stage, which he calls the workers' and peasants' government, prior to and apart from the dictatorship of the proletariat, the counterrevolutionary line of Barnes becomes absolutely unmistakable.

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What is involved here is not simply that Barnes is challenging some sort of theoretical icon of the Trotskyist movement. There are very definite political implications. In essence, Barnes rejects the dictatorship of the proletariat as the instrument through which the democratic revolution is achieved. He denies the class nature of the peasantry (which represents a fundamental repudiation of Lenin's teachings, which then leads to a reactionary vulgarization and distortion of the pre-1917 conceptions of the democratic dictatorship), and ignores all class distinctions within the "anti-imperialist" movement, or claims that they are relatively unimportant. He clearly implies that without the prior establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the transition from the "democratic" to "socialist" stages of the revolution can be peaceful and gradual, whereas, in reality, as history has demonstrated again and again, there can be no peaceful "growing over" from the rule of one class to another without a violent revolution. This was the basic flaw which Trotsky detected in Lenin's pre-1917 theory of the democratic dictatorship. Based on an analysis of the nature of the epoch, Trotsky foresaw that the bourgeois-democratic tasks of the peasant revolution could develop only through and under the leadership of the proletarian revolution.

All this is denied by Barnes in his critique of Trotsky:

> "In combatting Stalin's rightist errors, Trotsky in 1928 injected some leftist erro[r]s. While not directly challenging the Bolshevik's pre-1917 strategy as applied to Russia, Trotsky in fact revived his own pre-1917 position, rejecting an alliance with the peasantry as a whole in the democratic revolution. He now applied this to China, and, by implication, to other countries in the colonial world. Trotsky's 1928 document had no concept of a transitional regime and period, based on this worker-peasant alliance. It advanced no strategy that would enable the Chinese workers to gain experience and lead their most consistent allies, the agricultural wage workers and poor peasants, in the expropriation of the exploiters and the establishment of new relations of production based on state property and planning." (p. 53)

8. Finally, Barnes sums up the conclusions he draws from the critique of Trotsky's permanent revolution.

> "We believe that history has shown that in our epoch a workers' and farmers' government that will come out of a successful anticapitalist revolution. It is the first form of government following a victorious uprising against the bourgeoisie—a government that will not turn power back over to the capitalists, but will take power *away* from them and use it to open up the road to deepening the mobilization of the workers and farmers and the expropriation of the exploiters.
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> "But this is a process. In colonial and semicolonial countries, the initial tasks of the new revolutionary government are primarily those of democratic revolution—national liberation, agrarian reform, measures to improve the conditions and expand the rights of the working class and peasantry ... It is this all important transitional stage, and the rich concreteness of the class struggle and proletarian leadership of its allies during the transition, that is lost sight of when the workers' and farmers' government is rejected.
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> "To us, the workers' and farmers' government [NOT THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT-D.N.] is a decisive question." (p.76)

9. Barnes' position is not really original; it is based on the old conceptions of Stalinism, which the bureaucracy now puts forward under the slogan of "the non-capitalist road" to justify its unprincipled alliances with bourgeois nationalist regimes. The Stalinists are very explicit: there exists a "non-capitalist road" for underdeveloped countries which allows them to complete the democratic revolution and embark upon the tasks of socialist construction without the dictatorship of the proletariat.

> "The tactics and strategy of the Communists must unfailingly cooperate with national-revolutionary and revolutionary democrats: this is an essential condition for the success of all anti-imperialist forces which do not regard capitalism as a remedy against age-old backwardness. Under these circumstances the slogan calling for a transition to the non-capitalist path is in fact orientation toward such a class shift to the left which would bring consistently democratic forces to power. They will fail to achieve their tasks without making 'steps toward socialism', but they will only be able to make these steps on the basis of 'left-wing bloc' tactics. In practice, this often amounts to the organization of mass pressure on bourgeois democracy thus helping it to realize its progressive potentialities, and at the same time the setting of democratic tasks which its most consistent wing that has become revolutionary-democrat or is capable of becoming such will be able to fulfill ... Thus the adoption of the non-capitalist path is a phased process and the Communists who are interested in it more than anyone else cannot bring about such a shift at will ... IT IS ALSO NECESSARY TO BEAR IN MIND THAT THE PROMOTION OF THE SLOGAN CALLING FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE NON-CAPITALIST PATH BY NO MEANS IMPLIES THAT IT ALSO CALLS FOR A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY AND THE ASSUMPTION OF POWER BY THE COMMUNISTS, FOR THAT WOULD AMOUNT TO ASSERTING THAT ONLY A PROLETARIAN TAKEOVER IS CAPABLE OF SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF A DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION. BY PUTTING FORWARD THE SLOGAN CALLING FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE NON-CAPITALIST PATH, THE COMMUNISTS WANT TO DEEPEN DEMOCRATIC, ANTI-IMPERIALIST TRANSFORMATIONS AND AT THE SAME TIME ORIENT THEM TOWARD SOCIALISM." (Ulyanovsky, National Liberation, Progress, pp.51-53, emphasis added)

10. The evolution of revisionism completely vindicates the assessment made by the IC in the perspectives resolution of the Fourth World Congress in 1972:

> "Inside the colonial and semi-colonial countries, revisionism again directly assisted the Stalinist bureaucracy and the nationalist leaders as the revolutionary representatives of the masses. They completely rejected the essence of Lenin's position and the theory of Permanent Revolution: the construction of independent proletarian parties, leading the working class at the head of the oppressed peasantry, as the only force able to resolve the tasks of the democratic revolution and go beyond them to workers' power, as part of the international socialist revolution." (Vol. 1, p. 32)

11. The bankruptcy of Barnes' position: the "models" to which he

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refers as examples of “workers’ and peasants’ governments” or as the forces out of which the new alignment of “communists” shall emerge are the New Jewel Movement, the Sandinistas, the Farabundo Marti, and Castroism. In each case, the development of the world crisis of imperialism has had a devastating impact—and it shows the betrayals to which Barnes’ position must lead. At any rate, our position is not based upon the disposition of forces within a single country—whether the immediate conditions seem favorable for the victory of insurgent forces—but on the perspective of international socialist revolution. This is the basis upon which we set out to resolve the crisis of leadership—never adapting ourselves to those political tendencies within the nationalist movement which immediately predominate. Moreover, we should not forget that the toppling of a reactionary puppet regime in a semi-colonial country does not, of itself, resolve the problems. As Lenin and Trotsky pointed out, in such countries far greater problems than the seizure of power **emerge** after the successful revolution. This has certainly been shown in Nicaragua and Cuba, not to mention Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Kenya, Nigeria, etc.

12. The development of the IC has proceeded through the struggle against revisionism. The struggle recorded in the six volumes published during the 1970s is the theoretical foundation for the training of our cadre, just as the writings of Trotsky during the 1920s formed the basis for the political education of the early forces of the Fourth International. The latest attack by Barnes on Trotskyism must bring this entire history forward; precisely because the International Committee has always recognized that such crucial developments within the ranks of the revisionists inevitably foreshadow great new chapters in the world socialist revolution. Moreover, we don’t simply look upon revisionism as some sort of bacteria that exists inside a test-tube, safely stored in a laboratory. Precisely because revisionism has material roots in the actual development of the class struggle of which we ourselves are a part, because it reflects the pressure of alien class forces upon the working class and its revolutionary vanguard, our response to revisionism finds its highest expression in the analysis of our own political development.

13. It is for this reason that we feel the time has come to examine the whole development of the IC during the past decade. We are strongly of the opinion that we have steadily drifted away from positions for which we tenaciously fought for more than 20 years after the original split with Pablo. In a letter to Comrade Banda, written on January 23, 1984, I suggested that the time had come to draw a balance sheet on the entire experience of the IC in relation to the national liberation movements. I feel that such a balance sheet is necessary because there has been really no objective examination of our experience—as a World Party—with the various nationalist bourgeois regimes and liberation movements with which we have established relations. We feel that the record is one which merits a serious critique, in order to defend the continuity of the IC and to train the cadre in each of the sections. We are not here to assign blame, but to work for the development of the IC as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

14. In the summer of 1976, the IC first discussed initiating more active contact with the national liberation movements—principally the PLO. At the time the dangers inherent in such work were clearly stressed—that such movements were of a heterogeneous character, within which the imperialists and Stalinists worked actively. This approach was correct and principled. Further discussion at the Seventh Congress of the IC in May 1977, at which the work was guided by the newly published protocols of the Second Congress of the Communist International. Following the Congress, the IC sent a delegation to Lebanon. In July of 1977 the WRP signed an alliance with the Libyan Jamahiriya. Relations were then developed with the Arab Ba’ath Socialist Party of Iraq. It is clear that by mid-1978 a general orientation toward relations with nationalist regimes and liberation movements was developing without any corresponding perspective for the actual building of our own forces inside the working class. An entirely uncritical and incorrect appraisal began to emerge ever more openly within our press, inviting the cadres and the working class to view these bourgeois nationalists as “anti-imperialist” leaders to whom political support must be given.

15. Iraq—We assumed an increasingly uncritical attitude toward the regime of Saddam Hussein, providing political support for his struggle against the Iraqi Communist Party, including the execution of 21 members.

> “The fact is that the CP members were executed according to military codes which the Iraqi CP discussed, approved and agreed to implement. To this day the Iraqi CP has not called for the repeal of the military laws which ban the formation of secret cells in the army. It has never contested the fact that the arrested officers were guilty of the charges brought against them.
>
> “This is a straight case of Moscow trying to set up cells in the Iraqi armed forces for the purpose of undermining the regime. It must accept the consequences ... It is a principle with Trotskyists that we defend workers, whether they are Stalinists, revisionists or Social Democrats, from the attacks of the capitalist state. But, as the facts show, that has nothing to do with the incidents in Iraq.” *(News Line,* March 8, 1979)

This position was never rectified even though it had no precedent within the Trotskyist movement. We had simply ignored what Trotsky wrote about the role of the trade unions—whose leaders were among the victims of Hussein’s purges—in the less developed countries. Our praise for Hussein continued unabated. In the summer of 1980, we published a six-part series in which the Arab Ba’ath Socialist Party and Saddam Hussein were the subject of lavish praise. These articles were reproduced as a pamphlet, which was never repudiated.

These articles appeared on the eve of the invasion of Iran by Iraq. It is important to note our reaction to this development. Our own relations with the Iraqis were so well known that our own statements reflected the ambiguities within our position. We correctly opposed the war, but we did not denounce Iraq as acting on behalf of imperialism. Rather the WRP Political Committee statement declared:

> “We call for full support for the national revolutionary movements including the Arab Ba’ath Socialist Party and the Iranian Revolution in their fight against imperialism.” (*News Line*, September 25, 1980)

16. We continued to oppose to the war and call for the end to hostilities. Then following an Iranian offensive which crossed into Iraq, the *News Line* of July 16, 1982 published an editorial which declared:

> “The Iranian invasion of Iraq is a disservice to the besieged Palestinian and Lebanese fighters in Beirut and to the Iranian Revolution itself, and must be denounced.”

17. By September 1983, we had come to shift our line completely. We adopted, without any serious analysis and explanation, a position of support for the military victory of Iran over Iraq. Responding to the sale of Exocet missiles to Iraq, the *News Line* declared:

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> "The Iraqi regime has been militarily defeated and comprehensively exposed as a tool of imperialism. It must be overthrown by the Iraqi masses without delay. Its continued existence is giving imperialism a military base and pretext for their war plans."

18. This has continued to be our line—which corresponds to an uncritical attitude toward the Islamic Republic, a position which directly contradicts the one and only analysis made by the IC of the Iranian Revolution—five years ago. The IC Statement of February 12, 1979—published in the *News Line* of February 17, 1979—issued a clear and unequivocal statement:

> "The truth is that the masses were moved by CLASS questions, not religious ones.
>
> "However, in the absence of an organized revolutionary leadership and because of the cowardly class-collaborationist policies of Iranian Stalinism in the Tudeh party, Ayatollah Khomeini and other religious leaders of the Shi'ite sect have been able to establish a virtual political monopoly on the opposition forces...
>
> "The policies of Khomeiny reflect the contradictory and equivocal nature of the bazaar merchants and other elements of the Iranian native capitalist class and petty-bourgeoisie...
>
> "But they cannot and will not challenge capitalist state power in Iran ... The Stalinists and centrists of all varieties will oppose the strategy of advance to the socialist revolution in Iran, on the grounds that the revolution there is first and foremost a bourgeois revolution, i.e., a revolution for democratic demands to abolish feudal and semi-feudal oppression and permit the free development of national capitalism and democracy.
>
> "They will say it is 'sectarian' to advocate policies for the working class which are independent of and opposed to the bourgeoisie."

19. No further class analysis was ever made of the development of the Iranian Revolution. Our line came to consist simply of unconditional support for Khomeiny, despite the mounting persecution of every single left-wing organization in Iran. In the absence of any Marxist analysis of the development of this revolution, an obviously non-Trotskyist and revisionist line began to find its way into our international press—most notably in the articles written by Comrade Savas following his trip to Iran, which occurred in the midst of arrests and trials of Tudeh Party leaders. The tone for this series was set in the first article, entitled "The Rule of the Deprived." Among the first points made was the following:

> "For a person coming from the West, especially from a country like Greece, that has gone through decades under the police state of the right-wing and through dictatorship, one fact is striking: nowhere can one see a policeman."

What we found striking was that a virtually identical observation was made by Mary-Alice Waters of the SWP upon her return from Nicaragua:

> "The first thing you realize is that you're not scared of the police. Army, militia, police. They're all over the place. But you feel good about it, and so does everybody else. Almost everybody else. The 'forces of repression' are all laughing, smiling, joking with the hundreds of ordinary working people milling around." (Education for Socialists, December 1980, p. 5)

Assuming from the absence of police the absence of repression, the article made the following statement:

> "If we consider the degree of popular support as a basic criterion for estimating the degree of political stability of a regime then, undoubtedly, the Islamic regime in Teheran must be considered as extremely stable. Its foundation is the masses. Between the masses and their leadership, especially Imam Khomeini, there are mighty bonds, forged in the furnace of the revolution.
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> "In the forging of these very deep bonds, an immense role was and is played by the influence of the ideology of Islam upon the masses. So, it is not accidental that the Western imperialist and also Stalinist propaganda are raging particularly against this."

20. This article is of exceptional significance for the IC and it deserves the closest and most ruthless critical analysis within every section. It is not only that the trip of Comrade Savas, which included a television appearance at a time of mass arrests, seriously compromised the IC in the eyes of the working class. Revealed in these articles is a method which reveals very clearly the real disorientation within the IC and its leadership. We have here an outstanding example of the complete and unabashed substitution of impressionism for Marxism. Class forces no longer exist. Everything has become the "masses"—a category which explains nothing about the class dynamics and contradictions within Iran. Analysis is reduced to casual observation: "I don't see any police so the state no longer exists!" The method of historical materialism, which strives to uncover the material bases of all political developments, is replaced with the eye of the journalist. As Trotsky once wrote, "Empiricism, and its foster brother, impressionism, dominate from top to bottom."

21. Not just the fault of Comrade Savas. One uncorrected error leads inevitably to others. Nothing essentially different from the dozens of articles which appeared in the *News Line* on the Libyan Jamahiriya between 1977 and 1983, in which there was never a single appraisal of class relations in Libya and the class nature of the Libyan regime. At the high point of our relations with the Gaddafi regime, the following assessment appeared in a statement of the WRP Political Committee, dated December 12, 1981:

> "When Gaddafi and the Free Unionist Officers seized popular control in 1969, they set Libya on the road of socialist development and expansion ... Gaddafi has developed politically in the direction of revolutionary socialism and he has shunned the palaces and harems of some other Arab leaders."

Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, our approach to Gaddafi has lost its previous enthusiasm. But throughout the recent fighting in Tripoli, we studiously avoided direct criticism of Gaddafi's role in the conspiracy against Arafat.

22. Now we have the trip [of Arafat] to Egypt. This is hailed without any analysis whatever or reference to previous statements. We are disorienting our cadre and the working class. We are inviting cynicism toward our political line. The continuous shifts in our political line, in which no analysis connects a new conclusion with the one it both replaces

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and contradicts, are the hallmark of pragmatism. As Trotsky said of Burnham and Shachtman:

> "The opposition leaders split sociology from dialectical materialism. They split politics from sociology. In the sphere of politics they split our tasks in Poland from our experiences in Spain—our tasks in Finland from our position on Poland. History becomes transformed into a series of exceptional incidents; politics becomes transformed into series of improvisations. We have here, in the full sense of the term, the disintegration of Marxism, the disintegration of theoretical thought, the disintegration of politics into its constituent elements." (*In Defense of Marxism*, pp. 114-15)

23. We are not raising these issues because we have noted this or that incorrect formulation in an occasional article. Every section makes its share of mistakes. But after a lengthy period in which mistakes go uncorrected, they become a tendency, and this tendency inevitably makes itself felt in every area of our political work. Just as the retreat of the SWP back toward Pabloism found its expression in an ever more open orientation to centrist and middle class radical elements with the United States, we must express the concern that the same tendency is manifesting itself within the work of the WRP in Britain.

24. The record of the Party on the Malvinas War—the line which was originally taken was absolutely wrong: This Is Not Our War. But no analysis of this position was ever made inside the IC.

25. We feel an explanation should be made about our relations with Livingstone, Knight and the GLC in general. What is our political assessment of these forces. Do we believe that the Labour group that leads the GLC deserves the unreserved political confidence that they have been given by the *News Line?* We are very concerned that the WRP is on the verge of being seriously compromised by the future actions of these social-democrats. We are concerned that we are making the very opportunist errors which led in 1926 to the betrayal of the General Strike. We have gone out of our way to compliment Livingstone, to suggest that he is very different from other Labourites. Our opinion is that while it is of course correct to defend local government against the Tories, we should not place any confidence in Livingstone at all. We are disturbed that neither the *News Line* nor the *Labour Review* has commented on the interview with Livingstone that was published in the July-August 1983 issue of *New Left Review.* The interview was conducted by none other than Tariq Ali. Nothing in this article suggests that Livingstone's "socialism" is anything more than an eclectic amalgam of petty-bourgeois protest politics, pacifism, left social democracy, and bits and pieces of Marxist phraseology. He is certainly not a Trotskyist, and his attitude toward the Labourite traitors is entirely apologetic:

> "You've got to be fairly certain that someone has gone over to the politics of pure careerism before you start kicking them around the room. This is a congenital weakness of the Left. I suppose it is understandable given the almost permanent record of betrayal by Labour leader after Labour leader that people spend a lot of time waiting for the next one to go over. There are many cases, however, of people whom we've lost who might have been retained if we'd engaged in comradely debate rather than uncomradely denunciations. If your main function is building up your own membership it is inevitable that you end up with interminable attacks on other left groupings. The amount of time Left activists spend rolling around in hysterics reading the attacks made by one grouping against another has always amazed me. Unless this method of organization is altered it will be difficult to unite the Left."

We won't go into the idealist views propounded by Livingstone on the question of women's liberation, which he admits has been a major influence on his development ("I have always felt that the Labour Party's almost exclusive concentration on the employed male white working class was a weakness") or his vulgar views on the nature of class society ("I have come to leftwing politics not through a theoretical Marxist background but via a study of animal behavior and evolution.") No wonder he is interviewed by Tariq Ali! But the problem is that this man is being clearly boosted and unconditionally and uncritically supported by the Workers Revolutionary Party as a leader of the working class in London. We have provided both him and Knight with a platform. We are defending them against criticism on the left. We know less about Knight—except that until about two years ago I heard his name mentioned only in association with his desertion from the Party to join the Labourites. Now the impression is given that he is our man. That I am sure is not the case. His leaving us in 1963 could not have been accidental.

26. Our concerns about the relations with Livingstone and Knight and the GLC are heightened by the recent role played by the WRP in the NGA strike. We cannot agree with the way in which the WRP tail-ended the NGA leadership, covered up for them, put forward no independent demands, and, in the end, was compromised by their payment of the fine and their calling off of the Warrington demonstration. The WRP Statement attacking those who criticize the NGA was really unprecedented in the history of the British section.

> "Through its determined fight for principles the NGA is marching in the footsteps of those pioneers who battled under conditions of illegality and state repression to build independent trade unions...
>
> "Having raised the political level of the working class in this vital way, the NGA is now refusing to submit to the rule of the TUC class collaborators. It is fighting on and basing itself on the undefeated strength of the working class.
>
> "The policy of the WRP is unambiguous—we salute the NGA for its courageous action and we stand in complete solidarity with its fight to defend the union from the Tories' legal conspiracy...
>
> "The NGA has rightly taken the fight into the center of the TUC and shown who is selling the rights of the trade unions down the river. It is a craft union of politically moderate opinion, not a revolutionary party as the revisionists seem to think. And under the exceptional circumstances of state persecution, we believe they are acquitting themselves very well."

WHAT ARE THE "POLITICALLY MODERATE" OPINIONS OF THE NGA LEADERS? Are there not Stalinists and Social Democrats among them. These leaders are brought before the YS Annual General Meeting as "heroes" of the working class. Is this how young Trotskyists are to be trained?

27. During the strike, the WRP elaborated a truly incredible line on the nature of the anti-union laws. The speech given by Comrade Banda: we quote the *News Line* of December 7, 1983:

> "But what was this law? asked Banda. Normally, all laws were made to defend the rights of individuals [!], or concerned the rights of individuals in relation to the public interest [!!]. But the Tory

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> Employment Acts were unique. They were not just laws [!], but fundamental constitutional changes because they dealt with the relationship between classes [!!]... These Acts are completely illegitimate from an historical standpoint and a political standpoint. They are a declaration of war against the working class."

Now we are against "bad" laws which regulate the activities of classes and for "good" laws which defend the rights of individuals. If there had not been a single other quotation read at this meeting, this would be sufficient to warrant the most searching analysis of the political line of the WRP.

The political line of the WRP raises many questions. How do we now foresee the development of the social revolution? Should any political demands be placed upon the Labour Party and its trade unions. In relation to the latter, we waited as long as possible before calling for a General Strike. We did not demand new elections and the return to power of Labour. Our slogan of a Workers Revolutionary Government, under conditions in which we have not captured the leadership of any significant section of the working class, is very abstract. It appears very "left" but it is coupled with uncritical relations with right-wing "politically-moderate" trade union bureaucrats. We place no demands upon the Labour Party—as if the task of exposing them has already been carried out.

28. This has not developed overnight—long process of adaptation to petty-bourgeois forces. This does have definite theoretical roots—an empiricist method dressed up with Hegelian phraseology—but one which has absolutely nothing to do with Marxism. The glorification of sense perception and the rejection of historical materialism. **A serious critique must be made of Studies in Dialectics.**

29. Slaughter's letter was taken by the WL leadership as a very grave warning. We are worried by the depth of political and ideological differences. But we believe that the problems can be surmounted through serious and honest discussion. What is needed is a real discussion within the IC and the leaderships of the national sections. Documents should be prepared and circulated. This is the way to proceed. The IC can only emerge strengthened. The Workers League is very anxious to participate and to learn from this discussion. We treasure our collaboration with the British comrades and with every section of the IC. Let us set a definite timetable for this discussion, and on this basis work toward an IC Conference.

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