

# 40 years since the suspension of the Workers Revolutionary Party from the ICFI

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16 December 2025

Forty years ago, on December 16, 1985, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) suspended its British section, the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP). It did so in response to the report of its International Control Commission, which revealed, as the resolution suspending the WRP explained, “that the WRP has carried out an historic betrayal of the ICFI and the international working class.”

As the Control Commission proved on the basis of numerous previously unknown documents, the WRP had completely abandoned the Theory of Permanent Revolution, “resulting in the pursuit of unprincipled relations with sections of the colonial bourgeoisie in return for money.”

The suspension of the WRP was preceded by a deep crisis in the British section. On June 30, 1985, Aileen Jennings, Gerry Healy’s personal secretary, denounced the long-time WRP leader’s abuse of female cadres in a letter to the Political Committee. Healy, Cliff Slaughter and Mike Banda attempted to cover up the scandal and conceal it from the ICFI and the membership. Central Committee member Dave Hyland, who demanded an investigation by the WRP Control Commission, was subjected to massive pressure.

But the crisis could no longer be contained. The party split in a bitter struggle in which both sides—the supporters of Healy and the supporters of Banda and Slaughter—sought to prevent a discussion of the political causes of the crisis.

The International Committee, which was only informed of the crisis in October, refused to support either of the warring factions. It condemned Healy’s abuse of power and therefore expelled him from its ranks on October 25. But it insisted that the cause of the crisis in the WRP was not, as Slaughter and Banda claimed, Healy’s personal misconduct, but the long-standing opportunist and nationalist degeneration of the entire leadership.

The IC based its criticism of the WRP on clearly defined programmatic and principled issues that the Workers League in the US had raised three years earlier. David North, the national secretary of the Workers League, had presented a comprehensive critique of the WRP’s theoretical concepts and political line in 1982 and 1984. He criticized the British section for having moved, during the 1970s, closer and closer to the nationalist and opportunist positions of Pabloism, which it had vigorously opposed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Healy, Slaughter and—after some initial hesitation—Banda suppressed North’s criticism, prevented its discussion in the entire ICFI and threatened to expel the Workers League if it persisted.

The ICFI’s first statement on the crisis in the British section, issued on October 25, 1985, clearly states that while the crisis erupted with the exposure of the corrupt practices of Healy, at its root was “the prolonged drift of the WRP leadership away from the strategical task of the building of the world party of socialist revolution towards an increasingly nationalist perspective and practice.”

The ICFI proposed to re-register “the membership of the WRP on the basis of an explicit recognition of the political authority of the ICFI and

the subordination of the British section to its decisions.” It also established an International Control Commission to investigate the events in the WRP.

Healy and his supporters in the WRP, the Greece section led by Savas Michael, and small and inexperienced group in Spain had by this time broken off all contact with the ICFI and refused to accept the authority of any meeting not convened by Healy himself. Savas Michael proclaimed that Healy was a “historic leader” whose authority could not be challenged.

Slaughter and Banda agreed to the ICFI’s proposal because they were too weak to openly oppose the International Committee in front of the WRP membership. On October 27, an extraordinary conference of the WRP unanimously accepted the ICFI’s proposal.

But neither Slaughter nor Banda were prepared to accept subordination to the authority of the International. Slaughter, who had played a decisive role in suppressing the criticism by the Workers League and had attempted to block a control commission into Healy’s abuses in the summer of 1985, now used the sex scandal to prevent discussion of the political issues raised.

On November 26, at a public meeting in London attended by leading Stalinists and revisionists, Slaughter denounced the investigation “Security and the Fourth International,” which the ICFI had initiated to uncover the background to Trotsky’s assassination. He set the WRP on a course toward collaboration with Stalinists, Pabloites and other bitter enemies of Trotskyism.

On December 16, the ICFI met to discuss the report of the International Control Commission, which had been established against the initial opposition of Slaughter and Banda. The WRP was represented at this meeting by Slaughter, Simon Pirani, Tom Kemp, and, as representative of the minority that supported the ICFI, Dave Hyland. David North, Peter Schwarz (Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter of West Germany), Keerthi Balsuryia (Revolutionary Communist League of Sri Lanka), Nick Beams (Socialist Labour League of Australia) and other representatives were present on behalf of the ICFI.

The Control Commission presented its interim report—based on an examination of the secret internal documents—which meticulously exposed the unprincipled relations that had been established by the WRP leadership, behind the back of the ICFI, with several bourgeois regimes in the Middle East. Had the International Committee not insisted on the investigation, the documents and the relationships they exposed would have remained concealed and unknown.

The ICFI majority responded to this report by presenting a resolution which called for the suspension of the WRP. The majority rejected the claim of Slaughter that Healy bore sole responsibility for the betrayal of the British section. The resolution stated that “the political responsibility for the nationalist degeneration which allowed these practices to be carried out rests with the entire leadership of the WRP.”

The resolution continued:

WRP leaders blocked discussion of differences on the party's political line both in the British section and in the International Committee.

The ICFI does not seek to blame any individual leader but holds the entire leadership responsible.

In order to defend its principles and integrity, the ICFI therefore suspends the WRP as the British section until the calling of an emergency Congress of the ICFI no later than March 1, following the 8th Congress of the WRP.

The resolution passed with the support of the international delegates and David Hyland. Slaughter, Kemp and Pirani voted against the resolution.

The meeting of the ICFI resumed the following day, December 17. Slaughter and Kemp sought to disrupt the meeting by conducting themselves in the most provocative manner. Kemp, who normally acted as an absent-minded professor, resorted to directing explicitly racist insults at Keerthi Balasuriya. Comrade Keerthi ignored Kemp's provocations.

The International Committee majority explained that the suspension of the WRP was necessary in order to make clear that the ICFI would not tolerate the betrayal of political principles by a section regardless of its size. It presented a second resolution that placed the suspension in the appropriate historical and political context.

Contained in this struggle is the reassertion of the programmatic foundations of Trotskyism, embodied in the International Committee as the sole historically-established leadership of the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. These foundations are: the decisions of the First Four Congresses of the Communist International (1919-1922); the Platform of the Left Opposition (1927); the Transitional Program (1938); the Open Letter (1953); and the documents of the struggle against the bogus SWP-Pabloite reunification 1961 -63).

The resolution further stated:

The ICFI and the WRP reaffirm the historical correctness of the struggle against Pabloite revisionism upon which the continuity of the Fourth International, preserved and embodied in the International Committee, is based. As the national committee of the Socialist Labour League stated in 1961, Pabloite revisionism does not represent and cannot be regarded "as a trend within Trotskyism." In its origins Pabloism represented a capitulation to the pressures of world imperialism upon the Trotskyist movement. The full historical significance of its counter-revolutionary role was established in 1964, with the entrance of the Sri Lankan LSSP into the bourgeois coalition government of M. Ban-daranaike. Moreover, the public repudiation of the Theory of Permanent Revolution by the US SWP and its defense of the Stalinist doctrine of the two-stage revolution again vindicates the principled stand taken by the International Committee in 1963. In all parts of the world, the building of sections of the Fourth International under the leadership of the International Committee is bound up with an implacable struggle against the Pabloite enemies of Trotskyism.

Finally, the resolution presented the conditions upon which the WRP could be readmitted to the ICFI:

The ICFI and the Central Committee of the WRP shall now work closely together to overcome as quickly as possible the existing problems which are the legacy of the nationalist degeneration of the WRP under Healy, to reassert the basic principles of internationalism within the WRP, and on this basis restore its full membership in the International Committee of the Fourth International. The organizational structure of this relationship shall at all times be based on the Leninist principles of democratic centralism, which are elaborated in the statutes of the Fourth International.

Slaughter, Kemp and Pirani voted against the resolution. They were not prepared to affirm the programmatic foundations of the ICFI. Seven weeks earlier, the WRP Congress had unanimously decided to re-register its membership on the basis of recognition of the political authority of the ICFI, but now they categorically rejected this authority.

This was the last meeting of the ICFI in which representatives of the WRP participated. In the weeks that followed, the WRP swung rabidly to the right, rejecting the political authority of the ICFI. On February 7, 1986, its newspaper *Workers Press* published Mike Banda's anti-Trotskyist diatribe, "27 Reasons Why the International Committee Should Be Buried Forthwith," to which David North responded in the book *The Heritage We Defend*.

On February 8, Slaughter and Pirani called the police to bar ICFI supporters from the WRP's Eighth Congress. ICFI supporters would have had a majority at the Congress if delegates had been elected according to the criteria established in October. They subsequently founded the new British section of the ICFI.

As a Trotskyist organization, the WRP was finished. It splintered into numerous groups, all of which turned away from Trotskyism in the following years. Slaughter became an anarchist; Banda denounced Trotsky and Trotskyism within weeks of the split with the ICFI, proclaimed his admiration of Stalin, and became a supporter of Kurdish nationalism. Pirani repudiated Trotskyism and made a career as an academic.

For the Fourth International, the suspension of the WRP marked a historic turning point. It was the culmination of the long struggle that the International Committee had waged against Pabloite opportunism since 1953. Now, after 32 years, the Trotskyists finally had reestablished control of the Fourth International.

A flowering of Marxism followed. The cadre reappropriated the rich theoretical and historical heritage of the ICFI, analyzed the objective changes underlying the crisis of the WRP, and thus prepared for the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. While the entire petty-bourgeois "left" reacted to the dissolution of the Soviet Union with a wave of renunciationism, declaring socialism a failure and making its peace with capitalism, the ICFI drew entirely different conclusions.

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes was only the sharpest expression of the irreconcilable contradiction between the international character of the world economy and the nation state, on which both capitalism and Stalinism, with its perspective of "socialism in one country," are based. It ushered in a new epoch of violent crises, wars and revolutionary struggles, in which the perspective of permanent revolution defended by the ICFI would play the decisive role.

The International Committee based all its work on this understanding. In the mid-1990s, it transformed its sections from leagues into parties, in recognition of the qualitative degeneration of the old national organizations and a corresponding change in the relationship of the Fourth International to the working class. In 1998, the ICFI founded the *World Socialist Web Site* as the authentic voice of international socialism. And

on December 12, the WSWWS presented Socialism AI as a groundbreaking application of cutting-edge technology for the political education and mobilization of the international working class.

Against this background, the historical significance of the events of 40 years ago becomes clear. The process of clarification within the revolutionary party anticipates the orientation of the masses in great revolutionary struggles. As a result of its principled intervention in the crisis of the WRP, the ICFI was able 40 years ago to set the course for the building of a truly international Trotskyist world party that corresponds to the global character of the modern working class. Under conditions of a deepening crisis of world capitalism, the Fourth International, led by the International Committee, will emerge as the leadership of mass revolutionary struggles throughout the world.



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