

## SEP 2023 Summer School Lecture

# The Origins of Pabloite Revisionism, the Split Within the Fourth International and the Founding of the International Committee

Joseph Kishore  
18 August 2023

*The following lecture was delivered by Joseph Kishore, the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (US), to the SEP (US) International Summer School, held between July 30 and August 4, 2023.*

*The opening report by WSWs International Editorial Board Chairman and SEP National Chairman David North, “Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Epoch of Imperialist War and Socialist Revolution,” was published on August 7. The second lecture, “The Historical and Political Foundations of the Fourth International,” was published on August 14. The WSWs will be publishing all of the lectures in the coming weeks.*

This coming November will mark 70 years since the founding of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), which was established on November 23, 1953 on the political basis of, and one week after, the issuing of James P. Cannon’s “Open Letter to the World Trotskyist Movement.” We are also marking 100 years since the founding of the Left Opposition and 25 years since the establishment of the *World Socialist Web Site*. That is, a quarter of the history of the Trotskyist movement has taken place since the launching of the WSWs and nearly three-quarters under the leadership of the International Committee.

The ICFI was established to defend the Trotskyist movement against a form of revisionism and opportunism known as Pabloism, after its principal leader and proponent, Michel Pablo. “At stake,” we write in *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, “was the defense of the essential political principles upon which the founding of the Fourth International had been based, and its survival as an independent revolutionary organization.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Pabloism took different forms in different countries. A central feature was an adaptation to Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism, though in the United States the supporters of Pablo used his conceptions to justify their subordination to the anti-Communist trade union apparatus. In its essence, as David North explains in *The Heritage We Defend*, “Pabloism was (and is) liquidationism all down the line: that is, the repudiation of the hegemony of the proletariat in the socialist revolution and the genuinely independent existence of the Fourth International as the conscious articulation of the historical role of the working class...”<sup>[2]</sup>

As the quote indicates, we are not dealing just with political tendencies in the past. The Pabloite tendencies and their descendants, in many cases amalgamated with the “state capitalist” organizations that trace their origins to the split within the SWP in 1939-1940, function today as the most ardent supporters of the US-NATO war against Russia and critical instruments of capitalist rule, or in some cases support the reactionary nationalism of Putin.

I will review in this lecture the origins and development of Pabloism,

culminating in the founding of the ICFI. In the categorization of the stages in the history of the Fourth International outlined at the SEP (US) Summer School in 2019, this marks the conclusion of what we referred to as the second stage, which began with the founding of the Fourth International in 1938, and the onset of the third stage, which began with the issuing of the Open Letter and the establishment of the ICFI.

Before reviewing this history, however, I want to make a point on the primary source from which I will be drawing, *The Heritage We Defend*, which is the most comprehensive analysis of Pabloism produced by our movement or anywhere else. *The Heritage* was written by Comrade North in the form of 35 installments that appeared in the *Bulletin*, the publication of the Workers League, predecessor of the Socialist Equality Party, between April 1986 and February 1987.

*The Heritage* was published in the immediate aftermath of the split with the national opportunists in the Workers Revolutionary Party and in response to the document produced by one of the leaders of the WRP, Michael Banda: “27 Reasons Why the International Committee Should be Buried Forthwith and the Fourth International Built.” Banda’s document, first published on February 7, 1986, was endorsed by the rump “Eighth Congress” of the WRP held the following day, from which all supporters of the ICFI within the WRP were barred by Banda and Slaughter, with the assistance of the London police.

A significant portion of *The Heritage* is devoted to reviewing the fight against Pabloism. This includes the seven chapters from “The Fourth International and the Yugoslav Revolution” through “James P. Cannon’s Open Letter,” followed by the 11 chapters from “After the Split” through “The Historic Betrayal in Ceylon,” which focus on the political degeneration of the Socialist Workers Party of the US (SWP), culminating in the SWP’s reunification Congress with the Pabloites in 1963 and the entry of the LSSP into a bourgeois government in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Together, these chapters comprise more than half of the *Heritage*.

This extensive focus on Pabloism in the *Heritage* can be explained by the fact that what was at stake in the conflict with the WRP was the defense of the entire theoretical and political heritage of the Marxist-Trotskyist movement. This went back indeed, with Comrade North’s critique of Healy’s “practice of cognition,” to the very origins of Marxism itself. Of particular importance, however, was the defense of both the political authority of the International Committee, as the leadership of the World Trotskyist movement, and its essential political foundations.

The former was expressed in the resolution of October 25, 1985, which called for the “re-registration of the membership of the WRP on the basis of an explicit recognition of the political authority of the ICFI.” The

refusal of the WRP leadership to accept the authority of the international movement was inextricably connected to its national opportunist politics and its reversion, as Comrade North wrote in his letter to Mike Banda on January 23, 1984, “toward positions quite similar—both in conclusions and methodology—to those which we have historically associated with Pabloism.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Thus, in the course of answering Banda and re-affirming the political foundations of the ICFI, it was necessary to review in detail the history of the fight against Pabloism. A significant element in the evolution of the conflict within the IC, which developed between 1982 and 1986, was the fact that the leadership of the Workers League had been educated in the struggle against Pabloism. The comrades who were to lead the party after the desertion of Wohlforth in 1974 had been won to the party based on the fight against Pabloism and a thorough study of the documents of that struggle. Indeed, this explains why it was that Wohlforth was not able to win any support for his rampant subjectivism and his flight into the arms of SWP leader Joseph Hansen.

There is another important element of the *Heritage*’s focus on the origins of Pabloism, which is related to the intensifying crisis of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union itself during the 1980s. As Comrade North noted in the introductory lecture, the split in November 1953 was precipitated by the death of Stalin eight months earlier and the crisis within Stalinism that Stalin’s death engendered. The split with the WRP three decades later occurred on the eve of the terminal stage in the degeneration of the Stalinist apparatus and only five years before the final dissolution of the USSR.

The position of Pabloism as it developed in the 1950s was that Stalinism could play a progressive role. Banda declared shortly before the split with the ICFI that the existence of the Soviet Union was a “settled question.” Within less than a year after writing his “27 Reasons,” in which he claimed to be defending the heritage of the Fourth International against the IC, Banda had repudiated Trotskyism and openly embraced Stalinism. As reviewed in the final three chapters of the *Heritage*, Banda insisted that any liquidation of state property relations was impossible because it would violate the dialectical law of the “development of the lower to the higher.”<sup>[4]</sup>

The detailed analysis in the *Heritage* of the Pabloite positions on the Eastern European states and on Stalinism prepared the cadre of the ICFI for understanding and responding to the convulsive political events that followed the split with the WRP. Pabloism’s neo-Stalinist fantasies crashed upon political reality and were decisively refuted by events. As we have stressed many times, the IC’s victory over the national opportunists in the WRP was theoretically and politically aligned with profound objective processes, creating the conditions for a renaissance of Trotskyism after the split with the WRP.

This is not a lecture on the political conflicts that emerged in the years following the formation of the Fourth International in 1938. However, I want to make some reference to the political issues that arose in the conflict with the petit-bourgeois opposition within the Socialist Workers Party in 1939-1940, before Trotsky’s assassination, and the fight against the Retrogressionists and the Morrow-Goldman faction of the SWP in the years that followed Trotsky’s death, particularly as they relate to the later conflict with Pabloism.

In his essay, “The USSR in War,” published in September 1939 amidst the conflict with the Burnham-Shachtman-Abern faction in the SWP, Trotsky took up the position of those who insisted that the Stalin-Hitler Pact, adopted the previous month, required a fundamental reassessment of the class character of the Soviet Union. It could no longer be termed a “workers state,” they argued. A new term was required—“state capitalism,” as was advocated by the German “left communist” Hugo Urbahns, or “bureaucratic collectivism,” as proposed by the Italian “left communist” Bruno Rizzi and James Burnham. Underlying these

terminological differences, Trotsky explained, was a basic re-evaluation of the nature of the epoch and the role of the working class. He wrote:

Scientifically and politically – and not purely terminologically – the question poses itself as follows: does the bureaucracy represent a temporary growth on a social organism, or has this growth already become transformed into an historically indispensable organ? Social excrescences can be the product of an “accidental” (i.e., temporary and extraordinary) enmeshing of historical circumstances. A social organ (and such is every class, including an exploiting class) can take shape only as a result of the deeply rooted inner needs of production itself. If we do not answer this question, then the entire controversy will degenerate into sterile toying with words.<sup>[5]</sup>

That is, the question of the definition of the USSR was related to the more fundamental issue of whether the Stalinist bureaucracy was a “temporary growth,” an “excrescence,” that would either pave the way for the reintroduction of capitalist property relations or be overthrown in a political revolution led by the working class, or whether it was rooted in the “inner needs of production,” and therefore had a progressive historical role. Bound up with this question was an evaluation of the nature of the epoch, the revolutionary role of the working class, and the role of the Fourth International as the leadership of this objective force.

“The USSR question,” Trotsky emphasized in a letter to Cannon on September 12, 1939, “cannot be isolated as unique from the whole historic process of our times. Either the Stalin state is a transitory formation, it is a deformation of a workers’ state in a backward and isolated state, or ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ (Bruno R., *La Bureaucratization du Monde*, Paris 1939) is a new social formation, which is replacing capitalism throughout the world (Stalinism, Fascism, New Deals, etc.). The terminological experiments (workers’ state, not workers’ state; class, not class; etc.) receive a sense only under this historic aspect. *Who chooses the second alternative admits, openly or silently, that all the revolutionary potentialities of the world proletariat are exhausted, that the socialist movement is bankrupt, and that the old capitalism is transforming itself into ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ with a new exploiting class.*”<sup>[6]</sup> (Emphasis added)

The various forms of “state capitalism,” though rooted in an adaptation to imperialism in the rejection of the definition of the Soviet Union as a workers’ state, shared with Pabloism as it would emerge in the 1950s the basic position that the bureaucracy itself had an independent role to play. Underlying the terminological innovations of Shachtman, Burnham, Abern and others was a pessimism that reflected the demoralization of layers of the middle-class intelligentsia in response to the political defeats of the 1930s.

In the course of the conflict with the Shachtman-Burnham-Abern faction, it was also necessary to make an appraisal of the nationalizations that were carried out by the Stalinist apparatus in territories that came under its control in the early stages of World War II. Trotsky’s analysis of these measures placed the bureaucratic actions of the Stalinist regime in the context of the international counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism as a whole. He wrote in “The USSR in War”:

This measure [nationalizations in Poland], revolutionary in character – “the expropriation of the expropriators” – is in this case achieved in a military bureaucratic fashion. The appeal to independent activity on the part of the masses in the new territories – and without such an appeal, even if worded with extreme

caution, it is impossible to constitute a new regime – will on the morrow undoubtedly be suppressed by ruthless police measures in order to assure the preponderance of the bureaucracy over the awakened revolutionary masses. This is one side of the matter. But there is another. In order to gain the possibility of occupying Poland through a military alliance with Hitler, the Kremlin for a long time deceived and continues to deceive the masses in the USSR and in the whole world, and has thereby brought about the complete disorganization of the ranks of its own Communist International. *The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive, standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, wholly retain their reactionary character and remain the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution.*<sup>[7]</sup>

The evolution of Shachtman and Burnham vindicated Trotsky's analysis and the position of the SWP majority, led by James P. Cannon. Shachtman and Burnham collaborated in forming the "Workers Party" after their split from the SWP in April 1940. Within a month, Burnham had resigned from the Workers Party, declaring that he no longer considered himself a Marxist and that it is "meaningless to say that 'socialism is inevitable' and false that socialism 'is the only alternative to capitalism.'" By the 1950s, Burnham emerged as a leading ideologist for the conservative movement and was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan in 1983.

Shachtman formed the "Independent Socialist League" (ISL) in 1949. During the 1950s, the ISL moved sharply to the right, supporting the operations of American imperialism and integrating itself into the trade union bureaucracy. In 1958, it dissolved itself into and became the leadership of the Socialist Party, which functioned as a buttress of the reactionary Cold War wing of the Democratic Party.

In the aftermath of Trotsky's assassination in August of 1940 at the hands of a GPU agent, several oppositional tendencies emerged inside the SWP and the Fourth International that adopted, in different forms, the basic perspective of the petit-bourgeois opposition. This included the "Three Theses" group (the "Retrogressionists"), led by Joseph Weber of the Internationale Kommunisten Deutschlands (IKD), and the Morrow-Goldman faction within the SWP between 1944 and 1946. The essential source for reviewing the politics of these tendencies is again *The Heritage We Defend*, particularly Chapters 8 ("The Three Theses of the Retrogressionists") and 9 ("The Morrow-Goldman Faction"), as well as the preface to the 30th anniversary edition, in which the positions of both tendencies are taken up in the context of a polemic against Daniel Gaido and Velia Luparello.

Based on the position that fascism had triumphed in Europe, the Retrogressionists concluded in the early 1940s that socialist revolution had been put off until some far distant point in the future. "However one views it," they wrote, "the transition from fascism to socialism remains a Utopia without an intermediate stage, which is basically equivalent to a democratic revolution."<sup>[8]</sup> This position was elaborated in "Capitalist Barbarism or Socialism," published in 1943: "The most pressing political problem is the century-old problem of the springtime of industrial capitalism and of scientific socialism—conquest of political freedom, establishment of democracy (also for Russia) as the indispensable precondition for national liberation and the founding of the labor movement."<sup>[9]</sup> In other words, the epoch could no longer be considered one of international socialist revolution, but rather a reversion

(retrogression) to a period of bourgeois democratic national revolution.

The Morrow-Goldman faction seized on these positions beginning in the mid-1940s, concluding that the "absence of a revolutionary party" made socialist revolution impossible. "Instead of saying, 'Only the revolutionary party is lacking,'" Morrow wrote in 1946, "we must instead say, at least to ourselves, 'The absence of the revolutionary party transforms the conditions which otherwise would be revolutionary into conditions in which one must fight, so far as agitation is concerned, for the most elementary demands.'"<sup>[10]</sup>

While varied in their justifications and political orientations, the earlier forms of revisionism (Burnham-Shachtman, Three Theses and Morrow-Goldman) shared much in common with Pabloism as it developed in the early 1950s. As Comrade North writes in the preface to the 30th anniversary edition of *The Heritage We Defend*, the essential political connection that linked all of them was "the rejection of the revolutionary potential of the working class."

The revisions of Pablo and Mandel, which emerged in the late 1940s, cloaked their abandonment of Trotskyism in a superficially leftist rhetoric. But in their perspective, the leading force in the establishment of socialism was the Stalinist bureaucracy, not the working class. Pabloite theory was a peculiar inversion of Shachtmanite theory. While the Shachtmanites denounced the Stalinist regime as the progenitor of a new form of exploitative "bureaucratic collectivist" society, the Pabloite tendency proclaimed the bureaucratic Stalinist regimes established in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War II to be the necessary form of the historical transition from capitalism to socialism. *All of these tendencies, each in their own way, based their political perspective on the non-revolutionary role of the working class. It ceased to be an active, let alone decisive, force in the historical process.*<sup>[11]</sup> (Emphasis added)

The emergence of Pabloism within the Fourth International must be seen in relation to the contradictory political environment that prevailed in the post-war period. This was characterized, on the one hand, by an economic restabilization made possible by the betrayals and crimes of Stalinism, and, on the other, by an upsurge of the anti-colonial mass movement.

The framework of the "post-war" system began to emerge in the latter years of the war itself, including the Bretton Woods Agreement of July 1944, which created the International Monetary Fund and established an international currency regime based on the US dollar, which was pegged to gold. Then, at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, prior to the final defeat of the Nazi regime and its unconditional surrender in May, and the Potsdam Conference in July-August 1945, Stalin reached an agreement with the major imperialist powers on the division of Europe and the suppression of the revolutionary uprisings that came with the end of the war.

The Stalinist regime feared socialist revolution in Europe, not least because it would encourage the Soviet working class and endanger Stalinist rule in the Soviet Union. The Yalta and Potsdam conferences created the framework for the Kremlin to establish control over a series of "buffer states" in Eastern Europe. In exchange the Stalinist parties threw their support behind the defense of capitalist rule in Western Europe and Greece. Acting as agents of counterrevolution, the Stalinists worked to disarm mass movements that developed in Italy and France and joined bourgeois governments, under conditions where capitalist governments had been shattered in the aftermath of the defeat of fascism. In Japan, the Communist Party claimed, following the dropping of two atomic bombs and the surrender of the Japanese Empire, that the American occupation

forces led by General Douglas MacArthur were carrying out the “democratic revolution,” which had to be supported as a necessary first stage in a two-stage revolution.

The betrayals of the Stalinists created the conditions for a US-led stabilization of Western Europe, within the framework of the Marshall Plan, enacted in 1948, under which American capitalism transferred \$13.3 billion to rebuild the war-ravaged European economies.

Amidst this general restabilization, the post-war period saw an immense upsurge of the international working class and the oppressed masses of the former colonial countries, which the Stalinists worked to derail. In 1947, colonial India was partitioned into predominantly Hindu India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan, a monstrous betrayal of the anti-imperialist struggle carried out by the bourgeois Congress Party of Gandhi and Nehru, with the support of the Communist Party and its “two-stage” theory.

In October 1949, the Chinese Communist Party came to power under conditions of a revolutionary upsurge of the masses, which had less to do with the Stalinist politics of Mao than with the conditions created in the country by the collapse of the Japanese Empire. Less than a year later, the post-colonial upheavals found their most explosive expression in the outbreak of the Korean War, in June of 1950. In Eastern Europe, there was the coming to power of Tito and the Communist Party in Yugoslavia and the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, which is analyzed in Chapter 12 of the *Heritage*.

At the same time, the overall restabilization of world capitalism, as we write in the *Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party* “vastly expanded the field of operation for bourgeois nationalist movements, Stalinists, trade union bureaucrats and various petty-bourgeois tendencies that came to the head of these struggles. The objective function of these movements and organizations was, in one form or another, to provide a base of support within broader sections of the working class and oppressed masses for the maintenance of the global capitalist system.”<sup>[12]</sup>

I cannot review in detail each of these complex experiences. However, the general framework of the post-war period thoroughly confirmed Trotsky’s assessment of the counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism, and, in particular, the evaluation made in “The USSR in War,” namely, that whatever changes in property relations took place in one or another country that fell under the control of the apparatus, it remained “the chief obstacle on the road to the world revolution.”

The initial response of the Fourth International was based on this perspective. A statement published in the *Fourth International* in November 1946 explained in relation to developments in Eastern Europe:

For the sake of paltry loot, for the sake of the small change of reparations—completely meaningless so far as solving the USSR’s economic needs—the Kremlin has raised against itself a wall of hatred throughout Eastern Europe and the world. For the sake of military control over the poverty-stricken, bankrupt Balkans, the Kremlin has helped the Anglo-American imperialists crush the revolution and prop up decaying capitalism.<sup>[13]</sup>

In April 1949, the Seventh Plenum of the International Executive Committee (IEC) of the Fourth International insisted that “an evaluation of Stalinism cannot be made on the basis of localized results of its policy but must proceed from the entirety of its actions on a world scale. When we consider the state of decay which capitalism presents even today, four years after the end of the war, and when we consider the concrete situation of 1943-45, there can be no doubt that Stalinism, on a world scale, appeared as the decisive factor in preventing a sudden and simultaneous

crash of the capitalist order in Europe and in Asia.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Beginning in the autumn of 1949, however, Pablo and his supporters began advancing a very different interpretation of the developments in Eastern Europe, and, bound up with this, the role of Stalinism on an international level.

In September 1949, Pablo first put forward the theory that “deformed” workers states would dominate for decades, even centuries, in the transition from capitalism to socialism. In “On the Class Nature of Yugoslavia,” Pablo wrote:

Socialism, as the ideological and political movement of the proletariat as well as a social system, is by nature international and indivisible... But while bearing this in mind, it nevertheless remains true that in the whole historic period of the transition from capitalism to socialism, a period which can extend for centuries, we shall encounter a much more tortuous and complicated development of the revolution than our teachers foresaw—and *workers’ states that are not normal but necessarily quite deformed*.<sup>[15]</sup>

What are the implications of these positions? Stalinism becomes not a historic “excrescence” or “temporary growth,” as Trotsky had analyzed in *The Revolution Betrayed* and in the fight against the petit-bourgeois opposition, but an independent and indeed “necessary” social formation. If the extensive “transition period,” extending for centuries, would be characterized by “workers’ states” that were “*necessarily quite deformed*,” that is, led by Stalinist parties, this could only mean that, in a profound historical sense, Stalinism had a progressive role to play. In response to Trotsky’s question, “Does the bureaucracy represent a temporary growth on a social organism, or has this growth already become transformed into an historically indispensable organ?” Pablo was answering, “It is an historically indispensable organ.”

In the same article, Pablo began to advance formulations that revised the role of the Fourth International itself. “In our epoch,” he wrote, “the proletarian power established in a single country will *inevitably and rapidly* become bureaucratized. ... In order to combat this danger there is no other remedy than to bring to bear the weight of the world organization, the International. It alone is capable of counterbalancing the corrupting influence of national isolation upon the party in power.”<sup>[16]</sup> That is, the role of the Fourth International is to serve as a “counterbalance” to the “inevitable and rapid” tendency of “the party in power,” that is, a party other than the Fourth International, to become bureaucratized in one or another country. Only “in the long run” would the “importance and effectiveness” of the Fourth International “become manifest” through “the conquest of power in other countries.”

The issue of how to correctly designate Yugoslavia and the buffer states in Eastern Europe was the subject of intense discussion within the Fourth International, in which the implications for the perspective of the Fourth International, as well as critical methodological issues, were analyzed. The essential positions advanced by different leaders within the Fourth International and within the Socialist Workers Party are reviewed in Chapter 13 of *The Heritage We Defend*, “The Origins of Pabloism,” and Chapter 14, “The Metaphysics of Nationalized Property.”

Cannon, Morris Stein and John G. Wright in the SWP, and initially Ernest Mandel in the International Secretariat, argued against a simplistic conclusion that the nationalization of property relations automatically equated with the existence of a workers state, while Joseph Hansen and Bert Cochran in the SWP sided with Pablo’s position.

Mandel, later a close associate of Pablo, argued in October 1949 that those insisting on an immediate designation of Yugoslavia and the buffer

states as “workers’ states”—Pablo was not named but clearly implied—were making “an abstraction of decisive factors in estimating the character of these nationalizations: who instituted them, when, in whose benefit, and under what conditions. They isolate a historic factor from its context and reduce what should be a profound historical analysis to a simple syllogism, in fact to a tautology and to a begging of the question.”<sup>[17]</sup>

In February 1950, at a plenary session of the SWP National Committee, Stein argued against the position of Hansen, who at this early stage was already arguing that the statification of production is equivalent to a workers state. Stein placed particular emphasis on the historic origin of a given state in determining its class character. “Purely economic criteria for establishing the existence or non-existence of the workers’ state have figured in our movement only in discussing the degeneration of a workers state previously established by a proletarian revolution,” he argued.

Stein stressed that “the most important element in the social revolution is the consciousness and self-action of the working class as expressed in the policy of its vanguard party.

“The simplified approach which reduces itself in essence to the proposition: nationalization equals workers state, can only disorient our movement. It is a caricature of Marxism. It substitutes bureaucratic nationalization decrees for a real analysis of the living class forces and their relative position within society. Such an approach cannot conceivably serve us either as a guide to understanding the events transpiring in the buffer countries or as an aid in shaping our policy toward them.”<sup>[18]</sup>

The Fourth International reached the decision, at the Eighth Plenum of the IEC in April 1950, to designate Yugoslavia as a “deformed workers state,” which was later applied as well to the buffer states in Eastern Europe.

The *Heritage We Defend* sums up concisely the issues involved in the discussion, and it is worth quoting extensively from the extremely important chapter on “The Metaphysics of Nationalized Property.”

The importance of the arguments of Mandel and Stein were that they correctly placed central emphasis on the historical perspective of proletarian revolution against a growing current of opportunist adaptation to the Soviet bureaucracy and its ephemeral “successes.” This does not mean, however, that the eventual decision to acknowledge the existence of “deformed” workers’ states in Yugoslavia and the rest of Eastern Europe was wrong. When properly understood and properly used, this new definition fulfilled a necessary theoretical and political function. But as with all dialectical concepts, that of a “deformed workers’ state” is acceptable and retains its validity only within a given historical and political “tolerance.”

That is, as a means of defining the “hybrid” states which came into being under the specific and peculiar conditions of the postwar period, and of emphasizing the distorted and abnormal character of their origins, the concept of a *deformed* workers’ state establishes the principled basis upon which the Trotskyist movement asserts the necessity of defending these states against imperialist intervention, while at the same time clearly indicating the political tasks that confront the working class within these countries.

The use of the term *deformed* places central attention upon the crucial historical difference between the overthrow of the capitalist state in October 1917 and the overturns which occurred in the late 1940s in Eastern Europe: that is, the absence of the mass organs of proletarian power—Soviets—led by a Bolshevik-type party. Moreover, the term itself implies the merely transitory existence of

state regimes of dubious historical viability, whose actions in every sphere—political and economic—bear the stamp of the distorted and abnormal character of their birth.

Thus, far from associating such regimes with new historical vistas, the designation *deformed* underscores the historical bankruptcy of Stalinism and points imperiously to the necessity for the building of a genuine Marxist leadership, the mobilization of the working class against the ruling bureaucracy in a political revolution, the creation of genuine organs of workers’ power, and the destruction of the countless surviving vestiges of the old capitalist relations within the state structure and economy.<sup>[19]</sup>

However, the supporters of Pablo seized on the definition “deformed workers states” in a way that, Comrade North notes, treated “deformed” as if it were “no more than a sort of adjectival afterthought.” As Pablo had already indicated in his earlier essay on Yugoslavia, he was promoting the conception that the *necessary* means through which socialism would be achieved would be through such “deformed” states. This was accompanied with a pouring of scorn on those within the Fourth International who opposed these conceptions for supposedly being enamored with the “pure form” rather than accepting reality.

While the discussion over the characterization of Yugoslavia and the buffer states was important, underlying it were more fundamental issues of perspective. What was the nature of the epoch? By what means would socialism be realized? What was the role of the Fourth International?

Over the next two years, the essential characteristic of Pabloism emerged clearly, as I quoted earlier:

Pabloism was (and is) liquidationism all down the line: that is, the repudiation of the hegemony of the proletariat in the socialist revolution and the genuinely independent existence of the Fourth International as the genuinely articulation of the historical role of the working class.<sup>[20]</sup>

Chapter 15 of the *Heritage* (“The Nature of Pabloite Opportunism”) describes the evolution of Pabloism in the course of 1951, the year of the Third World Congress, held in August-September. Again, I can only refer to several of the most important points reviewed in the book.

In January 1951, Pablo wrote his essay, “Where are We Going?,” prepared following the Ninth Plenum of the IEC and in advance of the Third World Congress, in which he reiterated and expanded the position advanced in the essay on Yugoslavia. Those who “despair of the fate of humanity because Stalinism still endures and even achieves victories,” Pablo wrote, are motivated by the subjective desire for socialism to be “accomplished within the span of their brief lives.” Instead, he insisted, “this transformation will probably take an entire historic period of *several centuries* and will in the meantime be filled with forms and regimes transitional between capitalism and socialism and *necessarily deviating* from ‘pure’ forms and norms.”<sup>[21]</sup> (Emphasis added).

Under the cover of considering the “new developments in objective reality,” Pablo began introducing fundamental revisions in the Trotskyist movement’s understanding of the nature of the epoch and its own role within it. It was necessary, Pablo wrote, to recognize that since the end of World War II “we have entered a period essentially different from everything we have known in the past,” requiring the movement to overcome “all doctrinairism and every kind of thinking which is unable to encompass, analyze and comprehend the infinitely rich content of a new reality in full bloom.”<sup>[22]</sup>

What was this “new reality,” in its “infinitely rich content”? Pablo

summed it up as follows:

For our movement objective social reality consists essentially of the capitalist regime and the Stalinist world. Furthermore, whether we like it or not, these two elements by and large constitute objective social reality, for the overwhelming majority of the forces opposing capitalism are right now to be found under the leadership or influence of the Soviet bureaucracy.

“Objective social reality,” Pablo states “consists essentially of the capitalist regime and the Stalinist world.” He was so insistent on this point that he made it twice. “Furthermore, *whether we like it or not*, these two elements by and large constitute objective social reality.” There is no actual “furthermore” here, since Pablo was simply repeating what had just been stated, with the only addition being “whether we like it or not.” That is, whatever the Fourth International may want or do, whatever its cadres may subjectively desire, “objective *social* reality” consists of the Stalinist world and the capitalist regime. Why? Because “the forces opposing capitalism are *right now* to be found under the leadership or influence of the Soviet bureaucracy.” (Emphasis added)

Presuming the latter statement to be true, that the anti-capitalist strivings of the working class were “right now” under the leadership or influence of the Soviet bureaucracy, this for the Trotskyist movement would only underscore the essential problem of revolutionary leadership, namely, how to break the political influence of Stalinism over the working class. Moreover, the statement that “objective *social* reality” consisted of the “Stalinist regime” and the “capitalist world” attributed the existing constellation of political forces to something fundamental in the structure of society itself, again endowing the “Stalinist regime” with a historically necessary *social* function, rather than deeming it to be a temporary political “excessiveness.” To say that the “Stalinist regime” was rooted in “objective social reality” was, in a sense, to adopt the position of the state capitalists that Stalinism was a new social class, turning that position upside down.

Connected to this liquidationist line was Pablo’s theory of “war-revolution,” which replaced the development of the class struggle within which the Fourth International would fight to win political leadership with a cataclysmic world war as the mechanism for realizing socialism. “Such a war,” Pablo wrote, “would take on, from the very beginning, the character of an international civil war, especially in Europe and in Asia. These continents would rapidly pass over under the control of the Soviet Bureaucracy, of the Communist Parties, or of the revolutionary masses...”

These two conceptions of Revolution and of War, far from being in opposition or being differentiated as two significantly different stages of development, are approaching each other more *closely and becoming so interlinked as to be almost indistinguishable under certain circumstances and at certain times*. In their stead, it is the conception of Revolution-War, of War-Revolution which is emerging and upon which the *perspectives and orientation of revolutionary Marxists in our epoch should rest*.<sup>[23]</sup>

Pablo’s theory of “war-revolution,” later developed even further by Pablo’s supporter in Latin America, Juan Posadas, upended the traditional Marxist conception of war. Rather than the revolutionary movement of the working class being the objective basis for overthrowing capitalism and ending imperialist war, imperialist war became the midwife of revolution. In Pablo’s “revolutionary” fantasies, such a war would “rapidly” lead the

Stalinist parties to take control of all of Europe and Asia, endowing the bureaucracy with a progressive role in overturning capitalist property relations in much of the world and ignoring the role of Stalinism less than a decade earlier in smothering the revolution in Europe and Asia at the behest of imperialism during and immediately following the Second World War.

I will return to the issue of war-revolution, but first I would like to again cite an extended passage from the *Heritage* on the methodological issues involved in Pablo’s revision of Trotskyism, which have enduring relevance to the understanding of our own political activity. And that is the question of objectivism.

“As they adapted themselves to imperialism and its Stalinist agents,” Comrade North writes, “and ceased to believe in the ability of the Trotskyists to win the leadership of the working class, Pablo and his allies adopted an objectivist method which was perfectly suited to a political perspective that surrendered all historical initiative to forces outside the working class and to political tendencies other than the Fourth International.”

The standpoint of objectivism is contemplation rather than revolutionary practical activity, of observation rather than struggle; it justifies what is happening rather than explains what must be done. This method provided the theoretical underpinnings for a perspective in which Trotskyism was no longer seen as the doctrine guiding the practical activity of a party determined to conquer power and change the course of history, but rather as a general interpretation of a historical process in which socialism would ultimately be realized under the leadership of nonproletarian forces hostile to the Fourth International. Insofar as Trotskyism was to be credited with any direct role in the course of events, it was merely as a sort of subliminal mental process unconsciously guiding the activities of Stalinists, neo-Stalinists, semi-Stalinists and, of course, petty-bourgeois nationalists of one type or another.

Pabloism, in this sense, went way beyond a set of incorrect assessments, false prognoses and programmatic revisions. It attacked the whole foundation of scientific socialism and repudiated the central lessons abstracted by Marxists from the development of the class struggle over an entire century. The greatest conquest of Marxist theory in the twentieth century—the Leninist conception of the party—was undermined, as Pablo called into question the necessity of the conscious element in the struggle of the proletariat and the historic realization of the proletarian dictatorship. For Pablo and his followers, there was no need to theoretically educate the working class and make it conscious of its historical tasks. It was not necessary to wage a struggle for Marxism against the domination of bourgeois ideology over the spontaneous movement of the working class.

Thus, Marxism ceased to be an active political and theoretical weapon through which the vanguard of the working class established its authority among the masses and trained and organized them for the socialist revolution. Rather, it was merely “confirmed” by an abstraction called the “historical process,” working in quasi-automatic fashion through whatever political tendencies were at hand, regardless of the class forces upon which they were objectively based and no matter how notorious their past or reactionary their program.<sup>[24]</sup>

The fight against objectivism has a long history in the Marxist movement. The *Heritage* cites from Lenin’s early essay, “The Economic

Content of Narodism,” where he takes up this issue. One of Trotsky’s final essays, “The Class, the Party and the Leadership,” is devoted to an exposure of those who unload upon the working class and “objective causes” responsibility for defeats caused by the treachery of the leaders of the working class. “Political leadership in the crucial moments of historical turns can become just as decisive a factor as is the role of the chief command during the critical moments of war,” Trotsky wrote. “History is not an automatic process. Otherwise, why leaders? why parties? why programs? why theoretical struggles?” The Socialist Labour League in its opposition to reunification took up the objectivism of Hansen and the SWP in the early 1960s, as will be reviewed in the next lecture.

However, I would point comrades in particular to “Marxism, History & Socialist Consciousness,” which is contained in *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left*, where a correct understanding of objectivism is elaborated in opposition to Steiner and Brenner’s false presentation of the issue (particularly sections 6 and 15). Objectivism does not mean an understanding that history is a law-governed process, which we insist on, and which Steiner and Brenner rejected. Rather, it is the position that the objective development of the contradictions of capitalism will resolve the fundamental problem of revolutionary leadership, the “subjective factor.”

For Marxists, the fight for socialist consciousness does not consist of convincing the broad mass of workers to conduct a struggle against capitalism. Rather, proceeding from a recognition of the inevitability of such struggles, which arise out of the objectively exploitative process of surplus-value extraction, intensified by the deepening economic and social crisis of the capitalist system, the Marxist movement strives to develop, within the advanced sections of the working class, a scientific understanding of history as a law-governed process, knowledge of the capitalist mode of production and the social relations to which it gives rise, and insight into the real nature of the present crisis and its world-historical implications. It is a matter of transforming an unconscious historical process into a conscious political movement, of anticipating and preparing for the consequences of the intensification of the world capitalist crisis, of laying bare the logic of events, and formulating, strategically and tactically, the appropriate political response.<sup>[25]</sup>

Or as Lenin put it in a phrase later distorted and falsified by Healy, “The highest task of humanity is to comprehend this objective logic of economic evolution (the evolution of social life) in its general and fundamental features, so that it may be possible to adapt to it one’s social consciousness and the consciousness of the advanced classes of all capitalist countries in as definite, clear and critical a fashion as possible.”<sup>[26]</sup>

Returning to Pabloism, the theory of “war-revolution” actually adopted the position that Trotsky had explicitly excoriated in the years leading up to World War II, which bears relevance to our own analysis of the US-NATO war against Russia and which Comrade North quoted in the Introduction. In his testimony before the Dewey Commission in 1937, Trotsky referred to the “fantastic theory which is put into circulation by the friends of the GPU” that since “war often produces revolution,” the Trotskyist movement is in favor of expediting war.

“War has in fact often expedited revolution,” Trotsky explained.

But for precisely that reason, it has often led to abortive results.

War sharpens social contradictions and mass discontent. But that is insufficient for the *triumph* of the proletarian revolution. Without a revolutionary party rooted in the masses, the revolutionary situation leads to the most cruel defeats. The task is not to ‘expedite’ war – for this, unfortunately, the imperialists of all countries are working, not unsuccessfully. The task is to utilize the time which the imperialists still leave to the working masses for the building of a revolutionary party and revolutionary trade unions...

War and revolution are the gravest and most tragic phenomena in human history. You cannot joke with them. They do not tolerate dilettantism. We must understand clearly the interrelationship of war and revolution. We must understand no less clearly the interrelationship of the *objective* revolutionary factors, which cannot be induced at will, and the *subjective* factor of the revolution – the conscious vanguard of the proletariat, its party. It is necessary to prepare this party with the utmost energy.<sup>[27]</sup>

Pablo turned this understanding on its head. Rather than the necessity of resolving the “subjective factor of the revolution” in order to increase the “chances that the revolution will occur prior to war and perhaps make war itself impossible,” for Pablo war became the mechanism for realizing the revolution without resolving the subjective factor. With the aid of war, the overturn of capitalist property relations would happen “rapidly” and under the leadership of the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy.

Within this context, the role of the Fourth International was reduced practically to zero. “It is nevertheless necessary,” Pablo wrote in “Where are We Going?,” “for a correct orientation of revolutionary Marxists, not only to bear in mind that the *objective process is in the final analysis the sole determining factor, overriding all obstacles of a subjective order*, but also that Stalinism itself is on the one side a phenomenon of contradictions, and on the other a self-contradictory phenomenon.” (Emphasis added)

But if the “objective process” is “the sole determining factor,” what is the role of the party? This statement flew in the face of everything that Trotsky wrote about the dynamics of revolution and the decisive role of the party, of leadership. This factor becomes more significant, not less so, in a period of revolution. “But as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, *the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor*, that is, the party,” Trotsky wrote in 1928. “Opportunism, which consciously or unconsciously thrives upon the inspiration of the past epoch [that is, the period prior to World War I], always tends to underestimate the role of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and of revolutionary leadership.”<sup>[28]</sup>

The resolutions prepared for the Third World Congress and Pablo’s report to the Congress (“The Road to the Masses”) developed, on the basis of the liquidationist conceptions that were being advanced, the perspective of “real integration” into the mass movements wherever they existed and in whatever form they took.

“For the first time in the history of our movement,” Pablo stated in his report, “particularly since the Second World Congress, the maturity of our cadres is evidenced by the stubborn, systematic exploration of the road which the real movement of the masses has taken in each country and the forms and organizations which express it the best, and by our concrete, and practical steps on this road.”

Pablo’s “road to the masses” was based on national considerations in each country, rather than a global perspective for socialist revolution. “To understand the real movement of the masses means first of all to be able to correctly analyze the political situation in each country, its peculiarities, its dynamism, and to define the most appropriate tactics for reaching the masses.”

Pablo raised what in the Marxist movement have traditionally been considered tactical questions—how to relate to and win over workers from existing leaderships—into a supreme question of political perspective, the centrality of which was only now being understood. “What we have understood for the first time in the history of our movement and of the workers’ movement in general—for the first time in as thoroughgoing a manner and on so large a scale—is that we must be capable of finding our place in the mass movement as it is, wherever it expresses itself, and to aid it to rise through its own experience to higher levels...”

There is not now a single Trotskyist organization, which, either as a whole or in part, does not seriously, profoundly, concretely understand the necessity of subordinating all organizational considerations, of formal independence or otherwise, to real integration into the mass movement wherever it expresses itself in each country, or to integration in an important current of this movement which can be influenced.<sup>[29]</sup>

The Congress adopted a specific resolution on the political situation in Latin America, including a call for the Trotskyist movement in Bolivia to orient to the petit-bourgeois MNR, the beginning of a liquidationist policy on the continent that would have catastrophic consequences for the working class, which will be reviewed in the next lecture.

Beginning in 1952, Cannon took up a fight against Pabloism, which culminated in the issuing of the Open Letter in November 1953. In the course of reviewing this history in Chapters 16 and 17 of *The Heritage We Defend*, Comrade North at the same time exposes and counters the lie advanced by Banda in his “27 Reasons” that Cannon (as well as Healy, according to Banda), in opposing Pabloism and initiating the International Committee, were engaged in some sort of pragmatic maneuver or worse. According to Banda, the split in 1953 was a conflict between “those who in Britain and the USA (e.g., Cannon and Healy) were orienting rapidly toward the labour and reformist bureaucracies and the state and those in Western Europe who were adapting to the pressure of the dominant Stalinist bureaucracies in Italy and France.”<sup>[30]</sup>

As Comrade North notes, if this interpretation of 1953 were true, then genuine Trotskyists at the time would have been obliged to critically support Pablo, since the founding of the IC would have been based on an adaptation to US and European imperialism. As the *Heritage* exhaustively demonstrates, Banda’s “analysis” was a complete fiction.

The denigration of Cannon’s role in 1953 (extended by Banda to Healy as well) had roots in previous positions of the WRP, which in the course of its nationalist degeneration began to promote the line that Cannon’s break with Pablo was merely an unprincipled maneuver. The forward to *Trotskyism vs. Revisionism, Volume 1*, published in 1974, argued that “many people new to the movement may be tempted to draw the conclusion that the SWP represented an anti-revisionist and Marxist standpoint in the discussion and that their present [in the 1970s] renegacy is some sort of aberration not connected with the ‘orthodoxy’ of the fifties.” On the contrary, it stated, the ICFI elaborated its perspective against both Pabloism and “the pragmatism and mechanical determinism of the Cannon-Dobbs-Hansen tendency.” It further adds that “Cannon and the majority of the SWP leadership were unable to fight Pablo politically because they shared the same positivist method.”<sup>[31]</sup>

In his obituary of Healy, Comrade North points out that this diminution of Cannon’s role, which in fact began in the late 1960s, was advanced “in order to downplay ... the significance of the international movement and its decisive role in the development of the Trotskyist movement in Britain.”

It is certainly possible, in hindsight, to point out the faults of Cannon in the initial years of the emergence of Pabloism, including the failure to

understand the political issues involved in Pablo’s bureaucratic moves against the majority of the French section, and to understand the far-reaching significance of the positions advanced in the resolutions of the Third World Congress. Cannon himself acknowledged these faults once the battle against Pabloism was fully engaged. But to conclude from this that Cannon’s fight against Pablo was merely a maneuver, and that Cannon was “unable to fight Pablo politically,” was to distort the historical record. It falsified Cannon’s own position in the history of the Trotskyist movement, despite his subsequent political degeneration, and, whether Healy at the time intended to or not, undermined the political foundations of the ICFI itself, which was based on Cannon’s Open Letter.

Of particular significance is the defense that Cannon mounted, first in the fight against the Cochran-Clarke tendency in the SWP and then against Pabloism as a whole, for the history of the party.

In the US, Pablo’s supporters, led by Bert Cochran, were engaged in a wholesale repudiation of the historical traditions of the movement, under the demand to “Junk the Old Trotskyism.” Arguing that the SWP should stop referring to itself as “Trotskyist,” Cochran stated in April 1951, “I have the feeling that this designation impresses the average unpolitical American—the very person we are most interested in [!]—as a sectarian movement, as followers of some individual, and a Russian at that.”<sup>[32]</sup>

Cochran was giving expression to a mood, characteristic of all revisionist tendencies, of unrestrained hostility to the history of the party. He declared in July-August 1951 that “we cannot afford to live in the past, or in a make-believe world of our own creation.”

We cannot afford any Quixotism. While our program is based, and will continue to be based upon the international experiences of the working class; and while Trotsky was, in the immediate and most direct sense, the teacher and the leader of our movement, it does not at all follow from these two propositions that we will have much success in rallying workers to our banner by trying to straighten them out on the rights and wrongs of the Stalin-Trotsky fight, *which has now receded into history*—or that it is our revolutionary duty to try to do so.<sup>[33]</sup>

This is an extraordinary statement. The “Stalin-Trotsky” fight—as if this was a matter of the conflict between individuals, and not about life and death issues for the world socialist movement—had “receded into history.” This is said in 1951, only 11 years after the assassination of Trotsky at the hands of a GPU agent, the equivalent of the period between 2012 and today. It was less than 15 years after the Great Purges and the mass murder of Trotskyists and socialist workers in the Soviet Union. But the “rights and wrongs” of this conflict had supposedly receded into the distant past, under conditions in which Stalin still headed the bureaucratic apparatus in the Soviet Union.

Cannon understood that the fight against Cochran and then against Pabloism as an international tendency had to be carried into the membership and become the property of the membership.

I would like to play a clip from a speech delivered by Cannon on May 24, 1953, before a membership meeting of the New York branch, a main base of the opposition. It gives a sense of what Cannon represented and the approach that he took to the history of the movement, in which comrades will no doubt recognize our own motivations for this school.

In this speech and others from the period, Cannon connected the positions of the opposition to shifts in the objective situation and class relations in the years following the war. Addressing the party majority caucus on May 11, 1953, he explained that the party could no longer ignore the stratification that was taking place within the unions and the emergence of a conservative layer, whose moods and conceptions were



finding expression within the party itself.

In the course of 1953, Cannon and his supporters came to the understanding that the political conceptions that the SWP confronted in the tendency led by Cochran and Clark<sup>[34]</sup> was a particular national expression of the liquidationist line promoted by Pablo. It could, therefore, only be taken up at the level of the international. As Dobbs explained in this letter to Healy on October 25, 1953, “We think the best service we can render the international movement is to cut through the whole web of Pabloite intrigue with an open challenge of their revisionist-liquidationist line. We think the time has come for an open appeal to the orthodox Trotskyists of the world to rally to save the Fourth International and throw out this usurping revisionist clique.

“The fight we are now up against is no less vital and decisive for the future than the great battles waged 25 years ago, in which the original Trotskyist cadre were assembled. In the face of these political imperatives, petty scandals and organizational maneuvers pale into significance. Through an uncompromising political challenge you will quickly weld your forces together in a faction which will become the future movement in England.”<sup>[35]</sup>

In early November, following the expulsion of Cochran, Clarke and others who participated in a boycott of a party event marking the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Trotskyist movement in the United States, Cannon delivered a speech to an NC plenum in which he outlined the central issue at stake in the fight against Pabloism: the question of revolutionary leadership and, bound up with this, an understanding of the nature of the epoch:

And if our break with Pabloism—as we see it now clearly—if it boils down to one point and is concentrated in one point, that is it: the question of the party. That seems clear to us now, as we have seen the development of Pabloism in action. The essence of Pabloist revisionism is the overthrow of that part of Trotskyism which is today its most vital part—the conception of the crisis of mankind as the crisis of the leadership of the labor movement summed up in the question of the party.<sup>[36]</sup>

The Open Letter of November 1953 summed up the principled political and organizational issues involved in the fight against Pabloism. Its opening sections outlined, under “The Program of Trotskyism,” the fundamental basis upon which the Trotskyist movement was built, a section that was incorporated in full in the resolution founding the ICFI.

To quote:

1. The death agony of the capitalist system threatens the destruction of civilization through worsening depressions, world wars and barbaric manifestations like fascism. The development of atomic weapons today underlines the danger in the gravest possible way.

2. The descent into the abyss can be avoided only by replacing capitalism with the planned economy of socialism on a world scale and thus resuming the spiral of progress opened up by capitalism in its early days.

3. This can be accomplished only under the leadership of the working class as the only truly revolutionary class in society. But the working class itself faces a crisis of leadership although the world relationship of social forces was never so favorable as today for the workers to take the road to power.

4. To organize itself for carrying out this world-historic aim the working class in each country must construct a revolutionary

socialist party in the pattern developed by Lenin; that is, a combat party capable of dialectically combining democracy and centralism – democracy in arriving at decisions, centralism in carrying them out; a leadership controlled by the ranks, ranks able to carry forward under fire in disciplined fashion.

5. The main obstacle to this is Stalinism, which attracts workers through exploiting the prestige of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, only later, as it betrays their confidence, to hurl them either into the arms of the Social Democracy, into apathy, or back into illusions in capitalism. The penalty for these betrayals is paid by the working people in the form of consolidation of fascist or monarchist forces, and new outbreaks of wars fostered and prepared by capitalism. From its inception, the Fourth International set as one of its major tasks the revolutionary overthrow of Stalinism inside and outside the USSR.

6. The need for flexible tactics facing many sections of the Fourth International, and parties or groups sympathetic to its program, makes it all the more imperative that they know how to fight imperialism and all of its petty-bourgeois agencies (such as nationalist formations or trade-union bureaucracies) without capitulation to Stalinism; and, conversely, know how to fight Stalinism (which in the final analysis is a petty-bourgeois agency of imperialism) without capitulating to imperialism.<sup>[37]</sup>

Chapter 18 of the *Heritage* details the way in which the Open Letter exposes in detail Pablo’s rejection of these fundamental conceptions as expressed in critical political developments. These include the response to the death of Stalin in March 1953, with the Pabloite faction portraying the concessions of the bureaucracy not as a maneuver, but as moves toward the “sharing of power” with the working class. In response to the uprising of workers in East Germany in June of 1953, the Pabloites dressed up the violent suppression of the workers by Stalinist troops as part of “the road to more ample and genuine concessions.” In response to the massive general strike in France in August, the Pabloites covered up for the betrayals of the Stalinists by claiming the Communist Party had a “lack” of policy, rather than exposing its policy of bolstering French capitalism.

The letter concludes with a call for an international offensive against Pabloism in all its forms:

The lines of cleavage between Pablo’s revisionism and orthodox Trotskyism are so deep that no compromise is possible either politically or organizationally. The Pablo faction has demonstrated that it will not permit democratic decisions truly reflecting majority opinion to be reached. They demand complete submission to their criminal policy. They are determined to drive all orthodox Trotskyists out of the Fourth International or to muzzle and handcuff them. ... But the qualitative point of change has been reached. The political issues have broken through the maneuvers and the fight is now a showdown.

I would like to conclude with three points.

First, in forming the International Committee, Cannon and his supporters, including Healy, were defending the Trotskyist movement from liquidation. Without this struggle, the Fourth International would have ceased to exist as a revolutionary tendency. Despite his subsequent degeneration, Cannon understood how urgent and necessary this task was. “The cadres of the ‘old Trotskyists,’” he wrote in a letter to Leslie Goonewardene on February 23, 1954, “represent the accumulated capital of the long struggle.”

*They are the carriers of the doctrine*; the sole human instruments now available to bring our doctrine—the element of socialist consciousness—into the mass movement. The Pablo camarilla set out deliberately to disrupt these cadres, one by one, in one country after another. And we set out, no less deliberately—after too long a delay—to defend the cadres against this perfidious attack. Our sense of responsibility to the international movement imperatively required us to do so. Revolutionary cadres are not indestructible. The tragic experience of the Comintern taught us that.<sup>[38]</sup>

The split with the WRP had a similar character. It was a defense of the entire history of the movement against a liquidationist and opportunist tendency that threatened to destroy the Fourth International itself. Under different conditions, we are bringing these concepts into the work of the party. We are not, presently, engaged in a battle against an opportunist tendency within the party. But, based on an understanding of the tasks posed by the objective situation, we are seeking to educate the entire party in “the accumulated capital of the long struggle.” It is only on this basis that we will be able to orient the party in an extremely complex political situation, and through the party to orient and lead the working class in socialist revolution.

Second, if there is one conclusion that comrades should draw from this review is that you should read carefully and in detail the documents of the split with the WRP, including *The Heritage We Defend*. I could in the space of this lecture review only the main points in the origins and evolution of Pabloism and its significance. As with all the lectures this week, it is intended as a starting point for study in the party and by individual members.

Third, the struggle that led to the founding of the International Committee of the Fourth International 70 years ago initiated a 30-year period of what we have described as a “civil war” within the Trotskyist movement, including the fight against unprincipled reunification, led by Healy and the SLL, and culminating in the split with the WRP. This is what we have called the third stage in the history of the Trotskyist movement, the main subject of the lectures this week.

As for the organizations that sided with Pablo in 1953, and then participated in the reunification of 1963, they belong today, if they exist at all, among the “pseudo-left,” supporters of imperialism and defenders of the trade union apparatus. Some of those who passed through the school of Pabloism have even risen to the level of prime ministers and presidents. Only the ICFI, in its 70-year history and in its present practice, defends and upholds the perspective of Trotskyism. It is the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

[1] “The ‘Open Letter’ and the Formation of the International Committee,” *Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, WSWS.org, 2008, special library/foundations-us/17.html

[2] David North, *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International* (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 2018), p. 189.

[3] “Letter from David North to Mike Banda, January 23, 1984,” *The ICFI Defends Trotskyism*, URL: <http://www.icfi-defends-trotskyism-1982-1986/05.html>

[4] North, *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 486.

[5] Leon Trotsky, “The USSR in War,” *In Defense of Marxism* (London: New Park Publications, 1971), p. 7.

[6] “A Letter to James P. Cannon, Sept 12, 1939,” *ibid.*, p. 1.

[7] “The USSR in War,” *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

[8] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 99.

[9] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 101.

[10] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 109.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. xxxvi.

[12] *Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, pp. 69-70.

[13] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 71.

[14] Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

[15] Michel Pablo, “On the Class Nature of Yugoslavia,” *Socialist Workers Party International Information Bulletin*, December 1949.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, pp. 170-71.

[18] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 176.

[19] David North, *ibid.*, pp. 176-77.

[20] David North, *ibid.*, p. 189.

[21] Michel Pablo, “Where are we Going?,” (January 1951), *SWP International Information Bulletin*, March 1951.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 185.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

[25] David North, “Marxism, History and Socialist Consciousness,” *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left* (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 2015), p. 91.

[26] V.I. Lenin, “How Bogdanov Corrects and ‘Develops’ Marx,” *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Chapter 6.2, URL: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/six2.htm>

[27] Leon Trotsky, “Our position on war as nurturing revolution” *Fourth Internationalist*, URL: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspaper/fi-is/no11/trotsky.htm>

[28] Leon Trotsky, “The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals,” *The Third International After Lenin* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1996), p. 101.

[29] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, pp. 191-192.

[30] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 197.

[31] *Trotskyism vs. Revisionism, Volume One: The Fight Against Pabloism in the Fourth International* (London: New Park Publications, 1974), pp. xii; xvi.

[32] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 200.

[33] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 203.

[34] Bert Cochran and his principal supporter, George Clarke, went on to form the Socialist Union of America, based, as Cochran wrote in May 1954, on the conviction that “the revolutionary parties of tomorrow will not be Trotskyist, in the sense of necessarily accepting the tradition of our movement, our estimation of Trotsky’s place in the revolutionary hierarchy, or all of Trotsky’s specific evaluations and slogans.” (“Our Orientation”). The publication of the organization (*The American Socialist*) anticipated the positions to be developed by the movement for a “New Left” in the 1960s. “If the sixties are due to introduce a new decade of social tension and strife—and many signs point that way—it is vain to imagine that the surviving radical grouplets can start again where they left off twenty years ago... That play is finished. Leadership will inevitably come first from sources that currently sit astride the labor, liberal, and Negro movements, and command the attention, if not allegiance, of sizable segments of the nation.” (“The Next Generation of Radicals,” *The American Socialist*, June 1959).

[35] Quoted in *The Heritage We Defend*, p. 224.

[36] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 225.

[37] Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 229-30; 2008/11/06/pam-o2/available here:

[38] Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 243.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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