

Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists in the former Soviet Union celebrates the centenary of the Left Opposition

Our reporter
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On October 15, 2023, the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists, a Trotskyist youth organization in the former Soviet Union, celebrated the centenary of the emergence of the Left Opposition with a meeting that was attended by David North, the chairperson of the Socialist Equality Party (US) and the international editorial board of the *World Socialist Web Site*. The meeting took place exactly 100 years after 46 Old Bolsheviks declared their political support for Leon Trotsky in the inner-party struggle, thus initiating the struggle of the Left Opposition against Stalinism.

The meeting was a powerful demonstration of the emergence of Trotskyism as a major political and intellectual force among youth and workers internationally. After a protracted historical period, in which the crimes of Stalinism—including the political genocide of generations of socialists and the assassination of Leon Trotsky—and the betrayals of Pabloism cut off large sections of the working class from the revolutionary program, the principles of Trotskyism animate the political struggle of a new generation of revolutionaries in the former Soviet Union, long the center of the Stalinist reaction against Marxist internationalism.

David North opened the meeting with remarks that stressed the historic significance of the anniversary and the decades-long struggle of the International Committee of the Fourth International for the principles of Trotskyism. Bringing greetings on behalf of the ICFI and its American section, the Socialist Equality Party, North said:

The significance of this meeting arises from the fact that it establishes, exactly 100 years after the founding of the Left Opposition, that Trotskyism lives in the former Soviet Union. The principles and traditions underlying the struggle initiated by Trotsky and his co-thinkers—the most advanced and politically conscious sections of the Bolshevik Party—are being revived and fought for by a new generation of revolutionary youth in Russia and Ukraine and all the different components of the former Soviet Union.

Trotsky was once described as a “man of history.” The Fourth International, which emerged out of the Left Opposition, is a party of history. Our movement contains within it and is a concentrated expression of the great and often tragic revolutionary experiences of the working class over an entire historical epoch. We cannot avoid being mindful of this great legacy as we meet today...

I must finally say, comrades, as one who has been active in the Trotskyist movement for more than a half century, the very fact that we are celebrating 100 years of Trotskyism with our comrades in Russia, Ukraine and other components of the Soviet Union, is

not only a vindication of the struggle of Trotskyism, but a source of enormous optimism. Trotskyism lives. Its influence is expanding throughout the world. The Fourth International will prove itself in practice to be the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

North stressed that there was a close relationship between the two major anniversaries of the revolutionary movement this fall: The centenary of the founding of the Left Opposition and the 70-year anniversary of the issuing of the Open Letter by James P. Cannon, which led to the founding of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

These anniversaries are profoundly interconnected. They answer the two great questions of our time. The first question is: “Was there an alternative to Stalinism?” And that is answered by the review of the history of the Left Opposition.

But once that question is answered in the affirmative, once one has established that Trotskyism was the alternative to Stalinism, a second question arises: “Who are the Trotskyists?” Does there exist a movement today which can legitimately claim to be based on the legacy of Trotskyism? That question is answered no less decisively in the founding of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

North added,

One hundred years after the Left Opposition was founded, what alternative has emerged to the program of Trotskyism? Where are other and better answers to be found to the great political questions of our time? In the writings of Gramsci? Mao Zedong? Fidel Castro? The Frankfurt School? All of these variations of bourgeois ideology, petty bourgeois politics and nationalist perspectives are frauds. None of these individuals and tendencies have left behind a program and a legacy which answers the problems of our time. Only the work of Trotsky, as it has been developed by the Fourth International, has proved itself equal to the historical period.

After the speech by David North, Clara Weiss spoke on behalf of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student movement of the ICFI. Since last fall, the YGBL has worked

with the IYSSE to build a global movement by youth and workers against war. Relating the significance of the century-long struggle for Trotskyism to the genocide unfolding in Gaza, she said,

We are celebrating the centenary of Trotskyism under conditions where one of the most monumental crimes in history is being committed against the Palestinian people before the eyes of the world. No less than the war in Ukraine, the horror unfolding in Gaza is a product of the unfinished 20th century.

The Marxist movement always opposed Zionism from the socialist left. The fate of the Jewish people—as of all the oppressed nationalities—in the Russian Empire, Lenin and Trotsky insisted, was bound up with the development of the socialist revolution. The early Bolshevik government proved in practice the viability of a socialist solution, by putting an end to the most horrific anti-Jewish pogroms in history before the Holocaust in the civil war. In the 1920s, the early Soviet state was the only country in the world that provided equal rights and state funding to Yiddish-language—as to Ukrainian—publications and schools.

The establishment of the state of Israel and dominance of Zionism are a product, not least of all, of the Stalinist betrayal of the program of the October revolution. It was Stalinism that strangled the European revolution in the 1930s and made possible the coming to power of Hitler in Germany, paving the way for the genocide of European Jewry in the Holocaust. And it was Stalinism that discredited socialism in the eyes of the masses all over the world with the Great Terror and also with the revival of antisemitism, one of the most perverse outcomes of the revival of the Great Russian chauvinism and the nationalist program of “socialism in one country.”

The International Committee of the Fourth International, in a 33-year-long bitter struggle against the neo-Stalinist tendency of Pabloism, defended the perspective of permanent revolution, especially for the oppressed masses, just as it defended the Trotskyist assessment of Stalinism as a counterrevolutionary agency of imperialism. In the struggle against the Workers Revolutionary Party in 1982-1986, both questions were of central significance to the defense of the program of Trotskyism.

Today, in the war in Ukraine and the genocidal onslaught on Gaza, we see this struggle assume a life-and-death significance for millions of workers. ... A movement of the international working class against the crimes against the Palestinian people has already begun to emerge. The most advanced elements will take up the program of Trotskyism, for it is the only political and historical program that corresponds to the objective strivings and needs of the international working class.

The meeting was then addressed by four members of the YGBL. The group's co-founder and chair, Ostap Rerikh, first reviewed the development of the Left Opposition in the 1920s and its struggle against Stalinism. Despite the bloody suppression of the Marxist opposition to the Soviet bureaucracy, he stressed:

... the expulsion of Trotsky and the Bolshevik-Leninists from the Party, the further exile, imprisonment and even political genocide did not put an end to the Left Opposition. Because the Left Opposition was not a national phenomenon, it was not nationally restricted, its supporters were all over the world, and it was they who, in September 1938, founded the Fourth International. It was

they who continued the work of Trotsky and the Left Opposition when the political genocide reached its climax. And after the split in 1953 and its founding by the orthodox Trotskyist James P. Cannon, the International Committee of the Fourth International, continued—and continues to this day—the cause for which the Left Opposition fought against Stalinism in a struggle against its Pabloist collaborators and in defense of Trotsky's program.

Only the International Committee of the Fourth International, continuing the work of Trotsky and the Left Opposition, declared that the Stalinist bureaucracy was leading the USSR toward capitalist restoration, not toward its own self-reformation, as Pablo and Mandel claimed. The ICFI warned of the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and stated this when Ted Grant demanded a workers democracy from the Stalinist bureaucracy and called Yeltsin's Russia a workers state. It was the International Committee of the Fourth International that led the relentless struggle for historical truth, and constantly warned the proletariat of the Soviet Union of the consequences that awaited it with the restoration of capitalism. We celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Left Opposition amidst the growing global crisis of the capitalist system, amidst the mass strikes and the uprising of the Palestinian people against the Netanyahu regime, amidst the provoked proxy war [in Ukraine], the ongoing coronavirus epidemic and the threat of a third imperialist war, all of which are generated by the contradictions of capitalism.

...the Young Guard of the Bolshevik-Leninists knows that it has chosen the right path, and that the course it keeps on, building the section of the ICFI and in the entire former Soviet Union, can lead the world proletariat to the victory of communism.

Long live the centenary of our movement!

Long live the International Committee of the Fourth International!

Lev Novitsky then reviewed the objective context within which the struggle of the Left Opposition unfolded. He stressed that the Left Opposition and the Stalin faction represented different social forces in Soviet society, “on one side stood the proletarian and semi-proletarian classes, and on the other the petty-bourgeois and bureaucratic strata.” He concluded,

...we must, despite all the failures and defeats, continue, carry the torch of the struggle, which we inherited from the previous generations of Trotskyists, to the victorious end. Ultimately, the fate of the world and of humanity depends on this. We have already entered the decade of socialist revolutions more than three years ago; the decade is already approaching its midpoint, and it depends primarily on us whether there will be a socialist perspective or not, whether the international working class will stop a world and nuclear war or not. All these tasks now confront us and we must meet them. Ultimately, it is the proletarian vanguard that will decide the outcome of the proletarian revolution, and thus the entire subsequent course of human development as a whole.

In his contribution to the meeting, Andrei Ritsky stressed that his turn to Trotskyism and the International Committee was motivated by a study of the works of Vadim Rogovin to understand that there was an alternative to Stalinism within the Bolshevik Party. “Here we can see how a great historical work could influence the political orientation of an organization

like ours.”

Ritsky also stressed that the exposure of the pseudo-left “can only be done based on the lessons of the Trotskyist movement and the International Committee and the contemporary struggle of the working class internationally. The fact that we are celebrating the centenary of the beginning of this struggle shows that our movement has deep historical roots and we must assimilate all lessons of this struggle.”

The final speaker of the meeting was Carla, a Trotskyist youth in Kazakhstan. She said,

Dear comrades and friends, I am addressing you from the city of Alma-Ata, which is located in Kazakhstan. Exactly 95 years ago, one of the key figures of the October Revolution, the creator of the Red Army and one of the organizers of its victories in the Civil War—Lev Davidovich Trotsky—was exiled to this city by Stalin’s regime. Stalin and his propaganda apparatus, falsifying history, portrayed Trotsky as an enemy of the revolution, although in fact the enemy and gravedigger of October was Stalin himself. ... I believe it is necessary to build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International in this city so that at last the truth will prevail. After all, in the end, the revenge of history is stronger than the revenge of the most powerful general secretary.



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