

Wohlforth's renegacy, the renewal of the struggle against Pabloism in the Workers League, and the turn to the working class

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The following lecture was delivered by Evan Blake and Tom Mackaman, both leading members 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 third lecture, "The Origins of Pabloite Revisionism, the Split Within the Fourth International and the Founding of the International Committee," was published on August 18.

The fourth lecture, "The Cuban Revolution and the SLL's opposition to the unprincipled Pabloite reunification of 1963," was published on August 25.

The fifth lecture, "The 'Great Betrayal' in Ceylon, the formation of the American Committee for the Fourth International, and the founding of the Workers League," was published on August 30.

The sixth lecture, "The continuing struggle against Pabloism, the centrism of the OCI and the emerging crisis within the ICFI," was published on September 6.

The seventh lecture, "The ICFI's exposure of Ernest Mandel's 'neo-capitalism' and the analysis of the global economic crisis: 1967–1971," was published on September 8.

The WSWs will be publishing all of the lectures in the coming weeks.

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of Tim Wohlforth's resignation from the Workers League. Exactly 50 years ago this month, in August 1973, Wohlforth elevated Nancy Fields into the leadership of the party, a subjective and unprincipled decision which set into motion a political wrecking operation that nearly liquidated the Workers League. Over the following year, more than 100 members left the party, including over half of the party leadership, and whole branches were dissolved.

The break with Wohlforth is among the most significant events in the history of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Involved in this fight were fundamental issues of historical perspective, political principle, organizational security and the defense of dialectical materialism against the subjective idealist philosophy of pragmatism.

Above all, it represented a deepening of the fight against Pabloite revisionism. Just one decade after his expulsion from the SWP for

opposing their unprincipled reunification with the Pabloites, Wohlforth quickly returned to the SWP and became a chief acolyte of GPU-FBI agent Joseph Hansen. Their mutual embrace and visceral hostility to party security prompted the initiation of the Security and the Fourth International investigation, which marked the most significant advance in the fight against revisionism since the 1963 split.

The philosophical questions involved in Wohlforth's degeneration were critical. As with all renegades that have broken with Trotskyism, from Burnham-Shachtman, to Morrow-Goldman, to Cochran-Clarke, and most cynically Hansen and George Novack, Wohlforth rejected dialectical materialism and adopted the philosophy of pragmatism. This homegrown philosophy of American capitalism—which is based on short-term subjective political calculations and a rejection of the objective historical foundations of the Marxist method—has persisted throughout the history of the socialist and Trotskyist movement. Even in recent years, we have had to deal once again with unstable petty-bourgeois figures utilizing a pragmatic and subjective type of politics similar to that of Wohlforth.

The many lessons of the Wohlforth experience are critical for the cadre of every section of the ICFI and must be assimilated by our international movement today as the global crisis of capitalism deepens. The escalating war in Ukraine, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the mounting economic crisis, and the global eruption of the class struggle will bring to bear growing pressures upon our cadre, which can only be met through an objective and disciplined revolutionary practice rooted in historical materialism and oriented towards preparing the working class to seize power.

The central contradiction of the Workers League in the early 1970s was that between the immense revolutionary potential of the party's young cadre and the increasingly subjective leadership of Wohlforth. The layer of young people who joined to build a revolutionary party at that time were moving to the left, while Wohlforth was moving steadily to the right.

This contradiction was resolved through Wohlforth's resignation, which enabled the party to develop a higher level of political clarity and revolutionary practice between 1974 and 1982. This prepared the Workers League to lead the ICFI's struggle against the national opportunism of the WRP between 1982 and 1986, finally bringing to an end the 33-year battle against Pabloite revisionism within the ICFI and opening the fourth phase of the Trotskyist movement. The generation of political leaders forged in these struggles continues to play a critical role in our party today, a testament to the profound strength of the revolutionary principles and perspective of Trotskyism.

On November 4, 1972, Max Shachtman died at the age of 68. In the last decade of his life, he had gone so far to the right politically that he supported the Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba and the bombing of North

Vietnam by US imperialism. In his obituary for Shachtman, Wohlforth wrote that his deterioration “not only ‘detracts’ from his earlier contributions but completely negates them.” He added, “Shachtman died a traitor to his class and a counter-revolutionary. That is the long and short of it.”^[1]

This one-sided obituary drew a sharp rebuke from Gerry Healy, whose own political development as a Trotskyist was influenced by Shachtman’s writings in the 1930s, particularly his 1936 essay *Behind the Moscow Trial*.

Healy explained to Wohlforth:

You write that “Shachtman died a traitor to his class and a counter-revolutionary.” No one can dispute this. But you add, “That is the long and short of it.” This phrase itself seems at once paradoxical because Shachtman didn’t just die, he also lived.

Naturally the memory of someone who finally betrayed disgracefully does not give rise to kind feelings. However, we are not here to attribute responsibilities, but to understand.^[2]

We approach Wohlforth in the same way. Despite his break from Trotskyism in 1974, which ultimately led him to openly support US imperialism in the 1990s, for a critical period during the 1960s he provided political leadership to the minority opposition within the SWP, then the American Committee for the Fourth International (ACFI), then the Workers League. To understand his own subsequent political development and that of the Workers League, it is important to briefly review this history, as well as Wohlforth’s own background.

Wohlforth was born in 1933 and raised in a liberal middle class family in Connecticut, with one of his father’s close friends being FDR’s third-term vice president, Henry Wallace. While a student at Oberlin College, he became increasingly left-wing and in 1953 joined the Socialist Youth League (SYL), the youth movement of Max Shachtman’s Independent Socialist League (ISL), the successor to the Workers Party that Shachtman founded in April 1940 after splitting from the Fourth International. (In 1954, the Socialist Youth League merged with a faction of the Young People’s Socialist League and changed its name to Young Socialist League—YSL.)

Wohlforth broke with the ISL in 1957, opposing its efforts to merge with the Socialist Party of America. The leader of the Shachtmanite majority in the YSL that opposed Wohlforth was none other than Michael Harrington, who went on to found what is today the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

After leaving the ISL, Wohlforth joined the SWP in 1958, by which point the party was in the thick of its opportunist “regroupment” campaign, as described in detail in Chapter 24 of *The Heritage We Defend*. Wohlforth was a founder of the SWP’s youth movement, the Young Socialist Alliance, which recruited Comrade Fred Mazelis and others in the late 1950s.

Shortly after joining the SWP, Wohlforth came into conflict with the party leadership over its efforts to forge an unprincipled reunification with the Pabloites, beginning a correspondence with Gerry Healy and the IC in 1960. By 1961, Wohlforth, then an *ex officio* member of the SWP Political Committee, formally declared his support for the SLL’s opposition to a hasty reunification.

In the foreword to Volume 7 of *Trotskyism vs. Revisionism*, published in 1984, Comrade David North describes what then transpired:

[Wohlforth] immediately came under ruthless political attack by Hansen, who conspired to purge him from the leadership of the

YSA. Working closely with Hansen in this operation was Barry Sheppard, a relatively new recruit to the SWP who, just a few years earlier, had been an ardent right-wing Shachtmanite and opponent of Wohlforth’s turn to Trotskyism. Wohlforth’s replacements were drawn, as secretly prepared by Hansen in advance, from a group of students from Carleton College, who, as the Dean of Students admitted years later, “were plugged into” the SWP.

Jack Barnes, who hailed from a right-wing Republican family in Dayton, Ohio, returned from a trip to Cuba financed by the Ford Foundation to join the mysterious Fair Play for Cuba Committee. From there he entered directly into the Young Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Workers Party. ... Within a few weeks, under the behind-the-scenes supervision of Hansen, Barnes was running a faction that would promptly oust Wohlforth from the YSA leadership, thus removing an obstacle to the SWP’s plans to split from the International Committee.^[3]

Comrade Keith Jones has already reviewed the subsequent developments that led to the formation of the Workers League. I will only add that at each step, Wohlforth played an essential role in providing leadership, but throughout this process he exhibited tendencies towards subjectivism and pragmatism, which became more pronounced over the subsequent decade. The most significant example of this was his refusal to attend the April 1966 Third World Congress of the ICFI, motivated primarily by subjective hostility to James Robertson, who, he worried, could take his leadership position in a unified American section.

Nevertheless, the critical work conducted by Wohlforth, under the guidance of Gerry Healy and the SLL leadership, helped maintain the continuity of Trotskyism in the US and lay the foundations for the building of the Workers League in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Among his most important writings during this period, when he served as national secretary of the Workers League, were the *Bulletin* series pamphlets *Black Nationalism & Marxist Theory, What is Spartacist?* and *The Case for a Labor Party*, as well as the book, *The Struggle for Marxism in the United States*.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the breakup of the postwar boom and the intensification of the world capitalist crisis exerted ever greater objective pressures on the Workers League and on Wohlforth as its leader. The party was faced with the tasks of advancing beyond its largely propagandist practice, turning deeper into the working class and firmly breaking with the middle class protest politics which dominated the left in the US in the 1950s and 1960s. While certain important gains were made, in this intensifying objective crisis, Wohlforth’s practice became increasingly pragmatic, erratic and subjective.

The Nixon administration’s scrapping of the Bretton Woods Agreement on August 15, 1971 marked a turning point in the history of American and world capitalism. It unleashed a profound global economic destabilization, centered in the United States, provoking major political shifts and an intensification of the class struggle internationally. This, in turn, magnified the objective pressures bearing down upon the Workers League and the ICFI as a whole, precipitating Wohlforth’s political collapse.

The year 1972 began with the powerful UK miners strike and the “Bloody Sunday” massacre in Northern Ireland, followed by the Lordstown GM strike in the US and the Quebec general strike in April. The Easter Offensive in Vietnam began on March 30, prompting renewed mass anti-Vietnam War protests across the US. On September 23, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos imposed martial law.

At the start of 1973, conscription was ended in the US, leading to the final collapse of the antiwar movement, as broad layers of middle-class students pursued their careers and turned increasingly to the right. Other

major world events of that year included the September 11 Chilean coup d'état, the Arab-Israeli War and the oil embargo by OPEC against countries which had supported Israel, which led to a quadrupling of oil prices.

In February 1974, the Tory government fell in Great Britain, followed by the collapse of the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal and the military junta in Greece. Finally, as a result of the Watergate scandal, US President Richard Nixon was forced to resign on August 8, 1974, just three weeks before the Workers League summer school at which Wohlforth was removed as national secretary.

Within the ICFI, this period of the early 1970s marked a turning point in which the sections developed in an uneven and contradictory manner. While the SLL had made significant advances and provided essential leadership to the ICFI after the split with Pablo in 1953, by the late 1960s and, in particular, the early 1970s certain features in its work acquired an increasingly negative character.

The British section became primarily focused on national developments at the expense of political clarification within the IC, as documented extensively in *How the WRP Betrayed Trotskyism*. The key expressions of this growing drift away from patient and principled politics during this time were the 1971 split with the OCI, the 1973 founding of the WRP on a centrist program and the 1974 expulsion of Alan Thornett.

As reviewed in the lecture by Comrades Peter and Sam, the split with the OCI remained unclarified in the movement throughout this period, severing the historical continuity of Trotskyism in France for decades to come. Similarly, the expulsion of Thornett was conducted in a manner that evaded the central political issues, prompting hundreds of members, primarily workers, to leave the WRP.

These developments coincided with the mounting crisis in the Workers League between 1971 and 1974. In a sense, the growing disorientation of the WRP was refracted through the pragmatic approach of Wohlforth, as he repeatedly aped the practices of the British section without any real political clarification within the Workers League.

One of the earliest expressions of this process was Wohlforth's abrupt public announcement in June 1971 that the *Bulletin* would become a daily paper. This decision was made without any discussion in the IC, essentially grafting onto the US section the practice of the SLL, which had launched the *Workers Press* as a daily in 1969. In multiple letters, which are contained in Volume 7 of *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism*, Healy explained the pragmatic character of Wohlforth's decision, ultimately preventing the premature switch to a daily paper.

Another sign of Wohlforth's disorientation was the shift in the party's focus towards a "turn to the youth" in 1971, copying a similar initiative that had been carried out in Britain. The majority of party work now consisted of conducting *Bulletin* subscription drives in minority working class neighborhoods to try to recruit primarily high school youth.

While this led to some important gains and the founding of the Young Socialists in December 1971, Wohlforth became increasingly hostile to more experienced comrades in the party, while viewing work in the trade unions as no longer "fruitful." In much of his writings over the coming years, and in his resignation letter, Wohlforth's overriding concern was the "building of a working class youth movement." This was done on a pragmatic basis and without providing the necessary political and historical education for these new recruits.

At the January 1972 Congress, Comrade Fred Mazelis, one of nine members who had been expelled from the SWP in 1964 and a founding member of the Workers League, was removed from the Central Committee, along with other more experienced comrades, and replaced with youth who had just joined the party. Comrade David North was harangued for "lecturing the youth" when he himself was at the ripe age of 22 years old. Comrade Mazelis was only later reinstated to the Central Committee (CC) at the insistence of the SLL, while multiple youth who

had been put on the CC soon left the party.

In the months following the January 1972 Congress, Wohlforth increasingly neglected the campaign for a labor party. This had been a central political issue in the American section going back to the discussions with Leon Trotsky in the 1930s, until it was abandoned by the SWP in the 1950s. Through discussions with the SLL, it was then reintroduced in the founding of the Workers League and became a core demand of the party. But there was a continuous tendency to drift away from a focus on the labor party demand and amalgamate it with various adaptations to petty-bourgeois politics.

Only after the intervention of IC comrades in early 1972 did Wohlforth refocus on this core demand, leading to the publication of *The Case for a Labor Party* in the early summer of 1972. This important pamphlet was immensely popular, selling roughly 75,000 copies. In October 1972, the founding conference of the Trade Union Alliance for a Labor Party (TUALP) was held in Chicago.

In the spring of 1972, the prison campaigns began, in which prisoners were portrayed as the next great revolutionary force in American society. Wohlforth drew a totally false comparison with the political prisoners of the Russian revolutionary movement, including Leon Trotsky, which was taken up sharply by Mike Banda at the summer school in Britain that year.

In December 1972, Wohlforth wrote the obituary of Shachtman cited above. In the following spring of 1973, Wohlforth organized a series of public debates with Spartacist leader James Robertson on the history of the Fourth International. This turn to the dregs of middle class radicalism was a clear sign that Wohlforth had not broken from his past in this milieu and was moving on a rightward trajectory.

Then, in August 1973, Nancy Fields was elevated from a secretarial role into the leadership of the Workers League. This was done just months after Wohlforth had begun a relationship with Fields, expressing his increasingly subjective and opportunist politics. The following year was one of enormous crisis which nearly saw the liquidation of the Workers League and the Trotskyist movement in the United States.

Comrade North describes this process in *The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth* as follows:

After the first summer camp, having been brought into the leadership by Wohlforth for entirely personal reasons, Fields ran amuck in the Workers League.

Wherever she went, Fields left behind a trail of political destruction. She became Wohlforth's inseparable traveling companion and hatchet-woman. They jetted around the country to the tune of thousands of dollars in a wrecking operation the likes of which had never been seen in the Workers League. They closed down branches, threatened members with expulsions, and employed the crudest factional intrigues to drive comrades out of the Workers League. The so-called "national tours" of Wohlforth and Fields had more the character of a honeymoon than a political intervention.^[4]

In a remarkable letter that Wohlforth wrote to Healy on July 19, 1974, which is quoted extensively in *The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth*, after noting that some 100 comrades had recently left the party, he wrote:

This figure refers only to people in the party for some time and playing important roles, not those who drift in and out, the usual sorting out of membership. The bulk of these people left in the period of the preparation for and since the summer camp last

year which was the decisive turning point in the history of the League.

Even this figure does not show the full impact of the process. Almost half of those who left were from New York City. Almost half the National Committee and Political Committee were involved. Virtually the entire original youth leadership were also involved.

The most remarkable thing about it is that while the net membership is now perhaps (!) a little lower than a year ago, but not substantially, (!!), in every other respect the party is far stronger (!!!)... (Emphasis added)^[5]

Wohlforth added:

We are virtually wiped out as far as intellectuals are concerned—one big bastardly desertion. What is done on this front I have to do along with Nancy. We have nothing any more in the universities—and I mean nothing...

As far as the trade unions are concerned our old, basically centrist work in the trade unions, especially SSEU, has collapsed precisely because of our struggle to change its character and turn into the youth.^[6]

What Wohlforth described in this letter was nothing less than liquidationism in practice. While he may not have been conscious of this at the time, his disorientation and unprincipled behavior were direct manifestations of his political drift towards Pabloite revisionism. This was consummated in his rapid return to the SWP after resigning from the Workers League.

Finally, the August 1974 summer school was a critical event in the history of the ICFI. At a meeting of the Workers League Central Committee on the evening of August 30, which included Gerry Healy and Cliff Slaughter, the terrible experiences of the previous year were finally aired in the open. The following night, it was revealed that Nancy Fields had family connections to the CIA. This had been concealed by Wohlforth, who declared, "I didn't think it was important." In response, the entire CC, including Wohlforth and Fields, voted to remove Wohlforth as national secretary and suspend Fields from membership until a Commission of Inquiry had conducted an investigation into Fields' connections to the CIA.

The next month, when it became clear that the investigation would take place, Wohlforth abruptly resigned from the Workers League on September 29, 1974. Comrade Mazelis and Mike Banda met Wohlforth at his apartment in October, but he refused to be interviewed by the Commission or resume political activity.

Just three months later, in January 1975, Wohlforth published a subjective diatribe against the ICFI titled, "The Workers League and the International Committee," which represented his final break with the Trotskyist movement. Wohlforth was immediately supported by the Spartacists and the SWP, with Hansen publishing Wohlforth's document in the *Intercontinental Press* and commenting that his "sincerity is undeniable and one can only wish him luck on his next venture."^[7]

The first statement produced by the Workers League on Wohlforth's resignation was *What Makes Wohlforth Run?*, which is also contained in Volume 7. It was published in the April 15, 1975 biweekly edition of the *Bulletin* as a polemic against Wohlforth's January 31 document. We will not review it in detail here, but on the whole it is a strong document which expresses the developing political maturity of the leadership of the Workers League. It was written by a group of comrades in the leadership,

with support from the SLL, and was adopted unanimously by the Political Committee.

An important aspect of Wohlforth's denunciation of the ICFI was his declaration that the concerns raised about security and Nancy Fields' family connections to the CIA were evidence of Healy's "madness." Joseph Hansen—who had been on guard on the day that Trotsky was assassinated—took this even further, proclaiming such security concerns "paranoia." This provocative dismissal of party security by Hansen was treated with the utmost seriousness by the ICFI, which voted at its Sixth Congress in May 1975 to initiate an investigation into the events surrounding the assassination of Leon Trotsky, with the initial findings published under the title, "Security and the Fourth International."

The following month, on June 24, 1975, Wohlforth wrote a letter to Jack Barnes indicating that he and Nancy Fields wished to reapply for membership to the SWP. Their applications were accepted sometime later that year.

That letter, which is included in Volume 7, contains these extraordinary passages which indicate Wohlforth's total repudiation of the principles for which he had fought since 1961:

We believe the SWP has taken a principled position on Trotskyist fundamentals within the international movement as well as exercised a considerable degree of patience necessary because of the inexperience and freshness of many of the forces in a number of countries...

We have been allies, as you know, for a number of years in the socialist movement. Despite our recent experience, we are determined to contribute in any way we can to the construction of the revolutionary party. We are convinced of the socialist future of the U.S. and the world. We know the building of a revolutionary party is essential to that future. We are party people.

We wish, therefore, to apply for membership in the SWP and contribute in any way possible to its development.^[8]

Again, this letter was written in June 1975, by which point Hansen and the Pabloites bore responsibility for the catastrophic impacts of guerrilla warfare throughout Latin America and other parts of the world, as reviewed in Tomas's lecture. The overthrow of Allende in Chile had happened less than two years prior, but now Wohlforth was stating that "the SWP has taken a principled position on Trotskyist fundamentals within the international movement."

On November 10, 1975, Wohlforth and Fields published an article in *Intercontinental Press*, the organ of the Pabloite United Secretariat, and soon became regular contributors to this outlet as well as the SWP's *The Militant*. In November-December 1975, the SWP denounced the Security investigation in articles by Hansen and Novack. In January 1976, the ICFI publicly indicted Hansen, calling him an "accomplice of the GPU."

Amid this intensifying conflict over the Security investigation, the cadre of the Workers League was turning ever deeper into the history of Trotskyism and intervening in numerous struggles of the working class.

As we state in the *Historical and International Foundations of the SEP (US)*:

The political desertion of Wohlforth marked a decisive turning point in the development of the Workers League as a Trotskyist organization. Wohlforth's resignation and subsequent repudiation of his own political history expressed not only personal weaknesses. It epitomized specific traits of American petty-bourgeois radicalism—in particular, its contempt for theoretical

consistency and a pragmatic disdain for history. The Workers League recognized that the crisis through which it had passed in 1973-74 required more than a criticism of Wohlforth's errors. Thus, in response to Wohlforth's resignation and his denunciation of the ICFI, the Workers League initiated an extensive review of the history of the Fourth International.

It was precisely the emphasis on the historical experience of the Trotskyist movement, within the context of the objective development of world capitalism and the international class struggle, that emerged as the essential and distinctive characteristic of the Workers League. The development of Marxist perspective and the strategic orientation to the working class, it repeatedly stressed, was only possible to the extent that the full weight of the historical experience of the Marxist movement was brought to bear in the analysis of contemporary socio-economic processes.^[9]

The document *The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth* is a milestone in this growing political maturity of the Workers League in the aftermath of Wohlforth's resignation. Published as a series of installments between March 30 and May 14, 1976, most of the document was written by Comrade North, who had become the national secretary of the Workers League at the party's Congress of January 1976. Alex Steiner was the primary author of the second article, which focuses on philosophy.

One is struck in reading this document by the enormous development that the Workers League had already undergone in the span of just one year since the publication of *What Makes Wohlforth Run?* It is a devastating polemic against Wohlforth, who by this point had explicitly adopted virtually every political position he had opposed during his time as national secretary of the Workers League.

The document is incredibly rich, drawing from a wide range of works by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, while citing Wohlforth's earlier writings against his new revisionist positions. It is the most comprehensive statement written on Wohlforth's resignation, roughly double the length of *What Makes Wohlforth Run?*

The series begins by situating Wohlforth's break from the Workers League and return to the SWP in its broader objective context. It lays particular emphasis on the economic crisis, noting:

Capitalism internationally is in the throes of the deepest economic crisis in its history, with the collapse of the postwar Bretton Woods policies leaving no possibilities for the use of Keynesian credit inflation to pull all the major capitalist countries out of the slump.^[10]

The document stresses the revolutionary potential in this situation, stating that the role of the SWP in this period will be essential to head off revolution, with Wohlforth's rejoining of the SWP and denunciations of the ICFI facilitating these aims.

The first article in the series, "The Wohlforth School of Falsification," exposes Wohlforth's lying claims by recounting the factual background to his resignation, stating:

Wohlforth's return to the SWP is the consummation of his break with Marxism. His alliance with the GPU accomplice Hansen is his alliance with the counterrevolution. One can find almost no parallel for the cynicism and haste with which Wohlforth carried out his break with the revolutionary movement and passed over to

the camp of the enemy. He unites with Hansen and the SWP without the slightest explanation of how he changed his past views.^[11]

One of the strengths of the polemic is the continuous citation of Wohlforth's own writings from when he was in the Workers League, which are the antithesis of everything he wrote upon joining the SWP.

In this article, North notes the sudden shift in Wohlforth's opinion of Hansen, writing:

In fact, before Wohlforth repudiated Marxism, he specifically associated the degeneration of the Socialist Workers Party with the emergence of Joseph Hansen as its leading figure. In his lengthy assessment of the history of the Socialist Workers Party, published as a book in 1971, Wohlforth wrote:

"Hansen's theoretical role in the postwar history of the SWP was not a personal matter. He reflected—perhaps a bit more grotesquely than others—the empiricist method of the SWP. His theories were developed as impressionistic reactions to current developments or to serve political and factional purposes. A theory once developed would be lightly discarded when either the objective situation or the factional need changed. ... Only a party deeply sick with the disease of empiricism would let such a person occupy a leading position in its central leadership." (Wohlforth, *The Struggle for Marxism in the United States*, Labor Publications, p. 140)^[12]

North comments, "A devastating political assessment of Hansen, one which Wohlforth would prefer to forget." Also quoted is an article by Wohlforth published June 14, 1974, just three months before his resignation, titled "Joseph Hansen—An Aging Liar Peddles His Wares."

The second and longest article of the series, "In the Footsteps of Kant," focuses on the philosophical positions that Wohlforth espoused in his writings after leaving the Workers League, which were essentially Kantian and pragmatic in nature.

This was the only article in the series written by Alex Steiner, who at that point was still playing an important role as a member of the Workers League. As comrades know, Steiner left the Workers League and abandoned revolutionary politics in September 1978, followed by Frank Brenner in January 1979. By the mid-2000s, both were rabidly denouncing the ICFI.

The issues raised by Steiner and Brenner are taken up sharply in *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left*, which is essential for all comrades to study today. It reviews many of the fundamental political and philosophical issues that dominated the 20th century and continue to exert influence today in academia and society as a whole.

Steiner's article has certain limitations and points which are fairly abstract. It also begins with an incorrect analysis of the split with the OCI and the expulsion of Thornett, which reiterates the line of the WRP that these were fundamentally philosophical disputes. But on the whole, the article presents a correct analysis of Wohlforth's positions, with important passages on pragmatism, empiricism and Kantianism, while upholding dialectical materialism as the philosophical foundation of Marxism.

The central philosophical issue that the article addresses is Wohlforth's rejection of the existence of the universal in nature. A key passage summarizing this states:

By denying the objective existence of the universal in nature, Wohlforth must deny the unity, interconnectedness, and causality that operate in nature. By divorcing thinking and perception from universal matter in motion, Wohlforth rejects the materialist basis of all cognition. Cognition therefore ceases to be a practice and becomes, as Wohlforth pointedly says, “a mental process,” the subjective thinker independent of the external world. Wohlforth’s denial of causality and objective necessity in nature and in thinking also involves a complete rejection of historical materialism. Society and the roles of classes are viewed completely apart from their lawful and necessary process of formation.^[13]

Significantly, the positions advanced in this article directly contrast with those that Steiner would later put forward. Steiner writes:

Thornett and Wohlforth, like every revisionist, want to dismiss and take for granted the fundamental question of philosophy, materialism or idealism. Wohlforth thinks he can write any idealist rubbish he likes, as long as he pays a little hollow lip-service to materialism along the way.^[14]

The same could later be said of Steiner himself, who in a discussion with Comrade North in 1999 stated his disagreement with Engels that the relationship between materialism and idealism was the basic question of philosophy.

This article on philosophy testifies to the fact that Wohlforth’s abandonment of Marxism and the working class was not an isolated incident but part of a broader rightward movement of large sections of the middle class in the 1970s, of which Steiner and Brenner were later a part. In fact, there were a number of similarities between Wohlforth and Steiner, as both were deeply subjective, distant from the class struggle and oriented to petty-bourgeois politics.

In his opening report to the Socialist Equality Party (US) Second National Congress in July 2012, titled, “The theoretical and historical origins of the pseudo-left,” contained in the volume *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-Left*, North commented on the rightward trajectory of this social layer:

As the petty-bourgeois anti-war protest movement collapsed in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the implications of the social divisions within the Workers League became more pronounced. **It is not the case, by any means, that the evolution of each and every individual was determined directly by his or her social background. However, the severe loss of members in 1973-74—while certainly exacerbated by the disruptive behavior of Wohlforth and his companion Nancy Fields—reflected a broader social and political process.** Sections of the middle class who had been radicalized in the 1960s were anxious to return to their old familiar social milieu. This journey brought them inevitably back into the orbit of bourgeois politics. (Emphasis added)^[15]

The third section, titled, “The Long Road Back to Pablo,” takes up Wohlforth’s statement, “In the past, the Trotskyist movement was confined largely to a propaganda existence,” which he claimed meant that “a real sorting out of revolutionary forces could not take place.”^[16]

North replies, “What Wohlforth seeks to deny is the historic continuity of the Trotskyist movement.”^[17] North then reviews in detail the ICFI’s struggle against Pabloism and the splits in 1953 and 1963, concluding:

The struggle against Pabloism by the International Committee constitutes as rich a chapter in the history of Marxism as the struggle waged by Bolshevism against Menshevism between 1903 and 1917. Or, to put it more precisely, the fight against Pabloism represents the highest development of Marxism, basing itself upon all the accumulated lessons of the struggle against revisionism dating back to the great schism between Bolshevism and Menshevism at the turn of the century.^[18]

North then cites extensively from three letters that Wohlforth wrote to Healy on May 31, June 7 and June 14, 1974, just before he resigned from the Workers League. In each letter, he stressed the significance of the 1953 split, which he said was “of the greatest importance” and proposed writing a series of articles on the struggle against Pabloism.

In the June 7 letter, he explicitly attacked his soon-to-be ally Hansen, writing:

In fact, now it seems to me that the 1961 SWP International Resolution was a very conscious and completely cynical job. Hansen actually went out of his way to include in the document the exact Pabloite formulations which the SWP had denounced in 1953. This, more than anything else, raises the question of the character of the man. The document was an open and blatant attempt to spit at the past history of the SWP.^[19]

The following three articles are the most significant in the series, focusing on Wohlforth’s repudiation of the Marxist approach to revolution, the vanguard party, the epoch of imperialism and racial politics.

The fourth article, “Reform or Revolution?,” takes up Wohlforth’s distortion of the Manifesto of the Sixth Congress of the International Committee.

Specifically, Wohlforth took umbrage with this passage in the Manifesto:

What is now at issue, in all the capitalist countries, is the outbreak of mass struggles in which the first responsibility is the actual preparation by the working class for the taking of state power.

Not a single burning problem of the working class in Britain, the United States, or any other country, can be resolved outside the preparation of the struggle for state power.

Every elementary demand of the working class, every defense of past gains, every attempt of the capitalist state to control the trade unions, brings forward the two great necessities for the working class: the preparation of the conquest of state power and the building of the revolutionary party to lead this struggle for power.^[20]

After quoting another similar statement in an article by Alex Steiner, Wohlforth replied:

Well, Comrades Healy and Steiner, you can add us to the list of those who deny that the task today internationally is the “immediate practical task” of the struggle for power!^[21]

North notes that “Wohlforth has exhumed the stinking corpse of pre-World War One social democracy and put it—as well as his ignorance—on display.”^[22] He then cites extensively from Lenin and Trotsky to demonstrate the Marxist conception of the nature of the imperialist epoch.

In a passage which bears enormous relevance to this school and our political work in the present, North wrote:

The deliberate confusion which Wohlforth attempts to introduce, which we pointed out earlier, between the **preparation for power** and the **seizure of power** is not simply the product of his inveterate dishonesty. It is, more importantly, an expression of his hopeless entanglement in reformist schemas, in which every stage is separated by concrete walls.

On the basis of the historic assessment of the epoch, we state unequivocally that only the party which prepares for power will seize power. The preparation for power must permeate the everyday work of the party.

It is only in this way that a truly revolutionary cadre can be assembled, educated, and prepared for the titanic class battles that will culminate in the seizure of power by the working class, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the destruction of the bourgeois state.^[23]

The article goes on to note that Wohlforth’s present position was a reversal of the prior extreme that he advanced in 1972-73, when he “suggested that the American revolution was just around the corner.”^[24]

Often, the IC had to rein in Wohlforth’s wild impressionism, most notably in a February 1973 letter from Mike Banda, which stressed:

There will not only be “leaps” but plenty of hard, unspectacular slogging against the Stalinists and revisionists which will require great theoretical firmness and tactical skill. ... The task is to organize and win over the vanguard of the working class to Trotskyism and lay the basis for the revolutionary party.^[25]

The article ends by quoting Trotsky’s emphasis on the subjective factor of the party in his essay *Whither France?*:

The political relationship of forces is determined not solely by the objective factors (the role in the productive process, numerical strength, etc.) but by **subjective factors: the consciousness of strength** is the most important element of **actual strength**.^[26]

North concludes:

The working class arrives at this consciousness through the struggle of the revolutionary party, which embodies its entire historic experience and posits upon this all the developments of the class struggle.

The working class is strengthened in so far as the revolutionary

party wages war against all revisionist forces which reflect the pressure of imperialism within the proletariat.

The smashing of these forces is the highest point in the preparation of the working class for power. Thus, when the Workers League unmasked Wohlforth and cauterized this festering sore within its movement, the American working class was immensely strengthened.^[27]

The fifth article, “A Subjective Idealist on War,” is also immensely relevant for our political work and perspective today. The article focuses on Wohlforth’s denunciation of the warning made by the IC on the danger of World War III, which he claims “expresses the tremendous lack of confidence in the working class that distinguishes Healy and all ultra-lefts.”^[28]

After noting that Lenin characterized the modern epoch as one of wars and revolutions, Comrade North cites from Trotsky’s 1934 essay “War and the Fourth International,” which noted, “All governments fear war. But none of the governments has any freedom of choice. Without a proletarian revolution, a new world war is inevitable.”^[29]

North then writes:

We are, as Marxists, interested in **laws** of historical development. They are not altered by “confidence” or other inspiring emotions. A man who drank poison against the advice of his doctors because he has “confidence” in his stomach would rightly be considered an idiot. An individual who disregards the danger of war because he has “confidence” in the working class is simply not a Marxist, but rather a fool with opinions on questions he knows nothing about.

The only context within which the question of “confidence” has any significance whatsoever is when Marxists, who are fighting to construct the revolutionary party, proceed with the scientific knowledge that the working class with the historically required leadership will be able to prevent war by overthrowing capitalism.

The International Committee, in this scientific sense, is absolutely confident that the working class will defeat imperialism. We are confident because we are building the party that will destroy world imperialism. We proceed from the standpoint of Trotsky, who concluded the 1934 document with the following words: “The struggle against war means now the struggle for the Fourth International.”^[30]

The article then takes up Wohlforth’s incredible statement on the victory of the North Vietnamese over US imperialism the prior year, which amounts to a total rejection of the need for revolutionary leadership to stop imperialist war.

Wohlforth wrote:

The IC misses the main point of the Vietnam victory. It expresses the **great weakness** of the capitalists in carrying out their interests through war. It is above all the movement of the masses that holds back the trigger finger of the imperialists.^[31]

North replied:

Thus, in the wonderful world of Wohlforth, the struggle against

war is not a revolutionary task because the problem has been solved all by itself. Wohlforth can enjoy the sleep of the truly confident because the masses are holding back the trigger finger of imperialism and—this takes the cake—the capitalists are too weak to do a thing about it. Furthermore, the capitalists have since wised up to the fact that war is a bad way of carrying out their interests...

Everything here is a complete muddle and an outrageous distortion of Marxism.

Wohlforth arrives at the truly astonishing conclusion that the capitalists, having discovered their “great weakness” will now abstain from war like the righteous from sin...

War cannot be prevented except through the overthrow of capitalism. Wohlforth says nothing about this. But it is not an accidental omission...

Glorification of the mass movement and avoidance of the question of revolutionary leadership is the classic dodge of opportunism.^[32]

The sixth section, “The Boston Stranglers of the Working Class,” addresses Wohlforth and the SWP’s positions on the busing program to desegregate Boston public schools, which became a major focus of their activity between 1974 and 1976. In the course of this crisis, the SWP advocated the sending of federal troops to Boston to facilitate the busing program. This was the latest in a long series of anti-Marxist adaptations to the capitalist state, which began with the SWP’s 1957 demand that federal troops be sent to Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce the desegregation of schools.

In his writings on this issue, Wohlforth omitted the SWP’s demand for the sending of federal troops, a tacit endorsement of this policy. At the same time, he blamed the working class for racism and explicitly opposed the seniority system, promoting a court decision that forced white workers to sacrifice for black workers amid the deepening economic crisis of the mid-1970s.

North writes:

These are the policies of a man who has not only broken with Marxism but has also passed into the camp of the enemy class. What Wohlforth reflects is the right-wing movement of the most reactionary layers of the middle class, who are driven into a frenzy by the economic crisis and place the blame for it on the working class.

What gives Wohlforth’s anti-union diatribe a certain element of perversity is that he has, in the past, written extensively against the very positions he now advances.^[33]

The article then cites from Wohlforth’s 1969 pamphlet *Black Nationalism & Marxist Theory*, which was a strong document written in close collaboration with Mike Banda that polemicized against these same positions of the SWP in the 1960s.

The concluding part of this article is directly related to the ICFI’s contemporary defense of the American Revolution and Civil War against the “1619 Project” and all other racist interpretations of history. In his writings on Boston, Wohlforth claimed:

Because of the existence up to the American Civil War of a slave system in the South and the inability of the capitalist class, following the Civil War, to fully resolve the democratic tasks posed by that revolutionary war, the American working class is

deeply divided on race lines...

The political and social development of the American working class cannot proceed without a head-on confrontation with this problem—in many ways the central problem of the third American revolution.^[34]

North replied:

If one is to advance the proposition that the bourgeois democratic revolution was not completed in the United States, then one is faced with the immediate task of completely revising the entire Marxist conception of this historical epoch...

Unfortunately for Wohlforth, his entire theory is complete rubbish. In no country in the world were the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution completed as thoroughly as they were in the United States. The revolution led by the colonial merchants and planters in 1776 established the national independence of the United States, and the bloody Civil War shattered the slave system completely and created the historical conditions for the massive growth of capital through the unhampered development of industry in the continental United States...

Politically, the point of denying these obvious facts is to deny the necessity for the building of the revolutionary party for the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.^[35]

Finally, North critiques Wohlforth’s false claim that racism is the central problem facing the American working class, writing:

As a subjectivist who denies that being determines consciousness, Wohlforth insists that this is the “central problem” of the third American revolution...

In other words, racist thinking is not seen as a product of the decay of capitalism whose crisis drives the working class as an objective force in history toward the social revolution. Rather, racism becomes Wohlforth’s version of original sin which has a power over the working class more powerful than the objective historical forces.

This is just another version of all the demoralized arguments found commonly among radicals and layers of the middle class who reject the struggle for socialism on the grounds that workers are “stupid” and man inherently evil.^[36]

In the seventh article, “An Aging liar Peddles His Wares,” North addresses Wohlforth’s petty-bourgeois claim that the IC is guilty of “Stalinist” organizational practices.

An important passage refuting this states:

The denunciation of “organizational practices” is the hallmark of revisionism. Renegades commonly denounce Trotskyists for “Stalinist” practices in the same way as the Mensheviks after 1903 denounced Lenin’s organizational practices as “Blanquism” or “Jacobinism.”

What unites all these epithets is the hatred by those who use them for any revolutionary discipline and organizational loyalty based on great political principles.^[37]

The remainder of this article debunks the lying claim of Wohlforth that he and Fields were “purged” from the leadership of the Workers League, reviewing in great detail their disruptive activities in the year following Fields’ elevation to the party leadership.

The eighth article, “The Accomplice of Joseph Hansen,” responds to Wohlforth’s characterization of Security and the Fourth International as “the Joseph Hansen slander campaign.” It recapitulates the key findings of the investigation up to that point, challenging Wohlforth to answer a series of critical questions.

The final section, “Whither Wohlforth?”, summarizes the key points made in the series and the broader significance of Wohlforth’s resignation. It cites passages from one of his latest documents which most explicitly advanced a nationalist conception of the Fourth International, while denigrating the role of Trotsky himself.

North then draws an apt comparison between Wohlforth and Jay Lovestone, infamous for being a factional careerist in the American Communist Party in the 1920s and 1930s and later a leader in the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, mentor to its president, George Meany, and accomplice of the CIA.

He writes:

In Wohlforth, all the characteristics of a Lovestone in the embryonic stage of development can be found: total lack of political principles, unrestrained subjectivism and careerism, hostility to Marxism and Bolshevik democratic centralism, blatant anti-internationalism, disrespect for the history of the Marxist movement, subservience to the trade union bureaucracy and the capitalist state, and a bitter hatred of the working class.^[38]

The series ends with this prescient conclusion:

We say categorically that Wohlforth’s movement to the right has by no means come to a halt. This is a man who is going places. How much further Wohlforth will travel we do not have to predict. Let it merely be said that his future development will be determined by the needs of the ruling class and the speed with which the crisis develops.

The struggle against Wohlforth represents a milestone in the building of the forces of the International Committee of the Fourth International in the United States. His political exposure has not only immensely strengthened the Workers League, but it has also laid the theoretical foundation for the building of the mass revolutionary party in the United States.

We are not in the least bit disturbed by the hero’s welcome accorded to Wohlforth by the revisionists. Let him take his honored place beside the GPU accomplices Hansen and Novack in the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party. That is where he belongs!

But in the Workers League, the struggle against Wohlforth has steeled the cadre of the revolutionary party in an unbending hatred of revisionism. It has provided the political lessons vital for the training of the great new forces of workers, youth and students who will come forward in their thousands to join the revolutionary party.

In conclusion, we state with the greatest confidence that the struggle against revisionism waged by the Workers League in solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International represents the highest stage of the preparation of the working class in the United States and internationally for the world

socialist revolution.^[39]

All of this was proven correct in the coming months and years, as Wohlforth moved ever further to the right, and the cadre of the Workers League intensified their theoretical, political and historical education and fight for Trotskyism in the working class.

Following the publication of *The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth*, the Workers League continued to make significant political and theoretical advances while intervening in a vast number of workers’ struggles, as Tom will review in detail. At the same time, the *Security and the Fourth International* investigation deepened, exposing the network of GPU and FBI agents that had penetrated the Trotskyist movement, which Eric will review.

Despite the damning revelations of the ICFI’s investigation, Wohlforth continued to slander the movement for its concerns over security, writing the introduction to the SWP’s December 1976 pamphlet *Healy’s Big Lie*. He then took part in the infamous Platform of Shame event in London on January 14, 1977, which brought together representatives of the world Pabloite movement. An important article on this, which I do not have time to review but is contained in Volume 7, is titled, “Wohlforth—On to the Platform of Shame.”

Significantly, just months after he took part in the Platform of Shame, Wohlforth privately encouraged Jack Barnes to acknowledge that Sylvia Caldwell was an agent, given the overwhelming evidence accumulated by the IC against her. This letter is also contained in Volume 7.

Later that year, on October 16, 1977, Tom Henehan was murdered by two hitmen in New York City, just months after Hansen had written that there would be “deadly consequences” if the Security investigation continued.

In the face of this political assassination and unending slanders by the revisionist press, the Workers League did not bend an inch. Rather, the party turned deeper into the working class, mounting an aggressive campaign demanding an investigation into Tom’s murder and the arrest of the gunmen. At the same time, the Workers League deepened its interventions in the class struggle and sharpened its political analysis.

Flowing from these experiences and the development of the party after Wohlforth’s resignation, the Workers League drafted the Perspectives Resolution in 1978, which was then amended and finalized in June 1979. This document, titled, *The World Economic-Political Crisis and the Death Agony of US Imperialism*, marked the most significant theoretical and political development of the entire ICFI during the decade of the 1970s. Upon reading the document, Mike Banda was immensely moved, characterizing it as an “extraordinary development of the perspective of the IC.” Comrade Tom will review this document in greater detail.

I want to reiterate that the break with Wohlforth marked a transition point in the ICFI. From then on, the orientation of the WRP became increasingly nationalist and opportunist, while the Workers League turned ever deeper to the working class and the historical traditions of Trotskyism.

By the time that the 1978 Perspectives Resolution was being discussed and finalized, the degeneration of the WRP was becoming apparent to the leadership of the Workers League. Its conduct at meetings, uncritical support for bourgeois nationalist figures in its press, and Healy’s growing mystification of dialectics were initial red flags which became more pronounced in the coming years.

This finally came to a head with Comrade North’s critique of Healy’s *Studies in Dialectics* and the October 1982 meeting with WRP leaders and culminated in the split of 1985-86, the subject of the final lectures of this school.

As for Wohlforth himself, within a few years he had left the SWP and became a full-blown anticommunist. He soon came full circle by returning

to the Shachtmanites and giving lectures through the Democratic Socialists of America under Michael Harrington in 1984. He later co-wrote a book titled *On the Edge*, in which he slandered the Workers League and WRP as political cults. This evidently remains part of the curriculum for DSA members, as revealed in the interview with the Democratic Party operative and DSA leader Daraka Larimore-Hall.

As with Burnham, Shachtman, Cochran and other renegades from Trotskyism, Wohlforth finally moved directly into the camp of US imperialism. In the 1990s, he wrote an infamous article titled, "Give War a Chance," which argued that socialists should not oppose every Western military intervention. Alongside many other ex-lefts, he supported the American bombings in the Balkans to supposedly defend "human rights." This would become the central propaganda technique used to justify the unending wars of the 21st century, reaching a climax in the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

In the foreword to Volume 7, written on May 22, 1984, Comrade North commented on Wohlforth's lectures with the DSA and his increasingly rightward political trajectory, noting:

Such a movement is of a significance that extends far beyond Wohlforth. The driving force of his development is the objective crisis of world capitalism, and in his humiliating personal fate is contained a profound lesson on the significance of the dialectic, which, though not recognized by Wohlforth, nevertheless—as Trotsky once pointed out in relation to Burnham—extends its sway over him.^[40]

The lessons of the break with Wohlforth are intensely relevant to the work of the ICFI today and must be assimilated by the cadre internationally. The last word has not yet been written, and an immense amount of work remains to be done to bring forward the remarkable history of the Workers League and the ICFI throughout this period. Flowing from this summer school, we must develop an archival project on the history of the Workers League and each section of the ICFI in the 1970s and 1980s, documenting the experiences of members of this generation of party leaders and the record of our party in this critical turning point in the fight for Trotskyism.

Part II: The Workers League and the turn to the working class, 1974-1978

The deepening of the fight against revisionism that emerged out of the Wohlforth affair must never be thought of as a distraction from the work in the working class. It was an integral, decisive part of the whole. We can say together with Lenin: There can be no revolutionary movement without revolutionary theory. As Comrade North writes in *The Heritage We Defend*, in the light of what was revealed by the Wohlforth affair:

[The] awesome historical implications of the 1953 split and the subsequent battle against the Socialist Workers Party were reassimilated by the entire party. Upon these strengthened foundations, the party turned more vigorously than ever toward the struggle to construct a Marxist vanguard party of the working class in the United States as part of the world party of socialist revolution.^[41]

Or, as it was put in the Workers League 1978 Perspectives Resolution *The World Economic-Political Crisis and the Death Agony of US Imperialism*:

The foundation for revolutionary practice, the indispensable basis for any real orientation to the working class from the standpoint of the struggle for power, is the thorough assimilation of the entire body of historical experiences through which the International Committee has passed since 1953. The training of the Trotskyist cadre is only possible in the struggle to base every aspect and detail of the party's political work on the historical conquests of the International Committee, derived from the battle against revisionism.^[42]

Throughout the period from 1974-1978, the record testifies to the development made in all aspects of the Workers League's interventions in the working class. This lecture is focused centrally on the aforementioned 1978 Perspectives Resolution, which marks the culmination of this period and a qualitative development in the political work of the Workers League. It is a summation of the whole development of the Workers League in these years, including its orientation to the working class and its working out of a strategy of socialist revolution. The preparation during this period helped lay the groundwork for the Workers League to conduct the struggle against the Workers Revolutionary Party in the 1980s.

An essential purpose of this lecture is to introduce comrades to the *Bulletin*. It began publication as a mimeographed newsletter with the founding of the American Committee for the Fourth International in 1964, when it was called the *Bulletin of International Socialism*. It became a print newspaper in September 1966, two months before the Workers League was founded in November 1966.

The *Bulletin* continued until 1993, when it was replaced by the *International Workers Bulletin*, which involved greater collaboration of the entire ICFI and was the immediate predecessor of the *World Socialist Web Site*. From 1974 through 1987, the *Bulletin* was published as a bi-weekly, and for the remaining years, as a weekly. It included a Spanish-language page, *Prensa Obrera*. We have done some work toward digitizing these collections. The years 1964-1973 are available at marxists.org.^[43] The party aims to make the entire, combined collection available to the cadre soon.

The pages of the *Bulletin* form an unmatched archival source bearing witness to the era's many labor struggles. The Workers League seemed to be everywhere all at once, very often covering major strikes simultaneously underway in different regions of the country, as well as constantly publishing on international events, Marxist theory, history, culture and science. But the *Bulletin's* engagement with the working class went beyond coverage. The party *intervened* in the working class. As Marx explained in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, it is impossible to understand the world outside of the struggle to change it. And it is impossible to understand what happened in this period without the *Bulletin*. This is probably why American labor historians have been able to make so little sense of the period.

The Workers League, as attested to on the pages of the *Bulletin*, persistently fought for a revolutionary strategy in the working class. The labor party demand, which will be a focus of this lecture, provided the pivot for that strategy for power.

The labor party demand had been foundational to the American Trotskyist movement since the late 1930s and Trotsky's discussions with Cannon and the SWP leadership in Coyoacan. Trotsky's analysis of the American revolution, the most advanced ever made to that point, emerged from his world-historical analysis of capitalism and not from specific

American conditions. Trotsky foresaw that the rapid decline of American capitalism over the course of the Great Depression would force workers on the road of political struggle. As explained in the 1978 Perspectives document, for Trotsky, “the labor party demand was not simply one among many demands advanced by the party. It was the cornerstone of the strategy for the social revolution in the United States.”^[44]

Cannon, amidst the first signs of a restabilization of capitalism in the postwar period, reiterated parts of Trotsky’s analysis in his important *American Theses* of 1946. But the SWP drifted away from the labor party demand over the course of the 1950s. By 1954, just one year after the Open Letter, Cannon had moved to the position that a labor party would be built by the spontaneous movement of the working class, which would somehow compel some faction of the union bureaucracy to conjure it into being. Once created, the labor party would then provide the SWP the arena in which it could operate. This outlook left no role to the Trotskyist movement except to wait. By the early 1960s, with its embrace of Pabloism, the SWP had abandoned the labor party demand entirely.

Between 1964 and 1966, the young American Committee for the Fourth International corresponded closely with the SLL leadership, and under its guidance began to renew discussions on the labor party demand. This found powerful expression in the founding document of the Workers League, which stated:

At this stage in the development of the American working class our central transitional demand must be the creation of a labor party, a party of the American working class. The working class must be shown that it must of necessity go beyond isolated economic struggles to a fundamental political struggle against the ruling class and its political instruments. The labor party demand thus becomes the unifying demand of all our work in the United States. It must permeate all our propaganda and agitation: among the working class youth, in the trade unions, among the minority peoples, around the war question...

While the movement towards the labor party can get its start outside the trade union movement, it must develop a base within the organized labor movement before it can develop into a serious force. Further, unless such movements struggle to become a movement of the class as a whole, they will of necessity lose whatever class program they have achieved, as they maneuver between the existing capitalist parties rather than struggling to supplant them.^[45]

It must be stressed here the decisive role played by the SLL in orienting the young American sympathizing section. Gerry Healy’s greetings to the Workers League’s founding convention ring with the same force today as they did in 1966. Healy stated:

The working class in the United States is the most powerful in the world, and it is within this class that you must build your party. This is a basic principle of Marxism and one which applies with particular urgency to the conditions existing inside the United States. It is not Black Power or the dozens of peace and civil rights movements which extend throughout the country which will resolve the basic questions of our time, but the working class led by a revolutionary party.^[46]

The labor party demand must not be thought of as a clever agitational tactic. It was a strategy for power. As Comrade North writes in *The*

Workers League and the Founding of the Socialist Equality Party, the labor party demand “embodied a definite strategical conception of the development of the American working class”—and, we should add, in a very different period.

In 1966, when the Workers League renewed the labor party demand, the trade unions still commanded significant authority in the working class. This was only two decades after the great strike wave of 1945-1946, and just three decades after the explosive industrial struggles of 1934-1938. There were still veterans of those events in the plants, mines, docks and mills, working shoulder to shoulder with their sons and daughters. The great struggles of the past, and the great advances made by the working class, were very much living memories. We are speaking of a period, to quote again from Comrade North, in which

[the] ... central strategical problem that confronted the Trotskyist movement ... was the active and militant allegiance given by the most advanced sections of the working class to the mass Stalinist and social democratic parties and trade unions. The political activity of our sections therefore assumed, despite variations in tactics, that the starting point of a great new revolutionary reorientation of the working class would proceed in the form of a radicalization among the most class-conscious and politically-active elements within the ranks of these organizations. Out of that movement, in which the sections of the International Committee would play a catalytic role as the most intransigent opponents of Social Democracy and Stalinism, would arise the real possibilities for the establishment of a mass revolutionary party. Our tactics were based on this conception. This strategical orientation was diametrically opposed to that of the Pabloites, who oriented their organizations toward the bureaucratic leaders, to whom they attributed revolutionary potential. We sought, in a sense, to revolutionize these mass movements from below, while they sought to influence via the bureaucracies from above.^[47]

In response to the intense strike activity of 1969-1971, and especially the granting of a significant raise to steelworkers—who won the pay bump with only a threat of a strike—Nixon in 1971 imposed a 90-day pay freeze and created a Pay Board that included AFL-CIO President George Meany. The Workers League launched a successful campaign in the working class demanding that Meany walk off the board. A 1972 pamphlet, *The Case for a Labor Party*,^[48] originally published in the *Bulletin*, sold 75,000 copies.

Another crucial pamphlet from the period is Comrade David’s *Where Wallace Really Stands*,^[49] which argued that the building of a labor party was the way forward in combatting Wallace’s right-wing populist influence among industrial workers. These pamphlets laid the groundwork for the formation of the Trade Union Alliance for a Labor Party (TUALP). A very important worker comrade won to the Workers League after reading the Wallace pamphlet was Jim Lawrence, a GM worker in Dayton, Ohio. Here is a clip of an interview with Jim.

The Case for a Labor Party was motivated by the intervention of the SLL and Healy against Wohlforth’s tendency to veer away from this demand or to conjoin it to other activities, such as his prison letter writing campaign. The pamphlet stated:

We call on the labor movement to hold [a congress of labor] and construct such a Party. But we do not rely on the present labor bureaucracies to carry out such a task. What is required is a break from all the compromises with capitalism, which has created a

labor bureaucracy far removed from the ranks. This bureaucracy lives more like bosses than workers. The labor bureaucracy will resist such a break to the end. We must therefore construct a new leadership in the trade unions fighting to carry out this task. As a first step in this, we are calling on all trade unionists who favor a labor party to come together to form an organization in the trade unions to fight for such a party.^[50]

The founding conference of TUALP was held in Chicago in the fall of 1972 and was “attended by workers from virtually every major section of industry.”^[51] There was a major intervention among workers to build TUALP. In this slide we see the circulation among IAM members of a petition supporting the 1972 conference. There were many interviews with workers supporting the 1975 conferences. Here is one such interview with famed British actress Julie Christie.

A second conference was held in St. Louis in February 1973. The largest TUALP conference gathered in Detroit on April 12 and 13, 1975, with more than 325 delegates in attendance. It was followed on April 20, 1975 by a TUALP gathering in Los Angeles that included 65 delegates representing longshoremen, actors and actresses and autoworkers, among others. All major American industries and more than a dozen unions were represented at the two 1975 conferences. The *Bulletin* reported on the resolution emerging from the Detroit TUALP conference:

The 325 trade unionists, unemployed workers, and youth from the East Coast and Midwest regions pledged to build the Workers League and its industrial section, the TUALP, around socialist policies, defend the basic right of the working class to jobs and a decent standard of living. The conference issued a call to all trade unionists and workers to fight for a general strike to force the Ford-Rockefeller government out and for the building of a labor party...^[52]

The theoretical and organizational developments reflected in the labor party demand and in TUALP emerged from the party’s international perspective and through constant struggle among many sections of the American working class. One could offer as examples innumerable Workers League interventions. There is truly an embarrassment of riches. The coverage, as these slides show, in the *Bulletin* of workers’ struggles—interviews, photographs, interventions—is expansive. It still provides an example for us today. But here we will focus on what was the most significant of all, the coal industry. As we go on with the report, we will present in slide form a sampling of our coverage from the *Bulletin*.

The coal miners had been the most persistently militant section of the working class for long decades stretching back to the 1890s. In the 1920s and 1930s, what were called “mine wars” raged in many states, between the United Mine Workers, or UMW, and the coal operators, and also between insurgent rank-and-file miners and the UMW.

Socialism had historic influence in the coal patches, even in allegedly “backward” places like southern Illinois and West Virginia. The industry declined after World War II. The problem, as longtime UMW head John L. Lewis once put it, was too many miners, too many mines. But the economic expansion of the 1960s and the oil shocks of the 1970s increased once again the demand for bituminous coal.

The coal fields drew a generation of young workers in the 1970s, many of them Vietnam War veterans. Over the course of that decade, the coal miners again took their place at the head of the working class. Wildcat strikes raged by the hundreds year after year. The young miners, feeling their power, again and again defied the national contracts negotiated by the corrupt UMW bureaucracy.

David North, then the labor *Bulletin*, for ~~the~~ the coal fields in the early 1970s. The Workers League intervened among rank-and-file workers in the explosive coal miners’ struggles in Harlan County, Kentucky, in 1973 and 1974. And over the course of the decade, the *Bulletin* produced hundreds of articles and countless interviews with coal miners from West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Illinois, with datelines from such places as “Welch, West Virginia.”

One reporter heavily involved in this work was a young and courageous comrade named Tom Henahan. Reading the dispatches from the coal fields in the mid-1970s reminds the reader of what the ICFI lost in his political assassination in 1977. A tribute to Comrade Tom on the anniversary of his murder noted:

His work among the miners was a political breath of fresh air. Through his repeated trips to the coal fields of West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania he made an indelible impression on hundreds of miners, who respected the conviction and determination with which he fought for the Party’s policies.^[53]

The deepening work in the coal fields in 1974 took place virtually simultaneously with Wohlforth’s renegacy. Wohlforth, for his part, wrote off the coal miners. In a discussion, Comrade David told me and Evan that Wohlforth belittled the work in Appalachia, accusing David of “gallivanting around the coal fields.” Wohlforth, indeed, thought that the fight among the coal miners was a waste of time, as he wrote in November of 1974:

The very nature of mining in the United States places a great limit upon our ability to intervene in a party way. The mines are located in a culturally backward part of the country, distant from any cities. At this stage in the development of the American working class, it is not possible to build significant party branches in the small towns of the rural mining areas.^[54]

This, amidst the greatest eruption of mineworkers’ struggles in decades!

Another element of Wohlforth’s criticism bears special notice, given the pseudo-left’s recent promotion of Shawn Fain and Sean O’Brien as “reformers” in the UAW and the Teamsters, respectively. Wohlforth attacked the Workers League for being too critical of the supposedly progressive leader of the UMW, Arnold Miller. “Miller led a massive movement of rank-and-file miners against the corrupt [former union president Tony] Boyle leadership,” he wrote. Wohlforth’s position was that, by exposing Miller, the Workers League was in league with former UMW President Boyle, who was responsible for the murder of a union rival, Jock Yablonski, in 1969.

The Workers League responded, in *What Makes Wohlforth Run*:

Miller did not lead the movement, but jumped onto it in order to channel it into the arms of the government. We agree with Trotsky when he explained that the leadership of the American trade unions “reflects not so much the proletariat as the bourgeoisie.” We do not orient toward Miller or Boyle, but toward the tens of thousands of miners forced into struggle to defend their basic rights.^[55]

Wohlforth’s position was common to the entire middle class radical

milieu, which was casting about for “space” within the trade union apparatus by latching onto supposed reformers. The end result of this a half-century later is that yesterday’s middle class radicals are today’s bureaucrats. We see this with *Labor Notes* and Teamsters for a Democratic Union, as well as with Wohlforth’s former partner Nancy Fields, who after leaving the Workers League and later the SWP quickly rose to the Executive Council of the AFL-CIO.

The Workers League early identified the ruling class counteroffensive that was gathering in the mid-1970s and persistently warned workers of its implications. This was well before Thatcher and Reagan. As Trotsky had predicted so much earlier, the decline of American capitalism would present to workers the objective necessity of taking the road of political struggle.

On July 12, 1974, in a statement entitled “The Labor Party and the American Working Class,” the *Bulletin* wrote, with great foresight:

[The] wage offensive, while extremely important as the expression of the movement of the working class, encourages the illusion that militant strikes are sufficient to meet the attacks of the capitalists. But these strikes will deepen the economic crisis, as workers resist every attempt to lower their living standards. This resistance compels the capitalists to intensify their attack and actually seek to destroy the trade unions and basic rights of workers.^[56]

The Workers League thoroughly analyzed the global crisis of capitalism. The defeat in Vietnam and Nixon’s resignation after Watergate did not signify, it warned, that the American ruling class was defanged. The pages of the *Bulletin* analyzed the promotion of mass unemployment as a tool to combat the working class. It exposed the deployment of counterrevolutionary violence all over the world.

The *Bulletin* was extremely sensitive to government espionage in the working class, an outlook invigorated by the *Security and Fourth International* investigation, which Eric will address. It directed workers’ attention to the growing number of attacks on strike pickets in the mid-1970s and the promotion of police violence against workers and youth. There are many examples, but let me briefly point to one of the most significant, the Gary Tyler campaign.

As comrades have seen in recent coverage of Gary Tyler on the WSWS, the defense of this youth, framed up and imprisoned by a viciously racist and anti-working class judicial system, was a campaign of immense importance in our party’s history. It included two conferences in 1976, in Detroit and Harlem, that together drew 700 workers and youth. The campaign directed the Young Socialists, the youth organization of the Workers League, to the working class. The YS gathered over 100,000 signatures in Tyler’s defense, as well as the endorsements of unions representing millions of workers. The pamphlet, *The Frameup of Gary Tyler*, sold in the tens of thousands.^[57]

It was through the Gary Tyler campaign that the Workers League met New York City transit worker Ed Winn, who had been born and raised in the Jim Crow South. Comrade Fred Mazelis, in an anniversary essay on the 25th anniversary of Winn’s death, noted that it was also Henehan who “played the key role in recruiting Ed Winn into the Workers League.” Winn joined the Workers League in early 1976.

After Henehan’s assassination, Winn summoned the support of thousands of New York City transit workers to bring the killers to trial. In December of 1977, Winn won election to the board of TWU Local 100 in New York, running on a program calling for the building of a labor party based on socialist policies. In the 1980 New York transit workers’ strike, Winn played an important role in countering the TWU bureaucracy’s

efforts to betray the struggle.

It was within this context of a gathering ruling class counteroffensive that the Workers League refined and developed the labor party demand. It drew sharper lines of demarcation against reformist conceptions. It explicitly opposed farming off the work of building the labor party to the unions. As Comrade North writes:

[t]he party was attempting to formulate more exactly the relationship between the fight for the labor party and the development of the Workers League as a revolutionary party. We had come to recognize that there existed the danger that the fight for the establishment of the revolutionary party could be blurred by the demand for a labor party of a politically indistinct character. We recognized the persistent danger that the independent tasks of the revolutionary movement could be lost in the general demand for the formation of another working class party. Moreover, the way in which the call for the labor party was formulated as a “demand” addressed to the trade union bureaucracy carried with it the danger of subordinating the Workers League to the maneuvers of that bureaucracy.^[58]

The development of the 1978 Perspectives Document was anticipated by those of November 1975 and January 1977. The 1975 resolution stated:

The Workers League fights for the labor party from the standpoint of the struggle for power and the building of the mass revolutionary party. The labor party is a necessary first step which the working class must take in preparation for the struggle for power. But it must never be seen as some sort of panacea and substitute for the revolutionary party.^[59]

The perspectives resolution of 1977 put it this way:

In emphasizing the need to step up the campaign for the labor party, comrades must never forget that the decisive issue is the building of the Workers League and its transformation into the mass revolutionary party. We fight for the labor party from this standpoint alone.^[60]

The 1977-1978 miners strike marked a watershed in the party’s engagement with the working class and in its development of the labor party demand. The 111-day struggle, which began on December 6, 1977 and ended on March 19, 1978, demonstrated the colossal power of the working class. Miners defied a Taft-Hartley back-to-work order from President Jimmy Carter. “Taft can mine it, Hartley can haul it, and Carter can shove it,” miners said. Or, as they said, “Carter has made his order. Now let him come down here to Kentucky and enforce it.”

The Workers League’s influence was immense. The *Bulletin*’s publishing of a leaked tentative agreement caused the defeat of one attempted UMW sellout during the strike. It is reported that the next day found an exasperated Jimmy Carter waving the *Bulletin* in the Oval Office, asking, “Who are these guys?” The miners’ successful defiance of Carter, as much as the revolutions and collapses of US client states in Iran and Nicaragua, led to the failure of his administration. The ruling class lost confidence in Carter.

But though the miners defeated Carter, they did not win. Defeat was

snatched from the jaws of victory by the UMW, which imposed what was in effect a concessions contract.

The party's extensive intervention culminated in the April 1978 pamphlet, *Lessons of the Miners Strike*. It was a stark warning to the working class and one that turned out to be terribly accurate:

The fundamental lesson of the miners strike is the need for the construction of revolutionary leadership inside the working class. The miners' strike marks the end for all time of the period of class compromise, based on the boom, and the start of a period of the most explosive class confrontation. ... It proves that living standards, union rights, medical and pension benefits—every one of the gains made by labor since the 1930s—cannot be defended today outside of a fight to destroy the system itself. At its heart this means a fight by the working class to take power into its own hands. ... But not a single step forward can be taken in this fight without the building and training of a revolutionary leadership in the working class.^[61]

The Workers League's appreciation of shifting class relations on a global scale, as evidenced in its analysis of the coal strike, laid the groundwork for a significant critical development in the labor party demand in the 1978 Perspectives Resolution *The World Economic-Political Crisis and the Death Agony of US Imperialism*, which was submitted by the Political Committee on November 7, 1978.

The document begins with a far-reaching analysis of the global economic crisis. Comrades Nick and Max have dealt with this question. Suffice it to say here that the Workers League based all of its political work on an objective appraisal of the American and global economy at a moment of intense transition. This analysis helped to lay the basis for the development of the analysis of corporatism and the labor bureaucracies in the 1980s and its analysis of globalization in the 1990s. Allow me to quote the document's preamble:

The world capitalist system stands on the brink of the greatest economic and political catastrophe in its history. During the seven years since the collapse of the Bretton Woods Agreement, the international bourgeoisie has exhausted virtually all its financial resources as well as the credit mechanisms upon which it has relied since August 15, 1971 to stave off economic disaster.^[62]

This is followed by a historical analysis, "The Rise and Fall of the Dollar Republic." It explains the emergence of American capitalism in an earlier period, amid the strong signs of its decline and decay in the 1970s. This work continues to provide a foundation for our work on American history. The document exposed the bankruptcy of theories of American exceptionalism—the pragmatic view of American history that "the land of milk and honey" is immune to the laws of history. It notes:

The history of the working class can be grasped only in its dialectical relationship to the growth of the productive forces of American capitalism. But the United States cannot be understood except from the standpoint of the history of European capitalism and the growth of the world market. If there is anything that is "exceptional" or "peculiar" to America, it is this: that the laws of the development of world capitalism have worked themselves out most fully and found their highest expression in this country.^[63]

The document explains that the United States, while once a bulwark of "order," had become the center of the crisis of capitalism.

The working class has come to a historic turning point. For forty years, it has been able to make gains and defend its rights through trade union struggle. But the onrush of the crisis now means that the militant trade unionism of the past, though an absolutely essential prerequisite, is by itself today completely inadequate to stop the attacks of the ruling class. The crisis will produce vast changes in the consciousness of millions. The America which they may have seen as "the land of unlimited opportunity" will be seen as "the land of unlimited suffering."^[64]

It went on to explain that involved in the labor party demand was not the creation of an electoral machine or a reformist, British Labour Party-style organization, but a strategy for power based on an international socialist perspective. The document rejected any notion that left the work of the building of the labor party to the spontaneous movement of the masses or to allegedly progressive factions of the bureaucracy.

It is the world crisis and the world revolution that is providing the impulse for the entrance of the working class into the field of independent class political struggle. The emergence of a mass labor party will be the historic link of the struggles of the American working class with the new stage in the world revolution...

The Workers League insists that the labor party is at the very center of the revolutionary strategy in the United States. ... But here we must make a decisive qualification: The struggle for the labor party proceeds from and is inseparable from the struggle to construct the Workers League as the revolutionary leadership of the working class. The labor party will not emerge spontaneously...

Any discussion on the labor party which sees this development outside of the active struggle for revolutionary leadership within the working class is nothing else but a form of opportunism and treachery. The old formal conception that a labor party is needed in order to make the working class "ripe" for revolutionary ideas is based on petty-bourgeois skepticism about the role of both the working class and the revolutionary party. The implicit argument contained in this perspective is that the working class must first go through the school of labor party reformism before it can be mobilized around a revolutionary program. In practice, this position means subservience to the trade union bureaucracy. Moreover, the Party is pushed into the background because the development of the labor party is seen as something sealed off from the struggle of the Party and the training of the cadre as Marxists...

It is through the form of the struggle for the labor party that Marxism must be brought into the American working class. That is, the essential content of the struggle for the labor party is the training of revolutionary Marxist cadre from the working class, youth, students and all strata willing to fight capitalism... the labor party itself—as the transitional form through which the spontaneous movement of the masses shall pass on the road to power—will be the historical by-product of the struggle for Marxism waged by the Workers League.^[65]

The document then makes this profound statement, which echoes

Trotsky's statement from the *Transitional Program* that the crisis of mankind is reduced chiefly to the problem of leadership:

[T]he labor party question is not just a problem of the working class in general. It is principally a problem of the consciousness of the revolutionary vanguard. The working class has not broken from the stranglehold of the bourgeoisie because there has not yet emerged a revolutionary leadership sufficiently mature and ideologically grounded in Marxism to divert the spontaneous movement of the working class into consciously directed revolutionary channels. The Workers League—and only the Workers League—is building such a leadership.^[66]

The 1978 Perspectives Resolution represented a qualitative development of the labor party demand. As opposed to the 1954 iteration by Cannon, it acknowledged no role for the union bureaucracy whatsoever. The revolutionary vanguard was assigned the decisive task in carrying out that work. The 1978 document urged a rank-and-file rebellion, in effect, a civil war against the union bureaucracy. In this sense, it laid the groundwork for our present position on the unions.

The section of the document titled, "The Historical Continuity of Trotskyism as the Basis of Cadre Training and the Struggle Against Pragmatism," is essential reading. It begins with this profound passage, which was discussed at length at the 2015 Summer School:

There can be no real turn to the working class outside of the conscious struggle to preserve the lines of historical continuity between the present struggles of the working class and the revolutionary party as a unity of opposites and the whole content of the objective historical experiences of the class and the development of Bolshevism. It is only from the standpoint of the struggle to base the whole work of the Party on the historical gains of the struggle against revisionism and the immense political and theoretical capital that is the heritage left behind by Trotsky to the Fourth International that the fight against pragmatism within the ranks of the Party and, therefore, in the working class itself can be seriously mounted. As soon as the struggle against pragmatism is detached from the fight to maintain the direct historical connections between the daily practice of the cadres and the whole body of historical experiences through which the Trotskyist movement has passed, it degenerates into the most impotent forms of verbal jousting. Or, to put it even more accurately, it becomes simply another variety of pragmatism itself.^[67]

This whole section, which reviews the origins and features of pragmatism, must be assimilated by all comrades today, particularly in the US where pragmatism remains the official ideology of the bourgeoisie. Some of the most important passages include the following:

When Wohlforth threw overboard more than a decade of political history without so much as an explanation, he was simply acting upon the outlook of that famous pragmatist Henry Ford, who once explained the essence of his world outlook with the words: "History is bunk!" The reasons for the predominance of pragmatism as the national ideology are to be found in the particular characteristics of the historical development of the United States. As Trotsky explained, "In no other country has

there been such rejection of the class struggle as in the land of 'unlimited opportunity.' The denial of social contradictions as the moving force of development led to the denial of the dialectic as the logic of contradictions in the domain of theoretical thought..."

Now, objective conditions make possible a final reckoning with the pragmatic mode of thinking whose bankruptcy becomes more self-evident every day. The transformation of the "land of unlimited opportunity" into the "land of unlimited suffering" will produce immense possibilities for the development of Marxism. We may paraphrase Trotsky afresh: The acceptance of social contradictions as the moving force of development will lead to the acceptance of the dialectic as the logic of contradictions in the domain of theoretical thought. But the struggle against pragmatism must be waged consciously within the Party each day. The essence of this struggle is the training of cadre on the basis of the historical continuity of Trotskyism....^[68]

Finally, this section of the document concludes with this powerful summation, whose content must be absorbed by every cadre of the ICFI today:

But the cadre of the revolutionary party must be trained to sensuously perceive the world crisis from the highest development of the historically elaborated practice of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee. In other words, the development of the crisis and the class struggle can only be understood through the objective, collective, historically-verified and scientific practice of the Party.^[69]

The 1978 Perspectives Resolution represents a milestone in the development of the Workers League and the ICFI after Wohlforth's resignation. It will be the subject of future lectures. Each section of the 1978 Perspectives Resolution is extremely rich and requires careful study.

Carter's humiliation at the hands of the coal miners in 1977-1978 ensured the destruction of his administration and paved the way for Reagan. But before he left office, Carter in 1979 collaborated with the UAW bureaucracy to bail out Chrysler, through the impoverishment of its workforce, in exchange for UAW chief Douglas Fraser securing a seat on the corporate board.

The same year, Carter appointed Chase Manhattan Bank executive Paul Volcker to head the Federal Reserve. Volcker jacked up interest rates past 20 percent, creating the highest level of unemployment since the Great Depression. "The standard of living of the average American has to decline," he declared.^[70]

The unions offered no resistance to the social devastation that ripped apart whole cities, the old citadels of working class power like Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo, Pittsburgh and many more. And in 1980, Carter laid out intricate plans to crush a small federal union of air traffic controllers, PATCO.

Reagan then executed the crushing of PATCO in 1981. The Workers League intervened heavily in the struggle and led the defense campaign for jailed air traffic controllers, including controller Ron May, who joined the party. To say that the AFL-CIO bureaucracy did nothing to aid PATCO, in spite of the declaration of class war that Reagan's actions signaled, would be a wild understatement.

The union bureaucracy actively collaborated with the Reagan administration against PATCO. The AFL-CIO, the Teamsters, the International Association of Machinists and the unions of the pilots and flight attendants ordered their members to cross the picket lines of the air

traffic controllers. PATCO's defeat set the stage for a series of crushing defeats over the course of the 1980s, all following the same pattern: Phelps Dodge, Greyhound, Continental Airlines, AT Massey Coal, Pan American, Hormel, TWA, International Paper, Pittston Coal. One could go on.

A fundamental, qualitative shift was underway. One could no longer explain the level of treachery involved in the unions' collusion in the attacks on "their own" rank and file by virtue of the leaders' personal characteristics—greed, stupidity, dishonesty—although these qualities were on abundant display throughout the decade of the 1980s.

What was involved was a social layer whose material interests, objectively, no longer coincided with those of the workers they claimed to represent. Under the impact of globalization, the unions were being transformed into instruments of management in their own right, their wealth bound up with the exploitation of workers—not their defense, as the dictionary tells us it should be.

Our treatment of the labor party demand ends before this period. Yet it is possible to discern from the foregoing discussion the party's development of the position that it was no longer possible to speak of forming a labor party from the unions. The transformation of the unions' relationship to workers over the course of the 1980s and early 1990s—which was parallel to the restoration of capitalism by that largest of labor bureaucracies, the Stalinist state—precluded the possibility.

The Workers League won a number of important workers to the banner of Trotskyism in this period, among them Ed Winn and Jim Lawrence. It exercised real influence among whole sections of the working class, as its intervention in the 1977-1978 miners' strike shows. But the objective situation was not favorable. While a sense of militant solidarity prevailed among workers, the need for socialist politics to guide the struggle was not broadly understood. Decades of anticommunism had taken a toll. American workers were not prepared for the scale of the AFL-CIO's treachery in the 1980s. To this must be added the confusion introduced by the Pabloites and other revisionists among workers and youth.

Yet the period laid a crucial groundwork for what was to follow. Based on its deepening engagement with the history of the ICFI and its turn to the working class coming out of the Wohlforth affair, the Workers League was able to draw lessons from the crushing defeats of the 1980s and the transformation of the unions. Above all else, the decline of the old mass organizations—the unions, the social democracy, and the Stalinist states—and the globalization of economic production offered new revolutionary possibilities.

Conversely, the ebb tide of the mass movement of the British working class after 1974 found the WRP clinging evermore desperately to the old organizations that were then being washed out to sea—Labour, Third World nationalism and the Soviet bureaucracy. Rather than conducting an objective analysis of the period and rearming itself with the historical, theoretical conquests of Trotskyism, the WRP repeated its mantra of "the undefeated nature of the working class."

The leaders of the WRP failed to press the offensive against revisionism, because to do so would have required an acknowledgement of revisionism's growing influence in their own ranks, including in the leadership. As David North notes in *The Heritage We Defend*, "not a single leader of the WRP wrote even one article analyzing the theory and politics of Wohlforth's betrayal." This indifference, he writes, "expressed a theoretical indifference that reflected the WRP's turn, already well underway, away from the struggle which it had earlier waged against revisionism."

North then contrasted the Workers League's deep-going fight against revisionism in the Wohlforth affair and the WRP's bureaucratic handling of the expulsion of Alan Thornett—a subject that will be dealt with in another lecture. David concluded:

For the Workers League, the struggle against Wohlforth constituted a crucial chapter in its political development as a Trotskyist party capable of rooting itself in the struggles of the American working class. For the Workers Revolutionary Party, on the other hand, the brawl with Thornett proved to be yet another stage in its deepening political crisis that was to lead finally to its collapse.^[71]

The whole experience, from the SLL's intervention to revive the labor party demand, through Wohlforth's renegacy and the turn to the working class, testifies to the importance of *the International Committee as the World Party of Socialist Revolution and the need for a careful study and assimilation of the history of the Trotskyist movement by its cadre*.

In concluding, let me quote from David's letter to Mike Banda of January 23, 1984:

No matter how promising certain developments within the national work of the sections may appear—such as our own experiences in various trade union struggles—these will not produce real gains for the sections involved unless such work is guided by a scientifically-worked out international perspective. The more the Workers League turns toward the working class, the more we feel the need for the closest collaboration with our international comrades to drive the work forward.^[72]

This must remain the approach of the ICFI today, when we have such promising developments in the work of national sections.

[1] Tim Wohlforth, "Max Shachtman and American Pragmatism," December 4, 1972. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), pp. 325-26. URL: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/tvsr/Trotskyism-Versus-Revisionism-Volume-7.pdf>

[2] Letter from G. Healy to Tim Wohlforth, December 22, 1972, *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 228.

[3] David North, Foreword to *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), pp. viii-ix.

[4] David North and Alex Steiner, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 169.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[7] David North, "Wohlforth—On to the Platform of Shame," January 13, 1977. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 318.

[8] Letter to Jack Barnes from Tim Wohlforth, June 24, 1975, *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), pp. 289-91.

[9] Socialist Equality Party (US), *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party (US)* (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2008). URL: <https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/foundations-us/46.html>

[10] David North and Alex Steiner, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 71.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 110.

- [14] Ibid., p. 93.
- [15] David North, "Report to the Second National Congress of the Socialist Equality Party," July 8, 2012. Republished in *The Frankfurt School, Postmodernism and the Politics of the Pseudo-left* (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 2015), p. 216
- [16] Tim Wohlforth, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 113.
- [17] David North, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 113.
- [18] Ibid., p. 116.
- [19] Letter from Tim Wohlforth to Gerry Hearly, June 7, 1974, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 118.
- [20] Manifesto of the Sixth Congress of the International Committee, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 131-32.
- [21] Tim Wohlforth, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 132.
- [22] David North, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 133.
- [23] Ibid., p. 137.
- [24] Ibid., p. 139.
- [25] Letter from Mike Banda to Tim Wohlforth, February 1973, *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 236.
- [26] Leon Trotsky, *Whither France?*, New Park Publications, p. 97, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 142.
- [27] David North, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 142.
- [28] Tim Wohlforth, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 144.
- [29] Leon Trotsky, *Writings, 1933-34*, New Park Publications, p. 97, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 144.
- [30] David North, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 145.
- [31] Tim Wohlforth, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 146.
- [32] David North, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 146-48.
- [33] Ibid., p. 155.
- [34] Tim Wohlforth, quoted in "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 159.
- [35] David North, "The Fourth International and the Renegade Wohlforth," March-May 1976. Republished in *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. 159-60.
- [36] Ibid., p. 161.
- [37] Ibid., p. 164.
- [38] Ibid., p. 203.
- [39] Ibid., pp. 204-5.
- [40] David North, Foreword to *Trotskyism Versus Revisionism, Volume 7* (Detroit: Labor Publications, 1984), p. x
- [41] David North, *The Heritage We Defend: A Contribution to the History of the Fourth International* (Oak Park: Mehring Books, 1988), p. 451. URL: <https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/heritage/32.html>
- [42] "The World Economic-Political Crisis and the Death Agony of US Imperialism: Draft Resolution on the Perspective and Tasks of the Workers League," 1978: p. 30.
- [43] <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspaper/bulletin/index.htm>.
- [44] "World Economic-Political Crisis," p. 21.
- [45] "Perspectives for Building Revolutionary Party in the U.S.: Main Resolution Adopted by Founding Congress of the Workers League," Workers League, 1966. Published January 2, 1967, in the *Bulletin*. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspaper/bulletin/v03n09-w051-jan-02-1967-Bulletin.pdf>
- [46] *The Historical & International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, Mehring Books, 2015. <https://www.wsws.org/en/special/library/foundations-us/42.html>.
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