

Cliff Slaughter: 1928–2021

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Cliff Slaughter, who between 1957 and 1985 played a leading role in the International Committee of the Fourth International and its British section, died Monday at the age of 92. The *World Socialist Web Site* will soon publish a more extensive and critical review of Slaughter's life.

It is well known that Slaughter broke irrevocably with Trotskyism in 1986 and that the remaining 35 years of his political life consisted of a shameful repudiation of Trotskyist politics and its Marxist foundations. However, in noting his death, the ICFI must call attention to the significant role that Slaughter played in the fight for Trotskyism in the earlier period of his life.

Slaughter's most important contributions as a Marxist and Trotskyist are, undoubtedly, the documents that he wrote in the 1960s in opposition to the American Socialist Workers Party's betrayal of Trotskyism and its 1963 reunification with the Pabloite United Secretariat.

In "Trotskyism Betrayed" and "Lenin on Dialectics" (both 1962) and "Opportunism and Empiricism" (1963), Slaughter defended permanent revolution against the Pabloite capitulation to Castroism and other petty-bourgeois movements.

He exposed the reactionary political implications of the Pabloite claim that Castro was an "unconscious Marxist." Slaughter—defending the Leninist theory of the Party—insisted that revolutionary consciousness had to be brought into the working class. This task, he insisted, could only be achieved through the resolution of the crisis of revolutionary leadership, i.e., the building of the Fourth International. He wrote in 1963:

For Marxists the crisis of the old leadership expresses its bankruptcy from the standpoint of the proletariat and therefore the urgent need to develop a new leadership ... a party of a new

type, the Bolshevik Party, which is the prime need in all countries ...

He exposed the connection between Pabloite opportunism and its "objectivist" falsification of Marxism, which claimed that the crisis of capitalism was so great that it would enable the working class to conquer power even in the absence of a Trotskyist leadership. Rejecting objectivism, a theoretical justification for opportunism, Slaughter wrote:

There can be no concession on this point. The test of any Marxist's devotion to the construction of the International as the only leadership of the proletarian revolution will be his insistent work for the construction of the revolutionary party in each country.

Slaughter dismissed claims that petty-bourgeois nationalist movements, allied with the Stalinist regimes in the USSR or China, could serve as a substitute for the building of the world Trotskyist movement, based on the working class, as "reactionary twaddle."

Throughout the 1960s, he continued to defend the perspective of the Fourth International. However, the opportunist drift of the Socialist Labour League—which in 1973 became the Workers Revolutionary Party—found expression in Slaughter's writings.

In 1972, Slaughter wrote that the "struggle against idealist ways of thought was necessary which went much deeper than questions of agreement on program and policy." This formula served to deflect attention from the WRP's Pabloite adaptation to bourgeois nationalist regimes.

Slaughter misused his prestige as the ICFI's foremost

theoretician to legitimize and promote WRP leader Gerry Healy's blatantly idealist falsification of Marxism and opportunism. Between 1982 and 1984, he worked to suppress the differences raised by the Workers League.

In 1985, Slaughter bore immense responsibility for the devastating crisis that erupted within the WRP. He worked to prevent an analysis of the political and theoretical issues underlying the crisis in the WRP and, thereby, promoted a break with the ICFI and Trotskyism.

The remaining decades of his long life constituted a complete repudiation of all that he had fought for during the years that he had defended Trotskyism against Stalinism and Pabloism. His conduct, on both a political and personal level, was reprehensible.

But it is not only the evil that men do that lives after them. The International Committee of the Fourth International, in opposing Slaughter's political betrayal, upholds all that was significant in his earlier contributions.



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