

# The Historical Foundations of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit

Adopted by the Founding Congress of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (Socialist Equality Party) of Germany on May 23, 2010, Berlin

## I. Programme and history

1. The perspective of a party is determined, to a considerable degree, by its attitude to historical questions. Nowhere is this more clear than in Germany. Here the workers' movement achieved triumphant successes and suffered world-historical defeats, which shaped the character of the entire 20th century. In Germany, Marxism was founded; it was here that the Social Democratic Party (SPD) developed as the first Marxist mass party; and it was here that opportunism (the capitulation of the SPD on the eve of the First World War) and Stalinism (the failure of the German Communist Party to prevent Hitler's seizure of power) were to blame for terrible catastrophes. After the Second World War, the division of the country and the abuse of Marxism by the regime in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) left a heritage of great political confusion.

2. "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living", wrote Marx in 1852.<sup>1</sup> Nightmares are unleashed by undigested traumatic experiences. In order to overcome them, these experiences must be consciously worked through. In a general sense, this is also true for politics. Without consciously working through the lessons of the 20th century, one cannot find one's way in the 21st. The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG, Socialist Equality Party) bases its programme and its perspective on an understanding of the historical experiences of the international socialist movement. It relies thereby on the heritage of the Fourth International and its struggles against Stalinism, reformism and Pabloite revisionism. The purpose of this document is to elaborate these experiences.

### 3. The deepest financial and economic crisis since the

1 Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>

1930s is today throwing up all the unresolved questions of the past. The capitalist world system is suffering from the same irresolvable contradictions that have brought forth two world wars, numerous regional military conflicts, fascism and other brutal dictatorships—the incompatibility of the world economy and the nation state, and the contradiction between private property and social production. There is no way out of this crisis on a capitalist basis. As in the last century, it poses before mankind the alternative: socialism or barbarism.

4. At the heart of the crisis is the decline of the US, whose economic power in 1945—after two world wars and a hundred million killed—provided the foundation for a new capitalist upturn. For a considerable time, the US has been compensating for the loss of its economic hegemony by means of its military supremacy and by expanding the financial sector at the expense of industrial production. This is the background to the current crisis, which cannot be resolved peacefully. The American ruling class is just as little ready to voluntarily give up its power and wealth as every other ruling class in history. Its efforts to shift the costs of the crisis onto the working class and onto its international rivals, and the reaction of its rivals in Europe and Asia, are giving rise to violent class battles and international conflicts.

5. The global development of the productive forces has not only deepened the crisis of capitalism, it has also strengthened the social power of the working class and created the objective conditions for the overthrow of capitalism and the building of a socialist society. Innovative developments in information and communications technology have led to the integration of the world economy on a scale that has never been seen before, linking together the working class across continents and strengthening its numbers. Never before has such a high percentage of mankind lived in cities

and been so directly integrated into the global production process. Countries such as China, which were still predominantly rural just one hundred years ago, today rank among the most important industrial regions of the world. The PSG poses to itself the task of preparing the working class politically and theoretically for the coming class battles and of arming it with a socialist programme, which is built on the lessons of previous struggles. The PSG is the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, which was founded by Trotsky in 1938 as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

## II. The SPD as a Marxist mass party

6. Four decades after Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto and based socialism on a scientific foundation, German social democracy developed, under the influence of Marxism, into the world's first mass party of the working class. The SPD carried out pioneering historical work, whose results would have a lasting effect for many decades, even after the party had long turned away from Marxism. It formed the working class into a politically conscious class and developed within it a broad, socialist culture embracing all areas of life. Both the communist parties and the Fourth International rested on this early work of the SPD.

7. The necessity for an independent workers' party resulted from the defeat of the democratic revolution of 1848, which revealed the irreconcilable contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the political impotence of the democratic petty bourgeoisie. The bourgeois-democratic revolution was delayed in Germany, because the existing petty states, which continued into the 19th century, held back the development of trade and industry. When the revolution finally broke out in 1848, the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat was already so deep that a common struggle against Prussian absolutism was no longer possible. In particular, after the first great battle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, which flared up in July 1848 in Paris, the liberal bourgeoisie feared the revolution's threat to its property far more than its lack of rights under Prussian rule and stabbed the revolution in the back. The democratic petty bourgeoisie—the mass of the nation consisting of craftsmen, merchants and farmers—proved unable to

play an independent political role and failed pitifully. The first freely elected national assembly, which met in the Frankfurt Paulskirche, was, in the words of Engels, “from the first day of its existence, more frightened of the least popular movement than of all the reactionary plots of all the German Governments put together.”<sup>2</sup>

8. In their analysis of the 1848 revolution, Marx and Engels stressed that the working class had to organize itself independently of the democratic wing of the bourgeoisie. Even under conditions, where “the democratic petty bourgeois are everywhere oppressed”, where they “preach to the proletariat general unity and reconciliation” and “seek to found a great opposition party”, unity with them must “be resisted in the most decisive manner”, they wrote. The democratic petty bourgeoisie “seek to ensnare the workers in a party organization in which general social-democratic phrases prevail while their particular interests are kept hidden behind, and in which, for the sake of preserving the peace, the specific demands of the proletariat may not be presented. Such a unity would be to their advantage alone and to the complete disadvantage of the proletariat. The proletariat would lose all its hard-won independent positions and be reduced once more to a mere appendage of official bourgeois democracy.” They called for an independent organisation of the workers' party, “in which the position and interests of the proletariat can be discussed free from bourgeois influence.”<sup>3</sup>

9. In a further passage, on which Leon Trotsky would later base himself in the elaboration of the Theory of Permanent Revolution, Marx and Engels explained: “While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, achieving at most the aims already mentioned, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far—not only in one country but in all the leading countries

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2 Friedrich Engels, “Revolution and counterrevolution in Germany”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch07.htm>

3 Marx/Engels, Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League, London, March 1850, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm>

of the world—that competition between the proletarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers. Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one.”<sup>4</sup>

10. The defeat of the 1848 revolution temporarily pushed the working class into the background. State suppression, which culminated in the 1852 Communist Trial in Cologne, obstructed its political organization. The years of political reaction were, however, marked by the advance of the industrial revolution and the rapid growth of the working class. Banking, industry, mining, the railways, shipping and foreign trade experienced an enormous upturn. In the 1860s, the General German Workers’ Association (ADAV) of Ferdinand Lassalle and the Federation of German Workers Associations (VDAV) of August Bebel developed as independent political workers’ organizations. They united in 1875 to form the Socialist Workers’ Party of Germany (SAP), which was renamed in 1890 as the SPD.

11. Inside the SAP, Marxism began its advance. Bebel’s faction, which was identified with Marxism, increasingly gained authority. Although the party was banned between 1878 and 1890 under Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Laws, was politically persecuted and legally only able to contest national and state elections, it developed into a powerful social force. Its electoral successes and a mass strike, which shook Germany in 1889-90, finally led to Bismarck’s resignation and to the rescinding of the Anti-Socialist Laws. Now the SPD became the largest party in Germany. It educated the working class in Marxism and for hundreds of thousands of workers became the centre of their lives. At the high point of its power, it published more than 70 daily papers and numerous weekly publications, which were read by 6 million people. Its publishing houses produced books in large print runs on history, politics and culture. It had its own party school and 1,100 libraries. It coordinated an enormous network of leisure activities from gymnastics to choirs.

12. The SPD not only defended the social interests of workers, it was also the only party in Germany

that consistently fought for democratic rights and sharply opposed anti-Semitism. The petty bourgeoisie and bourgeois intelligentsia, which had stabbed the 1848 democratic revolution in the back, lined up in its majority behind Bismarck and the Wilhelminian state, after the unification of the empire through “blood and iron”. In contrast to England, France and the United States, there is no bourgeois democratic tradition in Germany. From the outset, the struggle for democratic rights was inseparably connected with the workers’ movement. The working class confronted a powerful, hostile state. The mere fight for social rights presupposed the struggle for political rights. That is why in Germany, the establishment of a workers’ party preceded the building of the trade unions. Influential trade unions only developed afterwards, as an initiative of the SPD and under its leadership.

### III. The growth of opportunism in the SPD

13. The SPD was never a homogeneous party. The unification conference in 1875 in Gotha made numerous concessions to the supporters of Ferdinand Lassalle, who had died in 1864. Marx sharply criticised the Gotha programme, which he accused of being “tainted through and through by the Lassallean sect’s servile belief in the state”. Lassalle had wanted to establish socialism with the help of the Prussian state, which he regarded as an institution standing above the classes. He had even met secretly with Bismarck, in order to exploit the latter’s conflicts with the bourgeoisie in the interests of the working class. Lassalle justified this opportunist “alliance with absolutist and feudal opponents against the bourgeoisie” (Marx) by saying that in relation to the working class, “all other classes are only one reactionary mass”. This ultra-left cliché blurred the difference between the democratic petty bourgeoisie, the liberal bourgeoisie and feudal reaction. It was also reproduced in the Gotha programme and was angrily rejected by Marx.<sup>5</sup>

14. After Gotha, Lassalle’s supporters were increasingly on the defensive and Marxism was successfully established as the official party doctrine. But after the abolition of the Anti-Socialist Laws, Lassalle’s perspective—of establishing a kind of national socialism under the

4 *ibid*

5 Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Programme”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/index.htm>

wing of Prussian despotism—received new support. In June 1891, the Bavarian Social Democrat Georg von Vollmar delivered two speeches in Munich's Eldorado Palace, which received much attention. Vollmar called on the party to abandon its past slogans, and become a practically-oriented democratic reformist movement. The party was best served by striving “for economic and political improvements on the basis of the present state and social order”, he said. He expressly opposed the internationalism of the SPD. Whoever was not a dreamer had to recognize that “differences of nationality and community are deeply rooted”. He warned against “a paradoxical denial of a legitimate, healthy national life and the obligations arising therefrom also for us”. He praised the tripartite alliance, the imperialist alliance between Germany, Austria and Italy, as serving the interests of peace, and threatened that any power breaking the peace through an attack on German soil would confront the armed force of the German working class.<sup>6</sup>

15. Vollmar's Eldorado speeches became the manifesto of the revisionism that was corroborated theoretically by Eduard Bernstein seven years later in his book *The Preconditions of Socialism*. Bernstein claimed that the development of capitalism had disproved Marx's economic analysis, and lampooned as “socialist catatrophitis” his prognosis that, due to its internal contradictions, capitalism would confront a fundamental crisis. Capitalism had developed “means of adaptation” that allowed it to dampen and overcome its periodic crises. Socialism was not a historical necessity, but was the end result of gradual reforms within the context of bourgeois society. It was not the result of the class struggle, but the product of moral and humanist principles founded on Kant's categorical imperative.

16. In this way, Bernstein rejected the socialist perspective itself. As Rosa Luxemburg pointed out in her reply to Bernstein, the rejection of the Marxist theory of capitalist crisis leads inevitably to the abandonment of socialism. Luxemburg wrote, either the socialist transformation flows from the objective contradictions of the capitalist order or “the ‘means of adaptation’ will really stop the collapse of the capitalist system and thereby enable capitalism to maintain itself by suppressing its own contradictions. In that case socialism

ceases to be an historic necessity. It then becomes anything you want to call it, but it is no longer the result of the material development of society.” If Bernstein was correct regarding the course of capitalist development, then “the socialist transformation of society is only a utopia.”<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. The collapse of the Second International

17. Although Bernstein's theses were regularly rejected at party congresses, in practice they won increasing support. After the turn of the century, instances in which the SPD leadership, or sections of it, adopted right-wing positions on important political questions or avoided putting a clear position, increased. A profound gulf opened up in the party between the two extremes, represented on the left by Rosa Luxemburg and on the right by the leaders of the trade unions. The latter regarded the party's revolutionary theory as a hindrance to their organisational successes and painstakingly acquired social concessions. The writings of Rosa Luxemburg, who vehemently fought against the growth of opportunism, read like a chronology of the gradual right-wing development of the SPD.

18. When the Russian revolution of 1905 threw up the question of a political mass strike, the trade unions rejected such a tactic with the words: “A general strike is general nonsense” and agitated against Luxemburg, who argued in favour of the mass strike. The trade union congress held in Cologne in 1905 took place under the slogan “The trade unions need peace and quiet above all” and condemned even discussion over the mass strike as playing with fire. The trade union leaders “were fearful of losing their tactical independence from the party, they feared that their well-filled coffers would be plundered, and they even feared the destruction of their organisations by the government as a result of such a confrontation. In addition they were completely opposed to ‘experiments’ which could disturb their very ingenious system of daily skirmishing with employers.”<sup>8</sup> Further conflicts flared up over the support for the state budget by social democratic deputies in southern Germany and the SPD's adaptation to German imperialism, as expressed in the party's

7 Rosa Luxemburg, “Reform or revolution”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/ch01.htm>

8 Paul Frölich, Rosa Luxemburg, Pluto Press, p.130

6 George von Vollmar, “Über die nächsten Aufgaben der deutschen Sozialdemokratie”, Munich 1891

stance towards German colonial policy and its passive reaction to Germany's massive build-up of arms.

19. As the First World War approached, the party leadership of August Bebel and Karl Kautsky increasingly distanced themselves from Luxemburg and sought to avoid any conflict with the trade union leaders. When the war finally broke out the opportunists had control over the party. They had failed to anticipate what Trotsky described as “the most colossal breakdown in history of an economic system destroyed by its own inherent contradictions”<sup>9</sup> and capitulated to German imperialism. Whereas before, at international congresses, the SPD had promised opposition to war and sworn its loyalty to international solidarity, it now called for the defence of the fatherland and regarded socialism as an issue for the distant future. In the Reichstag (national parliament), the SPD voted for war credits and placed its entire apparatus in the service of imperialist war propaganda.

20. All the other social democratic parties—apart from the Serbian party and the Russian Bolsheviks—also called for a defence of the fatherland. This sealed the fate of the Second International. Its transition to the camp of the ruling class was complete and irrevocable. At the end of the war, as revolutionary struggles flared up, the social democratic parties defended the bourgeois order with all available means. In Germany, the SPD had rebellious workers shot. It allied itself with the high command of the army in order to suppress the revolution and to murder its leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. The social democrats main organ *Vorwärts* promoted the *Freikorps*, the murderous paramilitary gangs from which Hitler was later to recruit his *Sturmabteilung* (SA). At a later date, when the Weimar Republic was gripped by crisis, the SPD supported Brüning's emergency decrees, elected Hindenburg as Reich president and so helped to clear the way for Hitler to come to power.

21. This historical betrayal, whose consequences would determine the future development of the 20th century, had objective roots in the historical conditions of the preceding epoch. The ascent of the SPD had occurred against the background of a long drawn out phase of capitalist expansion. While the party marched under

the banner of Marxism theoretically, its practice was completely bound up with workers' daily needs and the development of its own forces—the recruitment of new members, the filling of the party coffers and the development of its press. Although revisionism had lost out in the theoretical struggle, it lived on in the party and was nourished by its practice and psychology. “The critical refutation of Revisionism as a theory by no means signified its defeat tactically and psychologically,” Trotsky wrote, and continued: “The parliamentarians, the unionists, the members of cooperatives continued to live and to work in the atmosphere of general opportunism, of practical specializing and of nationalistic narrowness.”<sup>10</sup>

22. The catastrophe of 1914 was not, however, inevitable. The objective situation prior to the outbreak of war not only gave rise to opportunism, but also encouraged the emergence of revolutionary tendencies in the Second International and the working class as a whole. Revolutionary Marxists such as Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg had a much deeper understanding of the contradictions of imperialism than opportunists such as Bernstein, who were blinded by their superficial impressions of the economic upturn and trade union successes. The Marxists prepared the working class for the coming upheavals by undertaking a systematic struggle against opportunism. Nobody understood this better than Lenin, who unyieldingly fought opportunism on a theoretical, political and organizational level, and who had already broken with the Russian opportunists, the Mensheviks, in 1903. Lenin developed Marxism in a constant struggle against the political and ideological pressure of bourgeois and petty bourgeois tendencies. He regarded the conflict between rival currents not as a subjectively motivated struggle for influence, but as an objective manifestation of real shifts in class relations—both between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and also between different strata within the working class itself. This prepared the Bolsheviks for the war and the revolutionary developments that followed.

23. The Bolsheviks not only opposed the defenders of the fatherland, but also the pacifists, who limited their slogans to calls for peace. Lenin called for the imperialist war to be transformed into a civil war, i.e., he linked the fight against the war with preparation for

9 Leon Trotsky, “War and the International”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1914/war/index.htm>

10 *ibid*

the socialist revolution. In 1917 this perspective was confirmed in Russia. The February revolution brought the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries to power. They continued the war in the interests of the Russian bourgeoisie and its imperialist allies and came into sharp conflict with the desire for peace on the part of the workers, peasants and soldiers, who turned to the Bolsheviks. In October, the Bolsheviks organized an uprising, which brought down the provisional government and placed power in the hands of the Soviets. The Soviet government immediately ended the war and published the secret treaties detailing the imperialists' war aims.

24. The victory of the October revolution marked a historical turning point. In Russia, for the first time in history, the working class, under Marxist leadership, took power and preserved it. Notwithstanding its later degeneration, the October revolution testified to the capacity of the working class to overthrow the capitalist order and to lay the foundations for a higher, more progressive society. It became the stimulus for revolutionary uprisings throughout the world. The barbarian character of the war, indignation with the betrayal of the social democracy and the consequences of the economic crisis radicalised broad sections of workers. They oriented towards the revolutionary Marxists, who had placed themselves, from the very outset, against the war. In March 1919 in Moscow, the founding congress of the Communist International took place. The Comintern insisted that there was no place for centrist and opportunist elements in its ranks, and developed the programme, the strategy and the tactics of the world socialist revolution as a practical task of the international working class.

25. The First World War and the October revolution marked the beginning of a new historical epoch, the epoch of the death agony of capitalism and the world socialist revolution. The following three decades were marked by a continuous series of bitter class struggles and military conflicts. This called for a different kind of party than had been developed by the Second International. It was no longer possible to proclaim theoretical support for a maximum programme, for internationalism and for the revolution, while the party's daily practice remained limited to organizational routine and to a minimum programme of reforms within the national framework. The new parties had to be able

to react rapidly to social changes, to subordinate their tactics to revolutionary strategy, to act in a disciplined way and to conduct an irreconcilable struggle against opportunism.

26. Trotsky later summarized the difference between the parties of the Second and the Third internationals with the words: "In a period of growing capitalism even the best party leadership could do no more than only accelerate the formation of a workers' party. Inversely, mistakes of the leadership could retard this process. The objective prerequisites of a proletarian revolution matured but slowly, and the work of the party retained a preparatory character. Today, on the contrary, every new sharp change in the political situation to the left places the decision in the hands of the revolutionary party. Should it miss the critical situation, the latter veers around to its opposite. Under these circumstances the role of the party leadership acquires exceptional importance.... The role of the subjective factor in a period of slow, organic development can remain quite a subordinate one. Then diverse proverbs of gradualism arise, as: 'slow but sure', and 'one must not kick against the pricks', and so forth, which epitomize all the tactical wisdom of an organic epoch that abhorred 'leaping over stages.' But as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is, the party. Opportunism, which consciously or unconsciously thrives upon the inspiration of the past epoch, always tends to underestimate the role of the subjective factor, that is, the importance of the party and of revolutionary leadership.... Such an attitude, which is false in general, operates with positively fatal effect in the imperialist epoch."<sup>11</sup>

## **V. The centrism of the USPD**

27. In Germany on the evening of August 4, the Gruppe Internationale (later known as the Spartacus League) was founded on the initiative of Rosa Luxemburg. In Die Internationale and the illegally distributed Spartakusbriefer (Spartacus Letters) the group decisively opposed the war and, with Karl Liebknecht, who had rejected the war credits, had a deputy in the Reichstag

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11 Leon Trotsky, "The Third International after Lenin", <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/index.htm>

(national parliament). The first editorial in *Die Internationale* from the pen of Rosa Luxemburg began with the words: “On August 4th, 1914, German Social Democracy abdicated politically, and at the same time the Socialist International collapsed. All attempts at denying or concealing this fact, regardless of the motives on which they are based, tend objectively to perpetuate, and to justify, the disastrous self-deception of the socialist parties, the inner malady of the movement, that led to the collapse, and in the long run to make the Socialist International a fiction, a hypocrisy”. There followed a sharp reckoning with the rightwing party majority and Karl Kautsky, the representative of the “Marxist Centre” or “theoretician of the swamp”, as Luxemburg called him.<sup>12</sup>

28. Centrism, as personified by Kautsky, proved to be a far greater obstacle to the revolutionary development of the working class than the largely discredited policies of the rightwing SPD leaders. It wavered between opposition and adaptation, adjusting in words to the radical tendencies among the workers, while tending in practice towards the rightwing course of the SPD leaders. In April 1917, the centrists organized themselves in the Independent SPD (USPD), after several Reichstag deputies had been expelled from the SPD because they had refused to extend the war credits. The USPD was led by Reichstag deputies Hugo Haase and Georg Ledebour. In their ranks were many prominent leaders of the pre-war social democracy, like the revisionist Eduard Bernstein, the economist and later Finance Minister Rudolf Hilferding and the theoretician Karl Kautsky. In November 1918, when workers’ and soldiers’ soviets rose up and forced the kaiser to abdicate, the USPD opposed the establishment of a soviet republic and joined the government of the majority Social Democrat, Friedrich Ebert. While Ebert allied himself with the army command, disempowered the soviets, suppressed the workers’ rebellions and saved the bourgeois order, the USPD served him as a left fig leaf.

29. The programme and politics of the USPD were marked by indecision, compromise and half-heartedness. It stood in glaring contrast to the mood of the workers, who, just 10 days after the party congress

12 Rosa Luxemburg, “Rebuilding the International”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1915/xx/rebuild-int.htm>

establishing the USPD, mounted the first mass strike against the war in Berlin. The USPD’s opposition to the war was limited to passive calls for peace. It rejected any revolutionary initiatives. After it entered the Ebert government, Rosa Luxemburg characterized the USPD with the words: “It always trudged behind events and developments, never walking at their head. It has never been able to lay down a fundamental delineation between itself and the dependent [SPD]. Every lurid ambiguity, which led to the confusion of the masses: negotiated peace, League of Nations, disarmament, the Wilson cult, all the clichés of bourgeois demagoguery, which spread a darkening veil over the naked, abrupt facts of the revolutionary alternative during the war, found its eager support. The entire attitude of the party swung helplessly around the cardinal contradiction that, on the one hand, it tried to win the bourgeois governments as the competent powers for peace, while, on the other hand, it put the case for mass action by the proletariat. A faithful mirror of the contradictory practice is the eclectic theory: a hotchpotch of radical formulas hopelessly abandoning the socialist spirit.... Up to the outbreak of the revolution it was a case by case policy, without a comprehensive world view, which illuminates the past and future of German social democracy from a single light source, which has a view for the large sweep of the development”.<sup>13</sup>

30. The theoretical head of the USPD was Karl Kautsky, who justified its centrist politics with hackneyed bits and pieces of history and denounced the Russian October revolution. “Everything is recognised in Marxism except the revolutionary methods of struggle, the propaganda and preparation of those methods, and the education of the masses in this direction”, as Lenin mockingly remarked about Kautsky.<sup>14</sup> At the center of Kautsky’s attack on Marxism was the rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat. At a time when the war was exposing the democratic state everywhere as a brutal form of bourgeois class rule, Kautsky denied the working class the right to establish its own rule by revolutionary means. After the collapse of official so-

13 Rosa Luxemburg, “Parteitag der Unabhängigen SP”, In *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4, Berlin 1987, p. 423-424

14 V.I. Lenin, “The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1918/prrk/preface.htm>

cial patriotism, international Kautskyism had become the most important factor on which capitalist society relied, as Trotsky noted.<sup>15</sup>

31. The German November revolution confirmed this. By entering the Ebert government, the USPD contributed decisively to its defeat. The November revolution, from which the Weimar Republic emerged, was, as Trotsky wrote, “no democratic completion of the bourgeois revolution, it was a proletarian revolution decapitated by the Social Democrats; more correctly, it was a bourgeois counter-revolution, which was compelled to preserve pseudo-democratic forms after its victory over the proletariat.”<sup>16</sup> This had tragic consequences. All the social forces that 15 years later would help Hitler to power, survived the revolution unscathed: the Prussian landed nobility, which formed the sediment of political reaction; the industrial barons and the financial aristocracy, who were responsible for Germany’s expansive war aims; the army command, which developed into a state within the state; the judges and officials, who rejected democracy; not to speak of the Soldateska, whom the Weimar Republic could not offer any civilian perspective and who became the foot soldiers of the Nazis. The working class had to pay a heavy price for the politics of centrism. That is the bitter historical lesson from the actions of the USPD in the November revolution.

## VI. The KPD

32. Although the Spartacus League sharply criticized the SPD and the USPD, it did not break organizationally with them. While it insisted on full freedom of action, it nevertheless remained within the SPD and in 1917 joined the newly created USPD. Not until a month after the November revolution did it finally leave the USPD and, on January 1, 1919, form the German Communist Party. Just two weeks later, its most well-known leaders, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, were killed by the murderous gangs of the social democratic Reichswehr Minister Gustav Noske.

33. Rosa Luxemburg justified remaining in the SPD and the USPD with the argument: “It is not sufficient

15 Leon Trotsky, “Terrorism and Communism”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1920/terrcomm/index.htm>

16 Leon Trotsky, “Permanent Revolution”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/index.htm>

that a handful of people has the best prescription in their pocket and already knows how one is to lead the masses. The masses must be mentally wrested away from the traditions of the last 50 years; they must be freed from them. And this can only be done in the vast process of constant internal self-criticism of the movement as a whole.”<sup>17</sup> This view underestimated the social gulf that had opened up between the SPD and the USPD on the one hand, and the working class on the other. Before the war, the withdrawal from the SPD—a legal mass party, which officially claimed to be Marxist and that enjoyed great authority among workers—would have isolated the revolutionary wing from the class-conscious workers. But after the SPD’s support for the war credits the situation presented itself differently. The SPD had gone over completely to the camp of the ruling class. This had to bring it, inevitably, into conflict with the working class. It was necessary to prepare for this conflict by elaborating a clear political and organizational alternative. If in Russia in 1917 the presence of a party steeled by many years of struggle against opportunism had made possible the victory of the October revolution, the absence of such a party in 1918-19 was the cause of bitter defeats for the proletariat in Germany.

34. Due to its late formation and the loss of its most important leaders, the first years of the German Communist Party, the KPD, were extremely difficult. It lacked political and theoretical unity and an experienced cadre. Bitterness over the betrayal of the SPD temporarily resulted in ultra-left, anti-parliamentary and anarchist conceptions gaining influence, and a leftwing split-off in the form of the KAPD in April 1920. In December of the same year, the majority of the USPD broke with the rightwing leadership and joined the KPD. This made the KPD a mass party, but it also brought new political problems. Between 1919 and 1921, the KPD took part in several premature and badly prepared attempted uprisings. Just five days after its establishment, the party supported the so-called Spartacus uprising in Berlin, which was bloodily suppressed. In 1921, in the so-called March action, the KPD and KAPD jointly called for a general strike and for the overthrow of the Reich government, after it had deployed armed police units against workers in central

17 Rosa Luxemburg, “Rückblick auf die Gothaer Konferenz”, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 4, p. 274



Germany. The subsequent defeat cost the lives of approximately 2,000 workers.

35. The Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921 argued intensively against the left radicalism in the KPD and other sections. In his pamphlet “Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder”, Lenin criticised “petty bourgeois revolutionism”, which rejects political compromises under all circumstances, which denies the legitimacy of participation in elections or in parliament and which considers it impermissible to work in the reactionary trade unions. The Congress, Trotsky wrote, “advanced the slogan: ‘To the masses’, that is, to the conquest of power through a previous conquest of the masses, achieved on the basis of the daily life and struggles”.<sup>18</sup> It developed a programme of transitional demands, which linked the daily needs of the workers to the goal of the proletarian seizure of power, and endorsed the tactic of the united front. This tactic was aimed at establishing, in daily struggles on the basis of practical joint measures, an effective unity between the reformist, social democratic organisations and parties, which commanded the loyalty of the majority of the working class, and the revolutionary communist parties. The united front corresponded to the needs and instinctive drive of the masses for unity in the struggle to achieve important demands, the defence of wages and political rights and mobilisation against fascist attacks. It did not, however, mean renouncing criticism of political opponents inside the workers’ organisations. On the contrary, it created the conditions for the masses, on the basis of their own experiences, to convince themselves of the effectiveness of the communists and the uselessness of social democracy.

36. The change in course carried through at the Third Congress strengthened and stabilised the KPD. But in 1923 the political situation changed dramatically. France’s occupation of the Ruhr area unleashed a political and economic crisis, which culminated in an exceptional revolutionary situation. The collapse of the German currency led to the pauperisation and radicalisation of broad layers of workers and the middle classes. The SPD rapidly lost influence, while the KPD’s support grew. On the right, fascist groups won influence. In August, a general strike initiated by the KPD

forced the rightwing government of the industrial magnate Wilhelm Cuno to resign. The DVU politician Gustav Stresemann formed a new government along with the SPD. It handed executive power to General von Seeckt, the commander in chief of the Reichswehr, and by means of an enabling act eliminated the social achievements of the November revolution, including the eight hour working day. The whole country was polarized. In Saxony and Thuringia, left-wing SPD governments moved towards the KPD, while in Bavaria, fascist forces in alliance with the military prepared a coup against the Reich government.

37. It took a long time for the KPD to recognise the revolutionary situation. Only from August onwards did it undertake serious revolutionary preparations, in close co-operation with the Comintern. But on October 21 the party leadership, under Heinrich Brandler, called off a carefully prepared uprising at the last second, because leftwing SPD delegates at a factory councils’ congress in Chemnitz refused to give their agreement. Instead of culminating in a revolution, the German October ended in a political fiasco. In Hamburg, the decision by the leadership to call off the struggle for power came too late, and the uprising went ahead nevertheless. It remained isolated and was suppressed by force. In Saxony and Thuringia the Reichswehr deposed the left-wing governments. The KPD was banned.

38. Trotsky paid great attention to the lessons of the German October. Contrary to Stalin and Zinoviev, who justified the defeat by invoking the supposed immaturity of the situation, he called it “a truly classic example of a revolutionary situation permitted to slip by”, whose causes “lie wholly in tactics and not in objective conditions”. The Russian October revolution had already shown that the subjective factor, the party, plays the decisive role in an objectively revolutionary situation. The same had now been proven in the German October, but in the negative.

39. “From the moment of the Ruhr occupation”, Trotsky concluded, “it was imperative for the Communist Party to steer a firm and resolute course toward the conquest of power. Only a courageous tactical turn could have unified the German proletariat in the struggle for power. If at the Third Congress and in part of the Fourth Congress we told the German comrades,

<sup>18</sup> Leon Trotsky, “The Third International After Lenin”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/index.htm>

‘You will win the masses only on the basis of taking a leading part in their struggle for transitional demands,’ then by the middle of 1923 the question became posed differently: after all the German proletariat had gone through in recent years, it could be led into the decisive battle only in the event that it became convinced that this time the issue was posed, as the Germans say, aufs Ganze (i.e., that it was not a question of this or that partial task, but of the fundamental one), and that the Communist Party was ready to march into battle and was capable of securing victory. But the German Communist Party executed this turn without the necessary assurance and after an extreme delay. Both the Rights and the Lefts, despite their sharp struggle against each other, evinced up to September-October [1923] a rather fatalistic attitude toward the process of the development of the revolution. At a time when the entire objective situation demanded that the party undertake a decisive blow, the party did not act to organize the revolution but kept awaiting it”.<sup>19</sup>

40. In his pamphlet “Lessons of October”, Trotsky stressed that the leadership of a revolutionary party must be capable of recognizing abrupt changes in the objective situation in time and to reorient the party. Based on past experiences, he wrote, “We can posit as almost an unalterable law that a party crisis is inevitable in the transition from preparatory revolutionary activity to the immediate struggle for power”. A new tactical re-orientation always meant a break with past methods and customs. “If the turn is too abrupt or too sudden, and if in the preceding period too many elements of inertia and conservatism have accumulated in the leading organs of the party, then the party will prove itself unable to fulfil its leadership at that supreme and critical moment for which it has been preparing itself in the course of years or decades. The party is ravaged by a crisis, and the movement passes the party by and heads toward defeat. A revolutionary party is subjected to the pressure of other political forces. At every given stage of its development the party elaborates its own methods of counteracting and resisting this pressure. During a tactical turn and the resulting internal regroupments and frictions, the party’s power of resistance becomes weakened.

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19 Leon Trotsky, “The First Five Years of the Communist International”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/intro.htm>

From this the possibility always arises that the internal groupings in the party, which originate from the necessity of a turn in tactics, may develop far beyond the original controversial points of departure and serve as a support for various class tendencies. To put the case more plainly: the party that does not keep step with the historical tasks of its own class becomes, or runs the risk of becoming, the indirect tool of other classes”.<sup>20</sup>

## VII. Stalinism and the Left Opposition

41. The defeat of the German revolution had a direct effect on the Soviet Union. It strengthened the reactionary forces out of which the Stalinist dictatorship would eventually arise. The economic backwardness and international isolation of the first workers’ state led to the development of a bureaucracy in the state and the party that increasingly sought to establish its own interests. Because of the shortage of educated forces, the Soviet government had brought many former tsarist officials into the administration. In the 1921 New Economic Policy (NEP), it had made concessions to capitalist layers, in order to encourage the growth of the economy and to overcome the devastating consequences of the war and civil war. These conservative elements increasingly exerted an influence on the communist party, which had been exhausted by the civil war. They regarded the programme of the world socialist revolution with distrust and endeavoured to consolidate their own social position.

42. The German defeat gave succour to these conservative currents. It dashed the hope that the Soviet economy would soon win support from an advanced industrialized country. The Soviet Union remained isolated, and the failure of the KPD seemed to confirm all those who did not want to link the fate of the Soviet Union with the international successes of the communist movement, but would rather rest on their own national forces. “Had the German revolution conquered toward the end of 1923”, Trotsky wrote, in summarizing the effects of the German defeat, “the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia would have been cleansed and consolidated without any internal convulsions. But the German revolution ended in one of the most terrible capitulations in working class history. The defeat of the German revolution gave a powerful impetus to all

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20 Leon Trotsky, “Lessons of October”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/lessons/index.htm>

the processes of reaction inside the Soviet Republic. Hence the struggle against the ‘permanent revolution’ and ‘Trotskyism’ in the Party led to the creation of the theory of socialism in one country, and so on.”<sup>21</sup>

43. Just a few weeks after the German defeat, Stalin and Bukharin announced the theory of “socialism in one country”, which expressed the material interests of the bureaucracy and became the main thrust of its attack on Marxism. “Socialism in one country” meant a complete break with the international perspective that had informed the October Revolution, and signified a rejection of the strategic conclusions that Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg had drawn from the collapse of the Second International. Its origins can be traced back to the right-wing German social democrat, Georg von Vollmar, who in 1878 had already propagated the theory of an “isolated socialist state”.

44. Trotsky summarized the contradiction between the international perspective of Marxism and the national perspective of the Stalinists with the words: “Marxism takes its point of departure from world economy, not as a sum of national parts but as a mighty and independent reality which has been created by the international division of labour and the world market, and which in our epoch imperiously dominates the national markets. The productive forces of capitalist society have long ago outgrown the national boundaries. The imperialist war (of 1914-1918) was one of the expressions of this fact. In respect of the technique of production, socialist society must represent a stage higher than capitalism. To aim at building a nationally isolated socialist society means, in spite of all passing successes, to pull the productive forces backward even as compared with capitalism. To attempt, regardless of the geographical, cultural and historical conditions of the country’s development, which constitutes a part of the world unity, to realize a shut-off proportionality of all the branches of economy within a national framework, means to pursue a reactionary utopia...”<sup>22</sup>

45. The perspective of “socialism in a single country” influenced all aspects of Soviet domestic and foreign

policy. In domestic policy, it robbed the leadership of a political compass. The Stalin faction pursued an empirical zigzag course, which intensified economic and social contradictions, and which repeatedly drove the country to the edge of civil war. In order to strengthen its position over the working class, it initially promoted the large farmers and speculators. When these threatened to become too powerful, Stalin carried out a panic-stricken shift to the left, pushed through the collectivization of agriculture by force and set about industrialization at a speed that made excessive demands on the workers. Stalin was consistent only in his actions against the Left Opposition, which he persecuted ever more violently after each shift in policy.

46. In foreign policy, the Stalinist regime sacrificed an international revolutionary orientation to national interests. It transformed the Comintern into a tool of Soviet foreign policy and used its sections for its manoeuvres with bourgeois governments. In countries where the Soviet Union expected support from the government, the communist parties followed a course of class collaboration, which finally turned them into instruments of the counter-revolution. The first consequences of this political perspective were the defeat of the British general strike in May 1926 and the Chinese revolution in April 1927. In Britain, the communist party had placed itself uncritically behind the TUC, the trade union umbrella organization, with which Stalin hoped to establish friendly relations. When the TUC stabbed the general strike in the back—which was not difficult to foresee—the working class was completely unprepared. In China, the communist party supported the bourgeois Kuomintang, which then, in 1927, massacred thousands of communist party members.

47. From 1923, the struggle between the Stalin faction and the Left Opposition dominated the internal life of the communist party of the Soviet Union and the Comintern, whose political course Trotsky and his supporters fought to correct. They proposed measures against bureaucratisation and for the re-establishment of internal party democracy. They argued for an economic policy that strengthened the working class and the poor peasants against the profiteers of the NEP and the better-off peasants. They drew the lessons of the German defeat and argued vehemently against the wrong policies of the Comintern in Britain and China. The centre of the conflict concerned two irreconcilable

21 Leon Trotsky, “The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/09/fi-b.htm>

22 Leon Trotsky, “The Permanent Revolution”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/prge.htm>

perspectives, permanent revolution and socialism in a single country. The Left Opposition insisted on the fact that the fate of the workers' state and its further development to socialism were inseparably bound up with the development of the world socialist revolution. The Stalinists wanted to develop a nationally isolated socialist society on the basis of Russian resources.

48. The analyses, predictions and warnings of the Left Opposition were regularly confirmed in practice. Its ranks included many prominent party members who had played an outstanding role in the October revolution. For a time in 1926, it joined together with the supporters of Zinoviev and Kamenev to form the United Opposition. Now a large part of Lenin's party leadership (including his widow Krupskaya) stood in opposition to the Stalin faction. But the international defeats, for which the Stalinists were largely to blame, strengthened the bureaucracy. "It defeated all these enemies, the Opposition, the party and Lenin, not with ideas and arguments, but with its own social weight. The leaden rump of bureaucracy outweighed the head of the revolution",<sup>23</sup> is how Trotsky summarized the reasons for the victory of the bureaucracy. The Stalinist bureaucracy proceeded using slander, historical falsification, party expulsions, banishment, persecution and, finally, execution squads against its opponents. Trotsky was expelled from the Politburo in 1926 and from the party in 1927. In 1928 he was banished to Kazakhstan, in 1929 was exiled from the country, and in 1940 he was murdered by a Stalinist agent.

49. The Left Opposition found support in the communist parties of Europe and China. In 1928, James P. Cannon brought back Trotsky's critique of the draft programme of the Comintern<sup>24</sup> to the USA and thereby laid the foundations for the American Trotskyist movement. Through a long process of political and ideological clarification, the International Left Opposition and later the Fourth International were to emerge. Following his expulsion from the Soviet Union, Trotsky devoted a great deal of his energy to this task.

### **VIII. The German Left Opposition and the Leninbund**

23 Leon Trotsky, "The Revolution Betrayed", <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/revbet/index.htm>

24 Leon Trotsky, "The Third International after Lenin"

50. In the German Communist Party, Trotsky was denounced as a right-winger after 1923 because he refused to scapegoat party chairman Heinrich Brandler as the only one responsible for the October defeat. Ruth Fischer and Arkadi Maslow, supporters of Zinoviev and representatives of the KPD left wing, replaced Brandler as party leaders and suppressed the documents of the Left Opposition. Only when Zinoviev broke with Stalin and allied with the Left Opposition, did a violent faction fight flare up in the KPD as well. On the order of Moscow, Fischer and Maslow were replaced and expelled from the party. In their place stepped Ernst Thälmann, who became a faithful accomplice of Stalin. On September 1, 1926 700 prominent KPD members publicly supported the Russian united opposition in an open letter. They rejected the theory of "socialism in a single country" and demanded an open discussion over the Russian question in the ranks of the KPD. In April 1928 they created the Leninbund.

51. Trotsky's supporters formed the minority in the Leninbund. The majority, including its leader Hugo Urbahns, consisted of Zinoviev supporters. Many of the ultra-left positions that the Comintern under Lenin and Trotsky had fought lived on inside the Leninbund. It was inclined to petty bourgeois impatience and unprincipled manoeuvres, ranked unimportant squabbles above matters of principle and decided on international questions on the basis of national criteria. In 1929-30 a break was posed between the Leninbund and the Left Opposition. When Trotsky openly criticized the Leninbund, his supporters were expelled. The differences centred on the class character of the Soviet Union and the international orientation of the opposition.

52. The Leninbund put forward the view that the counterrevolution had already triumphed in the Soviet Union. Trotsky rejected this defeatist attitude, which regarded the struggle for a change of course inside the CPSU and in the Comintern as already lost. He dubbed the verbal radicalism of the Urbahns group, which equated Stalin's rule with the return of the bourgeoisie to power, "upturned reformism". Already in the Thermidor of the year 1794, wrote Trotsky, the French bourgeoisie were able to snatch power from the plebeians only through civil war, "How then can anyone assume or believe that power can pass from the hands

of the Russian proletariat into the hands of the bourgeoisie in a peaceful, tranquil, imperceptible, bureaucratic manner?” He pointed to the fact that the most important gains of the October Revolution remained untouched. “The means of production, once the property of the capitalists, remain to this very day in the hands of the Soviet state. The land is nationalized. The exploiting elements are still excluded from the Soviets and from the Army. The monopoly of foreign trade remains a bulwark against the economic intervention of capitalism.” From this Trotsky concluded, “The struggle continues, the classes have not yet spoken their final word.”<sup>25</sup> The Leninbund was the forerunner of a whole number of political tendencies whose turn away from Marxism began with their rejection of the defence of the Soviet Union—despite and against the Stalinist regime—as a workers’ state.

53. The second point at issue with the Urbahns group concerned the question of internationalism. It evaluated international questions on the basis of national criteria and, in the fight against Trotsky, allied itself with international groupings with which it had no agreement in principle. Trotsky noted that its “internationalism” was nothing more than “an arithmetical sum of national opportunist policies”. In an open letter to the members of the Leninbund, Trotsky stressed that the Left Opposition could develop only as an international organization: “Those who believe that the International Left will someday take shape as a simple sum of national groups, and that therefore the international unification can be postponed indefinitely until the national groups ‘grow strong,’ attribute only a secondary importance to the international factor and by this very reason take the path of national opportunism. It is undeniable that each country has greatest peculiarities of its own; but in our epoch these peculiarities can be assayed and exploited in a revolutionary way only from an internationalist point of view. On the other hand, only an international organization can be the bearer of an international ideology. Can anyone seriously believe that isolated Oppositional national groups, divided among themselves and left to their own resources, are capable of finding the correct road by themselves? No, this is a certain path to national degeneration, sectari-

anism, and ruin. The tasks facing the International Opposition are enormously difficult. Only by being indissolubly tied together, only by working out answers jointly to all current problems, only by creating their international platform, only by mutually verifying each one of their steps, that is, only by uniting in a single international body, will the national groups of the Opposition be able to carry out their historic task.”<sup>26</sup>

54. The Urbahns group justified its refusal to accept international discipline by citing its right to internal party democracy. Trotsky rejected this. “Under the guise of fighting against the bureaucratism of the Third International attempts are being made to smuggle in the tendencies and practices of the Second International,” he answered. “We stand not for democracy in general but for centralist democracy. It is precisely for this reason that we place national leadership above local leadership and international leadership above national leadership. The revolutionary party has nothing in common with a discussion club, where everybody comes as to a café (this is Souvarine’s great idea). The party is an organization for action. The unity of party ideas is assured through democratic channels, but the ideological framework of the party must be rigidly delimited. This holds all the more for a faction. It must not be forgotten here, too, that we are not a party but a faction, that is to say, the closest possible selection and consolidation of co-thinkers for the purpose of influencing the party and other organizations of the working class. It would be fantastic and absurd to demand of the Left Opposition that it become a combination of all sorts of national groups and grouplets, who are dissatisfied, offended, and full of protests and who do not know what they want.”<sup>27</sup>

55. In the spring of 1930, the Trotskyists who had been expelled from the Leninbund formed the German Left Opposition. They conducted a courageous political struggle to correct the wrong course of the KPD and to strengthen communist influence in the working class. In a message of greetings to the first national conference of the German Left Opposition in September 1930, Trotsky opposed the “completely false view” that a growth in the influence of the KPD would

25 Leon Trotsky, “The Defense of the Soviet Union and the Opposition”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1929/09/fi-b.htm>

26 Leon Trotsky, “An Open Letter to Members of the Leninbund”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/02/leninbund.htm>

27 *ibid*

strengthen the Stalinist party leadership. That was “the basis for every sort of ultra-left and pseudo-left sectarianism”. Rather “a real radicalisation of the masses and an influx of workers under the banner of communism would not consolidate the bureaucratic apparatus but would signify its destabilisation, its weakening.” “What could destroy the Opposition”, warned Trotsky, was “the mentality of a corner-alley sect, which lives from Schadenfreude and defeatism, without hope or perspective.”<sup>28</sup>

56. The German Left Opposition worked under enormous political pressure and major material difficulties. The painful process of the decline of the KPD had left deep traces in its ranks that expressed themselves in fierce subjective conflicts carried out with destructive bureaucratic measures. In a series of personal letters, Trotsky sought to overcome these problems. In February 1931 he eventually addressed a letter to all sections of the International Left Opposition dealing with the crisis of the German Left Opposition. Trotsky identified the roots of the group’s problems in the “administrative approach of the epigones [i.e. the Stalinists] in the spheres of the principles, ideas and the methods of Marxism” since 1923. The Left Opposition had to be established on a foundation which is “overcrowded with the remnants and splinters of former breakdowns.” Trotsky then sharply criticized the clique mentality that prevailed in the German section: “The spirit of circle chumminess (you for me, and me for you) is the most abominable of organizational sicknesses. With the aid of chumminess, one can gather a clique around oneself but not a faction of co-thinkers.” He opposed the “toying with principles, journalistic light-mindedness, moral looseness, and pseudo ‘irreconcilability’ in the name of personal caprice.” In Trotsky’s opinion, the crisis of the German Left Opposition could only be overcome with “active international assistance”. He called for an immediate halt to all retaliatory organizational measures and the setting up of a control commission and the preparation of a party conference in collaboration with the International Secretariat. The group around Kurt Landau, which commanded a majority in the central leadership in Berlin, was not prepared to subordinate its clique interests to

the IS. It categorically rejected Trotsky’s letter, carried out a series of expulsions of its opponents and eventually broke with the International Left Opposition.<sup>29</sup>

57. The conflicts in the German Left Opposition were exploited and intensified by agents of the Stalinist GPU. A key role in this respect was played by two brothers from Lithuania, Ruvin and Abraham Sobolevicius, who, under the party pseudonyms Roman Well and Adolf Senin, played a leading role in the Leipzig group that came into sharp conflict with the group in Berlin. Both brothers worked at that time for the GPU, as Senin admitted 30 years later to a New York judge, after being exposed as a Soviet agent operating under the name Jack Soble. The brothers functioned both as informants and agents provocateurs. They regularly reported their own versions of the conflict in the German Left Opposition to Trotsky and acquired sensitive information about Trotsky’s contacts and those of his son and close collaborator, Leon Sedov. When the political crisis in Germany intensified in the middle of 1932, the brothers openly switched to the camp of Stalinism and—10 days before Hitler took power—published a falsified edition of the newspaper Permanent Revolution declaring that the German Left Opposition was breaking with Trotsky. The Stalinist falsification was then spread and enthusiastically taken up by Stalinist newspapers.

58. Trotsky addressed himself to the case of Well in his article of 1933, “Serious lessons from an inconsequential thing”. He suspected there was a direct connection to the Stalinist secret police, but nonetheless ascribed more general political significance to the issue. Senin and Well, he wrote, “belonged to the type pretty well divided between the wavering intellectuals and semi-intelligentsia, for whom ideas and principles occupy second place and in first rank stands the concern for personal independence, which in a particular case turns into anxiety for one’s personal career.” While workers found it difficult to move from one country to another, learn foreign languages and write articles, the “mobile intellectual, who lacks both experience and knowledge but therefore knows all things and all people, and is present everywhere and ready to write with his left foot, frequently sits on the neck of the workers’

28 Leo Trotzki, “An die Reichskonferenz der Linken Opposition”, in “Schriften über Deutschland”, volume 1, Frankfurt 1971, P. 72-74

29 Writings of Leon Trotsky (1930-31), “The Crisis in the German Left Opposition”, New York 1973, p.147, 151, 150

organizations.” Trotsky concluded that the Left Opposition must “seriously pose the question of the training and education of new cadres of the proletarian youth.” “Hand in hand with the political struggle, systematic theoretical training” had to be carried out dealing with the revolutionary conceptions, the history and the tradition of the Left Opposition. “Only on this basis can a serious proletarian revolutionist be educated. Two or three vulgarized slogans like ‘mass work,’ ‘democratic centralism,’ ‘united front’ etc.—that is sufficient for the Brandlerites and for the SAP, but not for us.”<sup>30</sup>

59. Despite its numerical weakness, its brutal persecution by the Stalinist KPD leadership, the destructive work of Stalinist agents in its ranks and oppressive measures by the bourgeois state, the German Left Opposition gained a considerable hearing. It developed local groups in several dozen cities and won influence in the factories. Trotsky’s writings were widely circulated among members of the KPD, the SPD and the SAP. In 1932, the brochures “Germany, The Key to the International Situation” and “For a Workers’ United Front Against Fascism” were circulated in editions of over 30,000 each.

## IX. National Socialism and the Holocaust

60. The First World War did not resolve any of the problems that had given rise to it. Europe remained divided into hostile powers. German imperialism, which had tried to reorganize Europe according to its own needs, was shackled by the Versailles Treaty; England and France had been drained by the war. The ascendant American great power put Europe on rations. European capitalism suffered from constant fever attacks in the form of inflation, stock market crashes, political crises and class battles. The most malicious form of these ailments was expressed in the growth of National Socialism (Nazism).

61. Nazism expressed the most reactionary and brutal tendencies of German capitalism. That is the key to understanding it. Hitler’s rise from a Viennese homeless shelter and the trenches of the world war to becoming a megalomaniacal dictator cannot be explained by the social composition and psychology of his supporters. He owed his power to the ruling elite, which placed

him at the head of the state. The millions that Thyssen, Krupp, Flick and other industrial magnates donated to the NSDAP, Hitler’s appointment as chancellor by Hindenburg, the symbolic figurehead of the army, and finally the agreement of all the bourgeois parties to the Enabling Act are eloquent testimony to the fact that the vast majority of the ruling elite had placed themselves behind Hitler when all other mechanisms to suppress the working class had failed.

62. What differentiated the National Socialists from the other bourgeois parties was their ability to turn the despair of the ruined petty bourgeoisie and the rage of the lumpen proletariat into a battering ram against the organized workers’ movement and place it at the service of German imperialism. “In order to try to find a way out, the bourgeoisie must absolutely rid itself of the pressure exerted by the workers’ organizations; these must be eliminated, destroyed, utterly crushed”, warned Trotsky in 1932. “At this juncture, the historic role of fascism begins. It raises to their feet those classes that are immediately above the proletariat and that are ever in dread of being forced down into its ranks; it organizes and militarizes them at the expense of finance capital, under the cover of the official government, and it directs them to the extirpation of proletarian organizations, from the most revolutionary to the most conservative.”<sup>31</sup>

63. National Socialism could not be content with suppressing the Communist Party: “Fascism is not merely a system of reprisals, of brutal force, and of police terror. Fascism is a particular governmental system based on the uprooting of all elements of proletarian democracy within bourgeois society. The task of fascism lies not only in destroying the Communist vanguard but in holding the entire class in a state of forced disunity. To this end the physical annihilation of the most revolutionary section of the workers does not suffice. It is also necessary to smash all independent and voluntary organizations, to demolish all the defensive bulwarks of the proletariat, and to uproot whatever has been achieved during three-quarters of a century by the Social Democracy and the trade unions. For, in the

30 Writings of Leon Trotsky (1932-33), “Serious lessons from an inconsequential thing” New York 1973 p. 90, 93

31 Leon Trotsky, “What Next? Vital questions for the German proletariat”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next01.htm#s0>

last analysis, the Communist Party also bases itself on these achievements.”<sup>32</sup>

64. The members of the National Socialist movement originated—at least up to its seizure of power—almost exclusively from the middle classes. It recruited from among artisans, peddlers, the civil employees and peasants, whom the war, inflation and crisis had robbed of any faith in democratic parliamentarianism and who longed for order and an iron fist. At the head of the movement were officers and NCOs from the old army, who could not reconcile themselves to Germany’s defeat in the world war. However, the programme of the National Socialist movement was anything but petty bourgeois. It translated the basic needs of German imperialism into the language of mythology and racial theory. The dream of a “thousand-year Reich” and the hunger for “Lebensraum (living space) in the East” expressed the expansionist urge of German capital, whose dynamic productive forces were constricted by Europe’s closely meshed system of states. Racial hatred provided consolation for the German petty bourgeois in the face of his real powerlessness and prepared him for a war of extermination.

65. Even the anti-Semitism of the Nazis had a rational core. The systematic destruction of more than six million Jews, Sinti and Roma by Hitler’s regime is often described as historically “unique”. This characterisation certainly applies as far as the extent of its criminal energy is concerned—the systematic, industrially organized, mass destruction planned by sections of the state apparatus. However, if it is taken to mean that the Holocaust is inexplicable and cannot be understood through historical-materialist analysis, it is wrong. Even if the anti-Semitic prejudices that Hitler exploited can be partly traced back to the Middle Ages, the Nazis’ anti-Semitism was a modern phenomenon. It was inseparably bound up with the destruction of the workers’ movement and the war against socialism.

66. Hitler’s own anti-Semitism stood in close relationship with his hatred of the socialist movement. “The labor movement did not repel him because it was led by Jews ; the Jews repelled him because they led the labor movement,” writes the historian Konrad Heiden. “It was not Rothschild, the capitalist, but Karl Marx, the

socialist, who kindled Adolf Hitler’s anti-Semitism.”<sup>33</sup> In Vienna, Hitler had personally experienced the fact that many Jews were active in the leadership of the workers’ movement. Likewise in Vienna, he became acquainted with and admired the Christian Social Party of Karl Lueger, who purposely exploited anti-Semitism to drive a wedge between the workers’ movement and the disconcerted petty bourgeoisie. Lueger won large support among the petty bourgeoisie and middle class with a mixture of anti-Semitism and anti-capitalist rhetoric, and from 1897 to 1910 was mayor of Vienna.

67. The claim that the Holocaust was the end product of latent anti-Semitism that was widespread throughout the entire German population, made amongst others by the American historian Daniel Goldhagen in his book “Hitler’s Willing Executioners”, is completely wrong. The Marxist workers’ movement had energetically fought against anti-Semitism. As a result, the anti-Semitic Christian-Social Labour Party of Adolf Stöcker could not win influence among workers in the Wilhelminian Empire, because it encountered the bitter resistance of the SPD. “Opposition to anti-Semitism had become a badge of honour for the workers’ movement”, reports the historian Robert Wistrich. “The fierce campaign undertaken by the Social Democrats against Adolf Stöcker’s Berlin movement did to a large extent immunise the working class against anti-Semitism.”<sup>34</sup> The smashing of the KPD and SPD was the precondition for allowing anti-Semitism free rein. Before the term KZ (Concentration Camp) became a synonym for the persecutions and mass murder of the Jews, the Nazis established the first concentration camp in Dachau as a prison for workers’ leaders. Even afterwards, there were numerous cases of selfless assistance and solidarity, which did not take on a broader, organized form only due to the pervasive terror of the Gestapo. The fate of the Jews was inseparably bound up with that of the socialist workers’ movement.

68. Even after the Nazis had state power firmly in their grasp, they were not able to put their murderous

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33 Konrad Heiden, “Adolf Hitler: Eine Biografie”, 1936

34 Quoted in: David North, “Anti-Semitism, fascism and the Holocaust. A critical review of Daniel Goldhagen’s ‘Hitler’s willing executors’”, Labor Publications, p12



fantasies of the ruthless extermination of “the entire Jewry, Freemasons, Marxism and churchdom of the world” into practice unchecked.<sup>35</sup> For that, war was necessary. Now the murder of the Jews merged with the war of extermination in the East, which aimed, from the outset, at physically exterminating the entire political and intellectual leading layer of the Soviet Union—“Judeo-Bolshevism” in Hitler’s words—in order to secure centuries of German dominance. The cold-blooded murder of six million Jews was the high point of a campaign of destruction, to which millions of communists, partisans, intellectuals and ordinary people fell victim in Poland, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The barbaric character of imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, found its highest expression in this campaign of destruction.

## X. The German catastrophe

69. The support of the ruling class and the brute force methods of the Nazis alone would not have been sufficient for Hitler to succeed. What was decisive was the complete failure of the large workers’ parties. In 1932, the SPD and KPD were still far stronger than Hitler’s NSDAP. In the last elections before Hitler’s seizure of power, they won together 221 of the 584 seats in the Reichstag, with the NSDAP winning only 196. And the Reichstag election was only a weak reflection of the real balance of power. The workers who stood behind the SPD and the KPD carried far greater political weight than the social dregs stirred up by Hitler. Hitler’s victory was the result of the failure of the SPD and KPD.

70. In 1918, the SPD had strangled the proletarian revolution in order to save the bourgeois order. The result was the Weimar Republic, in which the old forces of reaction continued to live behind a democratic facade. In 1929, when the world economic crisis blew apart the unstable social equilibrium, the SPD “saved” the republic by dismantling its democratic facade brick by brick. First, it placed itself behind the Brüning government, which disabled parliament and governed by means of emergency decrees. Then it supported the election of Hindenburg as Reich President, who in turn then appointed Hitler as chancellor. Instead

of mobilizing its members against the fascist danger, the SPD placed its faith in the police, the army and the Reich President. Even as Hindenburg and von Papen removed the social democratic-led Prussian state government by force in 1932, the SPD did not lift a finger. Instead, it lodged a constitutional challenge in the Supreme Court. Trotsky summarized its attitude with the words: “A mass party, leading millions (toward socialism!) holds that the question as to which class will come to power in present-day Germany, which is shaken to its very foundations, depends not on the fighting strength of the German proletariat, not on the shock troops of fascism, not even on the personnel of the Reichswehr, but on whether the pure spirit of the Weimar Constitution (along with the required quantity of camphor and naphthalene) shall be installed in the presidential palace.”<sup>36</sup>

71. The servile attitude of the SPD not only disarmed the working class, it also strengthened the fascists, as Trotsky made clear: “The effect which the appeals of the Social Democracy produce on the state apparatus, on the judges, the Reichswehr, and the police cannot fail to be just the opposite to the one desired. The most ‘loyal’ functionary, the most ‘neutral,’ the least bound to the National Socialists, can reason only thus: ‘Millions are behind the Social Democrats; enormous resources are in their hands: the press, the parliament, the municipalities; their own hides are at stake; in the struggle against the fascists, they are assured of the support of the Communists; and even so these mighty gentlemen beg me, a functionary, to save them from the attack of another party comprising millions whose leaders may become my bosses tomorrow; things must be pretty bad for the gentlemen of the Social Democracy, probably quite hopeless ... it is time for me [the functionary], to think about my own hide.’ And as a result, the ‘loyal,’ ‘neutral’ functionary, who vacillated yesterday, will invariably reinsure himself, i.e., tie up with the National Socialists to safeguard his own future. In this manner the reformists who have outlived their own day work for the fascists along bureaucratic lines.”<sup>37</sup>

35 SS-leader Heinrich Himmler on 9 November 1938, the day of the Reichspogromnacht, quoted in Ian Kershaw, “Hitler 1936-1945”

36 Leon Trotsky, “What Next? Vital questions for the German proletariat”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next01.htm#s1>

37 *ibid*

72. The trade unions behaved with even more servility than the SPD. In an effort to prove their reliability and indispensability to the National Socialists, the ADGB, under the presidency of Theodor Leipart, dissociated itself from the SPD three and a half months before Hitler's seizure of power. While the SA proceeded against well-known trade unionists, social democrats and communists after Hitler entered the Reich Chancellery, the ADGB declared its readiness to place the trade unions, built over many decades, in the service of the new state: "The trade union organisations are an expression of an incontrovertible social necessity, an indispensable part of the existing social order. ... As a result of the natural order of things, they become more and more integrated into the state. ... Trade union organisations make no claim to influence state power directly. Their only task can be to place the experience and knowledge they have gained at the disposal of the government and parliament." On May 1, the ADGB marched under the swastika. But the Nazis were not impressed. On May 2, they stormed the trade union offices, arrested and murdered numerous trade union leaders and dissolved the ADGB.

73. The KPD had been established as a response to the betrayal of social democracy. But it proved just as unable as the SPD to weld together the working class and lead it into a struggle against the Nazis. A ten-year campaign against "Trotskyism" had politically corroded the party and transformed its leadership into a willing tool of Stalin. It repeated all the opportunist and ultra-left errors, against which Lenin and Trotsky had fought ten years before, and hid its paralysis and fatalism behind radical phrase-mongering. Until 1933, Trotsky tried relentlessly to correct the wrong course of the KPD. His writings on Germany from these years, which fill two thick volumes, prove his genius as a Marxist and political leader. Banished to a remote Turkish island, forced to rely on newspapers and reports from political friends, Trotsky demonstrated an understanding of German events and their internal dynamics that remains unparalleled to this day. He foresaw the events clearly and precisely and developed a convincing alternative to the devastating course of the KPD. The KPD responded not with arguments, but with slanders, violence and the entire weight of the Moscow apparatus.

74. At the heart of the policy of the KPD was the thesis of social fascism. From the fact that both fascism and

bourgeois democracy were forms of capitalist rule, the Comintern drew the conclusion that there was no contradiction between them, not even a relative one. Fascism and social democracy were the same—in the words of Stalin: "not antipodes, but twins"—the social democrats therefore were "social fascists". The KPD rejected any collaboration with the SPD against the rightwing danger and, in some cases, even went so far as to make common cause with the Nazis—for example, when it supported the referendum initiated by the Nazis in 1931 to bring down the SPD-led Prussian state government. Occasionally it called for "a united front from below". But this was not an offer to collaborate, but an ultimatum to the SPD members to break with their party.

75. Trotsky decisively opposed this form of vulgar radicalism. He recalled that Marx and Engels had protested fiercely when Lassalle had called feudal counterrevolution and the liberal bourgeoisie "one reactionary mass". Now Stalin and the KPD were repeating the same error. "It is absolutely correct to place on the Social Democrats the responsibility for the emergency legislation of Brüning as well as for the impending danger of fascist savagery. It is absolute balderdash to identify Social Democracy with fascism", he wrote. "The Social Democracy, which is today the chief representative of the parliamentary-bourgeois regime, derives its support from the workers. Fascism is supported by the petty bourgeoisie. The Social Democracy without the mass organizations of the workers can have no influence. Fascism cannot entrench itself in power without annihilating the workers' organizations. Parliament is the main arena of the Social Democracy. The system of fascism is based upon the destruction of parliamentarianism. For the monopolistic bourgeoisie, the parliamentary and fascist regimes represent only different vehicles of dominion; it has recourse to one or the other, depending upon the historical conditions. But for both the Social Democracy and fascism, the choice of one or the other vehicle has an independent significance; more than that, for them it is a question of political life or death."<sup>38</sup>

76. Trotsky fought untiringly for a policy of the united front. This would have made it possible for the KPD to use the contradiction between social democracy and fascism to unite the working class, win the confidence

of the social democratic workers and expose the social democratic leaders. In an article written at the end of 1931, entitled “For a Workers’ United Front Against Fascism”, he explained: “Today the Social Democracy as a whole, with all its internal antagonisms, is forced into sharp conflict with the fascists. It is our task to take advantage of this conflict and not to unite the antagonists against us.” One must “show by deeds a complete readiness to make a bloc with the Social Democrats against the fascists” and “understand how to tear the workers away from their leaders in reality. But reality today is—the struggle against fascism.” It was necessary to “help the Social Democratic workers in action—in this new and extraordinary situation—to test the value of their organizations and leaders at this time, when it is a matter of life and death for the working class.”<sup>39</sup>

77. The refusal of the KPD to accept such a policy led to the German catastrophe. The KPD’s social fascism policy divided the working class, demoralized KPD members and drove the petty bourgeoisie into the arms of Hitler. Trotsky drew the following political balance sheet of the KPD’s policy in May 1933: “No policy of the Communist Party could, of course, have transformed the Social Democracy into a party of the revolution. But neither was that the aim. It was necessary to exploit to the limit the contradiction between reformism and fascism—in order to weaken fascism, at the same time weakening reformism by exposing to the workers the incapacity of the Social Democratic leadership. These two tasks fused naturally into one. The policy of the Comintern bureaucracy led to the opposite result: the capitulation of the reformists served the interests of fascism and not of Communism; the Social Democratic workers remained with their leaders; the Communist workers lost faith in themselves and in the leadership.”<sup>40</sup>

78. Even the transition of the desperate petty bourgeois masses into the camp of fascism was not inevitable. Many would have stood on the side of the working class, if it had shown a way out of the social dead-end.

39 Leon Trotsky, “For a Workers’ United Front Against Fascism”, <http://marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1931/311208.htm>

40 Leon Trotsky, “The German Catastrophe”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1933/330528.htm>

The precondition for this would have been for the communist party to advance a courageous and decisive policy. The petty bourgeoisie, wrote Trotsky, “is quite capable of linking its fate with that of the proletariat. For that, only one thing is needed: the petty bourgeoisie must acquire faith in the ability of the proletariat to lead society onto a new road. The proletariat can inspire this faith only by its strength, by the firmness of its actions, by a skilful offensive against the enemy, by the success of its revolutionary policy. But woe if the revolutionary party does not measure up to the situation! The daily struggle of the proletariat sharpens the instability of bourgeois society. The strikes and the political disturbances aggravate the economic situation of the country. The petty bourgeoisie could reconcile itself temporarily to the growing privations, if it came through experience to the conviction that the proletariat is in a position to lead it onto a new road. But if the revolutionary party, in spite of a class struggle becoming incessantly more accentuated, proves time and again to be incapable of uniting the working class behind it, if it vacillates, becomes confused, contradicts itself, then the petty bourgeoisie loses patience and begins to look upon the revolutionary workers as those responsible for its own misery.”<sup>41</sup>

79. In 1921, Lenin had described leftwing radicalism as an “infantile disorder”. Ten years later, the ultra-left policy of the KPD was no longer an infantile disorder. It was entrenched in the social position of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which had soared above the working class and subordinated the sections of the Comintern to its command. “The ruling and uncontrolled position of the Soviet bureaucracy is conducive to a psychology which in many ways is directly contradictory to the psychology of a proletarian revolutionist”, wrote Trotsky. “Its own aims and combinations in domestic as well as international politics are placed by the bureaucracy above the tasks of the revolutionary education of the masses and have no connection with the tasks of international revolution.”<sup>42</sup> The bureaucracy was accustomed to pose ultimatums and to command. It foresaw nothing and reacted to the catastrophic

41 Leon Trotsky, “The Only Road”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932/onlyroad1.htm#s2>

42 Leon Trotsky, “What Next? Vital questions for the German proletariat”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next02.htm#s10>

consequences of its own policies with an erratic zig-zag course, which took both ultra-left and rightwing tacks. Whereas the Comintern pursued a rightwing course between 1924 and 1928 (Britain, China), it reacted to a crisis in the Soviet Union in 1928 with a sharp leftward turn, which it then imposed on the sections. It proclaimed the so-called “Third Period”, which placed the struggle for power on the agenda in every country. The theory of social fascism was a result of this turn.

## **XI. The decision for the Fourth International**

80. The German disaster caused Trotsky to change his attitude to the KPD. He no longer called for its reform, but for the construction of a new party. Before 1933, the key to the situation had been in the hands of the KPD. “Under such conditions to oppose the party and in advance to declare it to be dead would have meant to proclaim a priori the inevitability of the victory of fascism,” explained Trotsky. “We could not do that. We had to fully exhaust all the possibilities of the old situation.” But with the victory of fascism the situation had changed fundamentally. “It is no longer a question of making a prognosis or a theoretical criticism, but it is a question of an important historical event which will penetrate ever deeper into the consciousness of the masses, including the Communists. One must build the general perspective and the general strategy upon the inevitable consequences of these events and not upon secondary considerations.”<sup>43</sup> Answering the objection that the KPD was still far stronger than the Left Opposition, Trotsky responded by pointing to the fact that the development of a cadre “is not merely an organisational problem, it is a political problem: cadres are formed on the basis of a definite perspective. To again warm up the slogan of party reform means to knowingly set a utopian aim and thereby to push our own cadre toward new and ever sharper disappointments. With such a course the Left Opposition would only become the appendage of a decomposing party and would disappear from the scene together with it.”<sup>44</sup>

81. Trotsky did not immediately apply this conclusion to the Comintern and the CPSU. He waited to see whether they would react to the German disaster

and draw the lessons of it. That was not the case. The Moscow leadership defended the policy of the KPD and banned any discussion about it. Not in a single communist Party did opposition to this position arise. “An organization which was not roused by the thunder of fascism and which submits docilely to such outrageous acts of the bureaucracy demonstrates thereby that it is dead and that nothing can revive it”, concluded Trotsky. “In all our subsequent work it is necessary to take as our point of departure the historical collapse of the official Communist International.” At the same time, the defence of the Soviet Union depended now on the building of a new international, he stressed: “Only the creation of the Marxist International, completely independent of the Stalinist bureaucracy and counterposed politically to it, can save the USSR from collapse by binding its destiny with the destiny of the world proletarian revolution.”<sup>45</sup>

82. Two years after Hitler’s seizure of power, the Comintern swung sharply to the right. Without ever admitting to the errors in Germany, it turned from rejecting the united front to supporting the popular front. Whereas it had so far rejected any co-operation with reformist workers’ parties, it now endorsed alliances with purely bourgeois parties in the name of the fight against fascism. Thus the Stalinist bureaucracy completely separated the fate of the Soviet Union from the international class struggle. It relied on the support of allied bourgeois governments and instructed the respective communist parties to suppress any revolutionary struggles against their new allies. It feared that successful uprisings by the European working class could give the Soviet workers new courage and endanger its own rule. In 1943 it dissolved the Comintern.

83. With the transition to the popular front, the policy of the communist parties took on an openly counter-revolutionary character. In order not to deter its bourgeois popular front partners, it suppressed all the revolutionary efforts of the working class. In France, the popular front suffocated a powerful revolutionary offensive between 1936 and 1938 and secured the political survival of the bourgeoisie, which soon thereafter turned to openly repressive measures, and—under the Vichy regime—to collaboration with the Nazis. In

43 Writings of Leon Trotsky [1932-33], “KPD or New Party?”, New York 1972, p. 161

44 Writings of Leon Trotsky [1932-33], “The Collapse of the KPD”, New York 1972, p. 195

45 Writings of Leon Trotsky [1932-33], “It is necessary to build Communist Parties and an International anew”, New York 1972, p. 305-6, 310

Spain, the popular front suppressed every independent political initiative of the workers and peasants. While Franco's troops threatened the republic, the GPU, the Stalinist secret service, hunted down revolutionary workers behind the front, took thousands prisoner, and tortured and murdered them. Its numerous victims included the leader of the centrist POUM, Andres Nin, Trotsky's secretary Erwin Wolf and the Austrian socialist Kurt Landau. Stalin's counter-revolutionary policy finally helped Franco to secure victory.

84. Stalin's counter-revolutionary course culminated in the Great Terror of the years 1937 and 38. In a preventive civil war, he liquidated all of those around whom the opposition of the working class could have crystallized. Practically the entire leadership of the October revolution, the members of the Left Opposition, outstanding intellectuals and artists, capable engineers, as well as the leadership of the Red Army, were condemned to death during public show trials or in secret proceedings. They were then executed by being shot in the head. No other comparable political genocide has ever taken place. Nearly one million people lost their lives in the Great Terror, with Stalin's regime responsible for the deaths of more communists than Hitler's and Mussolini's together. To this day, the working class has not recovered from its political impact.

## XII. The Centrism of the SAP

85. The five years that lay between Trotsky's call for a new International and its founding in September 1938 were devoted to a process of intensive clarification. At its centre was a struggle against centrism, which sought to find a kind of middle road between Stalinism and Trotskyism, between reformist and revolutionary politics. The events in Germany had discredited the perspective of peaceful development and democratic reforms and unleashed a process of fermentation in the ranks of the reformist and Stalinist parties, a process that Trotsky sought to influence. "Reformism gives place to the innumerable shades of Centrism, which now, in the majority of countries, dominate the workers' movement," he wrote. "The new International cannot form itself in any other way than that of struggle against centrism. Ideological intransigence and flexible united front policy are, in these conditions, two weapons for attaining one and the same end."<sup>46</sup>

46 Leon Trotsky, "Two Articles On Centrism", <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/02/centrism.htm>

86. In the article "Centrism and the Fourth International", Trotsky elaborated the most important characteristics of centrism: in the sphere of theory it is impressive and eclectic, avoids theoretical obligations as much as possible and inclines "(in words) to give preference to 'revolutionary practice' over theory; without understanding that only Marxist theory can give to practice a revolutionary direction." In the sphere of ideology, centrism leads a parasitic existence. It utilises the arguments of the reformists against the Marxists and the arguments of the Marxists against the right, whereby it avoids the practical conclusions and dulls the tip of Marxist criticism. It detests "the revolutionary principle: State that which is", and inclines "to substituting, in the place of political principles, personal combinations and petty organizational diplomacy." It remains spiritually dependent on the right and hides its hybrid nature "by calling out about the dangers of 'sectarianism'; but by sectarianism it understands not a passivity of abstract propaganda but the anxious care for principle, the clarity of position, political consistency, definiteness in organization". It does not understand "that one cannot build in the present period a national revolutionary party save as part of an international party"; and in the choice of his international allies the centrist is "even less particular than in his own country". The centrist "swears by the policy of the united front as he empties it of its revolutionary content and transforms it from a tactical method into a highest principle." The centrist "gladly appeals to pathetic moral lessons to hide his ideological emptiness" without understanding "that revolutionary morals can rest only on the ground of revolutionary doctrine and revolutionary policy".<sup>47</sup>

87. All these characteristics were present in the Socialist Workers Party of Germany (SAP). In autumn 1931, the SAP was formed as a left split from the SPD and developed as a home for various currents that had found neither a place in the SPD nor in the KPD—left Social Democrats, former leaders of the USPD (among them Georg Ledebour), residues of the KAPD, defectors from the Leninbund and the KPD opposition (Brandlerites), and radical pacifists. For the masses "centrism is only a transition from one stage to the next", wrote Trotsky, however for individual politicians it became second nature. He characterized the

47 Ibid

leadership of the SAP as “a group of desperate Social Democratic functionaries, lawyers, and journalists.” However, “a desperate Social Democrat still does not mean a revolutionist.”<sup>48</sup>

88. The SAP did not have its own political programme. It did not rest on a common understanding of great historical events, whose lessons were inculcated in the flesh and blood of its cadre. The place of the programme was taken by the united front policy, which it transformed from a tactic into a strategy. Instead of fighting for a thought out revolutionary perspective, it advocated unity at any price, which led inevitably to adaptation to social democracy. Characteristic was its reproach that the KPD was splitting the trade unions by building the revolutionary trade union opposition (RGO). Trotsky, who also rejected the RGO policy, answered: “The fault of the Communist Party does not lie in that it ‘splits’ the ranks of the proletariat, and ‘weakens’ the Social Democratic unions. That is not a revolutionary criterion because, under the present leadership, the unions serve not the workers, but the capitalists. The Communist Party is guilty of a crime not because it ‘weakens’ Leipart’s organization but because it weakens itself. The participation of the Communists in reactionary unions is dictated not by the abstract principle of unity but by the concrete necessity to wage battle in order to purge the organizations of the agents of capital. With the SAP this active, revolutionary, attacking element in the policy is made subservient to the bald principle of the unity of unions that are led by agents of capital.”<sup>49</sup>

89. Under the blows of the Nazis, the SAP moved temporarily to the left. Max Seydewitz and Kurt Rosenfeld, two left Social Democrats, were replaced as party leaders by Jacob Walcher and Paul Frölich, two founding members of the KPD, who came from the KPD opposition led by Brandler. In August 1933, the SAP, together with the International Left Opposition and two Dutch parties, called for the formation of the Fourth International. The signatories of the “Declaration of Four” declared categorically, “that the new International cannot tolerate any conciliation towards reformism or centrism. The necessary unity of the working-class

48 Leon Trotsky, “What Next? Vital questions for the German proletariat”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next02.htm>

49 Ibid

movement can be attained neither by the blurring of reformist and revolutionary conceptions nor by adaptation to the Stalinist policy but only by combating the policies of both bankrupt Internationals. To remain equal to its task, the new International must not permit any deviation from revolutionary principles in the questions of insurrection, proletarian dictatorship, soviet form of the state, etc.”<sup>50</sup>

90. But in practice, the SAP sabotaged the construction of the Fourth International from the outset, openly moving away from it when the Stalinist parties turned towards the popular front. Under the title “Trotskyism or revolutionary Realpolitik” the SAP now stated that the establishment of the International did not yet lie in the realm of the possible. The vanguard could not jump over the stages of development of proletarian consciousness. “It would be senseless to believe that the masses would spontaneously one day—if not today then tomorrow—recognise the correctness of these principles and gather around them.” The homogeneity necessary for the International could result only from common experiences. “Abstract swearing by superficially acquired principles or by the figure of a leader” would only result in “a ridiculous caricature of real unanimity”. The theoretical basis of the new International consisted not of some pre-existing formulae, but could only be formed in the process of its emergence. In countries with a developed proletariat “the vanguard is formed not by the proclamation of some ‘correct’ but abstract principles, but through the permanent participation in the concrete daily struggles of the proletariat.”<sup>51</sup>

91. “Trotskyism or revolutionary Realpolitik” was the SAP’s answer to an open letter that Trotsky had addressed to all revolutionary groups and organizations in the summer of 1935. In it, Trotsky stressed that the construction of new parties and of the new International were the key to the solution of all other tasks. The speed and the timing of a new revolutionary development depended on the general process of the class struggle. “Marxists, however, are not fatalists. They

50 The Declaration of Four”, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/1930s/four.htm>

51 “Trotzkismus oder revolutionäre Realpolitik: eine notwendige Auseinandersetzung”, published by the foreign centre of the Socialist Workers Party of Germany. - Paris, approx. 1935

do not unload upon the historical process those very tasks which the historical process has posed before them. The initiative of a conscious minority, a scientific program, bold and ceaseless agitation in the name of clearly formulated aims, merciless criticism of all ambiguity—those are some of the most important factors for the victory of the proletariat. Without a fused and steeled revolutionary party a socialist revolution is inconceivable.”<sup>52</sup>

92. Among the SAP members who attacked Trotsky most aggressively was Willy Brandt, who later became German Chancellor and SPD chairman. At the time, the 22-year old was in charge of the headquarters of the SAP youth federation in Oslo, which he represented at the International Bureau of Revolutionary Youth Organizations. Brandt oversaw the expulsion of the Trotskyists from the International Youth Bureau and wrote articles accusing Trotskyism of the “worst sectarianism”. “In our opinion, the main distinction—a distinction of a principle nature—between us and the Trotskyists regards the development of the proletarian party and the relationship between party and class”, wrote Brandt. “For the Trotskyists, the task is to create an ideologically aligned ‘vanguard’ over the working class. For us, we face the duty of participating in the creation of a truly communist proletarian mass organization, on the foundations of the European workers’ movement, out of the practical lives and traditions of the working class in our country.”<sup>53</sup>

93. Brandt’s “foundations of the workers’ movement” were highly contaminated by Stalinism and social democracy. He defended the popular front politics of the Stalinists and endorsed collaboration with social democratic parties. In Spain, where he travelled in 1937 as a war correspondent, he criticized the centrist POUM from the right. Its errors were “mainly of an ultra-left, sectarian nature”, he claimed. It had not gone far enough in supporting the popular front. “The slogan should not be ‘against the popular front’, but ‘beyond the popular front.’”<sup>54</sup> The school of the SAP—and

its furious attacks on Trotskyism—prepared Brandt for his later role. In 1969, as the first social democratic chancellor of the Federal Republic, Brandt succeeded in integrating a majority of rebellious students into bourgeois society, while he marginalised leftwing elements with the Radikalenerlass (decree against radicals).

94. The fateful consequences of centrism finally became clear in the actions of the POUM in the Spanish civil war. The party of Andres Nin, which, like the SAP, belonged to the centrist London Bureau, subordinated itself to the Stalinists on all important questions, and joined the popular front government in Barcelona at the high point of the revolution. It served as a left fig leaf for the coalition of republicans, socialists, Stalinists and anarchists that was destroying the Spanish revolution, and thus blocked the way to a revolutionary perspective for the workers, who were continually rebelling against their old leaders. The defenders of the POUM, who ascribed the Spanish defeat to the supposed “immaturity” of the masses, were answered by Trotsky as follows: “The historical falsification consists in this, that the responsibility for the defeat of the Spanish masses is unloaded on the working masses and not those parties which paralyzed or simply crushed the revolutionary movement of the masses. The attorneys of the POUM simply deny the responsibility of the leaders, in order thus to escape shouldering their own responsibility. This impotent philosophy, which seeks to reconcile defeats as a necessary link in the chain of cosmic developments, is completely incapable of posing and refuses to pose the question of such concrete factors as programs, parties, personalities that were the organizers of defeat. This philosophy of fatalism and prostration is diametrically opposed to Marxism as the theory of revolutionary action.”<sup>55</sup>

### XIII. The founding the Fourth International

95. In September 1938, on the outskirts of Paris, the founding congress of the Fourth International took place. The founding document “The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International (the Transitional Programme)” was written by Trotsky.

furter Hefte 1/1987, P. 47/48

55 Leon Trotsky, “The class, the party and the leadership”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1940/xx/party.htm>

52 Open Letter for the Fourth International”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1935/xx/fi.htm>

53 In Marxistische Tribüne, Diskussionsblätter für Arbeiterpolitik, published by the SAP, Paris 1935-37

54 Willy Brandt, “Ein Jahr Krieg und Revolution in Spanien, Referat auf der Sitzung der erweiterten Parteileitung der SAP (1937)”, in Neue Gesellschaft, Frank-

It stated that “The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ‘ripened’; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.”<sup>56</sup>

96. The sceptics and centrists who regarded the construction of a new International as premature, and held that such an organization must come out of “great events”, were answered in the Transitional Programme: “The Fourth International has already arisen out of great events: the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history. The cause for these defeats is to be found in the degeneration and perfidy of the old leadership. The class struggle does not tolerate an interruption. The Third International, following the Second, is dead for purposes of revolution. Long live the Fourth International!” Even if the Fourth International was weak in numbers, “it is strong in doctrine, program, tradition, in the incomparable tempering of its cadres.” The Transitional Programme declared “uncompromising war” on the “bureaucracies of the Second, Third, Amsterdam and Anarcho-syndicalist Internationals, as on their centrist satellites”, and stated: “All of these organizations are not pledges for the future, but decayed survivals of the past.”<sup>57</sup>

97. In order to overcome the gulf between the maturity of the objective, revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard, the Transitional Programme formulated a set of economic and political demands—such as a sliding scale of wages, the nationalization of industry, the banks and agriculture, the arming of the proletariat, the formation of a workers’ and peasants’ government. These transitional demands represented a bridge, “stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.” They had the task of developing the revolutionary consciousness of the working class and were not meant to be an adaptation to the predominant consciousness. “The program must express the

objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers”, Trotsky emphasised. “It must reflect society as it is and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness.”<sup>58</sup>

98. Revisionist currents have repeatedly tried, ever since, to interpret the Transitional Programme in an opportunist manner by taking individual demands out of their context. Thus the American revisionist George Novack called the Transitional Programme a “versatile toolbox”, from which one could select, “like a good craftsman” the tool suitable for a certain task. In this way, every opportunist manoeuvre could be justified. But this is precisely not the sense of the transitional demands, which must never contradict the socialist perspective upon which they are based.

99. The persecution of Trotsky and the Fourth International escalated following the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. The revolutionary consequences of the First World War were still fresh in the minds of the leaders of the imperialist powers and the Soviet bureaucracy. Stalin feared that the war could unleash a revolutionary movement capable of bringing Trotsky back to power. In order to liquidate Trotsky and hinder the growth of the Fourth International, Stalinist agents penetrated the Trotskyist movement and murdered Trotsky’s close collaborators, including his son Leon Sedov. Trotsky himself was struck with an ice-pick in his house in Coyoacan, near Mexico city, by the GPU agent Ramon Mercader on August 20, 1940. He died one day later. With his death, international socialism suffered a severe blow. The most important figure in the Russian Revolution after Lenin, Trotsky was an irreconcilable opponent of Stalinism, the founder of the Fourth International and the last and greatest representative of the political, intellectual, cultural and moral tradition of classical Marxism, which had inspired the revolutionary workers’ movement at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

#### **XIV. The Second World War**

100. Like the First, the Second World War was an imperialist war. “It derived its origin inexorably from the contradictions of international capitalist interests”, Trotsky wrote in 1940. “Contrary to the official fables

56 Leon Trotsky, “The Transitional Program”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/transprogram.pdf>

57 Ibid

58 Leon Trotsky, cited in “The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International”, Labor Publications 1988, p74



designed to drug the people, the chief cause of war as of all other social evils—unemployment, the high cost of living, fascism, colonial oppression—is the private ownership of the means of production together with the bourgeois state which rests on this foundation.” So long, however, as the main productive forces of society were held by isolated capitalist cliques, Trotsky continued, “and so long as the national state remains a pliant tool in the hands of these cliques, the struggle for markets, for sources of raw materials, for domination of the world, must inevitably assume a more and more destructive character. State power and domination of the economy can be torn from the hands of these rapacious imperialist cliques only by the revolutionary working class.”<sup>59</sup>

101. As in 1914, the initiative in the struggle to re-divide the world emanated from Germany. Arriving on the imperialist world stage later than its rivals England and France, it tried in 1914 to create room for its dynamic productive forces by reorganizing Europe at the expense of its rivals—and thereby failed. The second attempt was better prepared—by a regime that suffocated every internal resistance and concentrated all its economic resources on the setting up of an enormous military machine.

102. However, the tremendous aggressiveness of German imperialism did not make the Allies’ war an anti-fascist one. In both the British and American ruling elite there had been substantial sympathy for Hitler before the outbreak of war, while the French ruling elite, after its military defeat, came to an arrangement with the German occupying forces. With the exception of the Soviet Union, the Allies pursued their own imperialist goals. England fought for the defence of its colonies and former supremacy. The United States intervened in order to secure its global hegemony in Europe and the Pacific. Hitler’s goal of smashing the Soviet Union was met in the US and England with considerable sympathy. But in view of the threat of German supremacy, they allied with the Soviet Union—which made the biggest sacrifices in the war—and postponed their confrontation with the USSR to a later date.

103. For its part, the Stalinist bureaucracy did everything to prove to its allies that it had no revolutionary intentions. From 1935 onwards it had supported “democratic” bourgeois regimes in the name of the popular front against fascism. Then, in 1939, Stalin entered into a pact with Hitler and handed over to him numbers of German Communists. After Hitler had broken the pact and attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, the communist parties unconditionally supported the warring bourgeoisie and suppressed every expression of the class struggle. In the occupied countries, they subordinated the anti-fascist resistance to rightwing bourgeois figures such as general de Gaulle. In the colonial countries they demanded that the national movements provide support to their colonial oppressors in the war. And in the Soviet Union they appealed not to the class consciousness of the workers, but to Russian nationalism. Up to this day the Second World War is still identified in Russian by the Stalinist term the “Great Patriotic War”.

104. The Trotskyists conducted a courageous and heroic struggle against fascism and war. Persecuted by the Nazis and Stalinists, they participated in the anti-fascist resistance and strove to place it on a proletarian class basis. The German Trotskyists, who from October 1933 called themselves the International Communists of Germany (IKD), had early on prepared for illegality. They had approximately one thousand supporters when Hitler seized power. Some well-known leaders, who had to reckon with their arrest, went into exile. A committee abroad led the work in close co-operation with the International Secretariat under Leon Sedov. It published the newspaper *Unser Wort* (Our Word), which was distributed illegally into Germany. In particular, members of the Dresden group of the IKD smuggled many of the most important works of Trotsky over the Czechoslovakian border for underground distribution in Germany—at the risk of their lives.

105. Many members of the IKD were murdered by the National Socialists or incarcerated in concentration camps. In autumn 1935, there was a wave of arrests of German Trotskyists. The Gestapo uncovered cells in Gelsenkirchen, Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Kassel, Magdeburg, Dresden and Danzig. Approximately 150 were sent to prison or to concentration camps. In

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59 “Manifesto of the Fourth International on Imperialist War and The Proletarian World Revolution”, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>

the summer of 1936, the superior regional court in Hamm condemned 23 members of the IKD to a total of 70 years detention. Three prominent members of the Gelsenkirchen group were condemned by the Volksgerichtshof (people's court). In January 1937, in the free city of Danzig, ten Trotskyists were brought before the court and sentenced. They had called for "the overthrow of fascism by the armed might of the proletariat". "The organization of workers in the industrial enterprises, in the unemployment offices, and in the forced labor camps to resist and actively struggle against National Socialism—that is the sole means of overthrowing fascism", read one of their flyers.<sup>60</sup>

106. In 1938, the IKD was represented by two delegates at the founding conference of the Fourth International. In occupied France, German and French Trotskyists jointly circulated the newspaper *Arbeiter und Soldat* (Worker and Soldier) among German troops. In contrast to the Stalinists, who subordinated themselves to the bourgeois national resistance, the Trotskyists fought for an alliance of the European workers, which included the German working class. The publisher of *Arbeiter und Soldat*, Widelin (Martin Monat), was later murdered by the Gestapo.

107. Widelin represented the German section in February 1944 at a six-day, secret conference of the Fourth International in occupied France, which elected a European executive committee and agreed upon extensive perspectives resolutions. The conference assumed the war would culminate in a revolutionary crisis. While it rejected alliances of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, it supported the resistance struggle against the German occupying forces: "The proletariat supports this struggle in order to facilitate and hasten its transformation into a general struggle against capitalism. This position implies the most energetic fight against attempts of the agents of the national bourgeoisie to win the masses and use their support to rebuild the capitalist state and army. Everything possible must be done, on the contrary, to develop the embryonic workers' power (militias, committees, etc.) at the same time as the most vigorous struggle is pursued against all forms of nationalism."<sup>61</sup>

60 Writings of Leon Trotsky [1936-37], "The Trial of the Danzig Trotskyists", New York 1970, p, 287

61 "Theses on the Liquidation of World War II and the Revolutionary Upsurge", <http://www.marx.org/history/>

## **XV. The counterrevolutionary role of Stalinism after the end of the war**

108. The end of the war brought an upturn in the class struggle. Anti-capitalist sentiments were widespread throughout Europe. In Germany, cities and factories lay in ruins. The elite in big business, the state and politics was deeply implicated in the crimes of the Nazi regime, which was responsible for a war of aggression costing 80 million lives, and for committing the greatest genocide in world history. The ruling classes of Italy, France and numerous Eastern European countries had been discredited by their collaboration with the Nazis. A general feeling prevailed that the old social order had failed. The link between Nazi crimes and capitalism was so obvious that it even found expression in conservative party programmes. In 1947, for example, the Ahlen Programme of the CDU advocated the nationalisation of the mines and a planned economy.

109. In this situation, the Soviet regime and its network of Stalinist parties played the crucial role in preventing the working class from seizing power. Stalin feared a socialist revolution in Europe, because it would encourage the Soviet working class and endanger his own despotic regime. At the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, he agreed to the division of Europe, leaving Western Europe under bourgeois rule. The Stalinists used all their political authority to suppress the class struggle. In Eastern Europe, the Kremlin established control over a series of dependent "buffer states" and took over the job of holding the working class in check. In Western Europe, the Stalinist parties threw all their political weight behind the defence of bourgeois rule. In Italy and France, where the communist parties had mass influence, they joined the bourgeois postwar governments led by Marshall Badoglio and General de Gaulle. In Italy, the leader of the PCI, Palmiro Togliatti, assumed the post of justice minister and personally drafted a law for the amnesty of fascists. In Greece, the Soviet bureaucracy refused to provide much-needed support to the rebellious workers and so guaranteed the victory of the bourgeoisie in the civil war.

110. In Germany, out of the cadre of the once largest communist party outside the Soviet Union, only a few had survived the war. Most had fallen victim not to Hitler, but to Stalin. Of several tens of thousands of

foreign communists who had lived in the Soviet Union in the mid-thirties, only one in ten escaped the Stalinist purges, according to Leopold Trepper.<sup>62</sup> The most well-known leaders of the KPD in exile in Moscow—including Heinz Neumann, Hermann Remmele and Hugo Eberlein, a close comrade of Rosa Luxemburg and a German delegate to the first congress of the Comintern—were tortured, condemned to death and shot. Ernst Thälmann, who was killed in 1944, had remained in the Nazis' dungeons for 11 long years, although Stalin could have obtained his freedom in 1939 during the Stalin-Hitler Pact. Those who survived had unconditionally subordinated themselves to Stalin or had denounced their comrades. It was they who now led the KPD and (in the case of Herbert Wehner) also the SPD.

111. In its founding document, the KPD professed its support for “the completely unhindered development of free trade and private entrepreneurial initiatives on the basis of private property”. The “Ulbricht group”, which had returned with the Red Army from exile in Moscow in order to take over the leadership of the KPD, dissolved the spontaneously established anti-fascist and factory committees and replaced them with administrative bodies that included bourgeois forces. “The dissolving of the anti-fascist committees was nothing other than the destruction of the initial beginnings of a perhaps powerful, independent anti-fascist and socialist movement”, wrote Wolfgang Leonhard, at that time a member of the “Ulbricht Group”.<sup>63</sup>

112. The Stalinists' betrayal provided the necessary breathing space for the US to stabilise capitalism in war-ravaged Western Europe. In so doing, the US had two aims: the containment of the Soviet Union and the opening up of new possibilities for the expansion of US capital. After the initial years of crisis, bringing in progressive American production methods, supplying funds under the Marshall Plan and introducing a new international currency system based on the US dollar set into motion a sustained economic recovery. The working class was pacified by a definite improvement in its living standards and the expansion of social

and welfare gains. Wages in West Germany rose five times over between 1959 and 1971, with fewer working hours and improved pension and health benefits.

113. The betrayals of Stalinism combined with the marked improvement in working class living standards gave a new lease of life to social democracy and the trade unions. In West Germany, the KPD gradually lost its initial influence—particularly after the repression of the GDR workers' uprising of June 17, 1953. The SPD re-emerged as the leading party of the working class while, at the same time, it moved programmatically further to the right. Kurt Schumacher, who took over the leadership of the party after the war, “drew three conclusions from the downfall of the Weimar Republic: first, the social democrats must never again allow any doubts to emerge about their patriotism; secondly, they must win over the middle classes, and thirdly, they must draw a clear line between themselves and the German communists dependent on Moscow.”<sup>64</sup> In 1959, in Bad Godesberg, the SPD finally bade farewell to any reference to Marxism and the working class. From then on, it designated itself (like the CDU) as a people's party, no longer as a socialist workers' party.

114. The trade unions were re-established after the war under the strict control of the occupying powers. They adapted their rhetoric to the radical mood among the workers; thus, the DGB's founding programme in 1949 called for the nationalisation of key industries and banks and for overall economic planning. But in practice, the unions limited themselves to the demand for Mitbestimmung (co-determination), which developed into an institutionalised form of class collaboration. The firm integration of the trade union bureaucracy into the leadership of the large corporations, legally secured by the laws on Mitbestimmung and Betriebsräte (Works Councils), and their close co-operation with the state, became a permanent component of the “Rhenish model”, which rested on “industrial peace” and “social partnership” in order to increase the competitiveness of German industry. When the unions organised labour disputes—like the 1956-57 16-week metalworkers' strike in Schleswig-Holstein that won

62 Leopold Trepper, “The Great Game”

63 Wolfgang Leonhard, “Die Revolution entlässt ihre Kinder”, Cologne, p397

64 Heinrich August Winkler, “Der lange Weg nach Westen. Zweiter Band. Deutsche Geschichte vom ‘Dritten Reich’ bis zur Wiedervereinigung”, Munich 2000, p124

the right to continued pay in periods of sickness—they made sure that the foundations of capitalism were in no way endangered.

115. In East Germany, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, the Stalinist occupying power initially had no intention of abolishing capitalist property relations, and did so only in certain key areas. Thus, in East Germany, as part of the 1945 campaign to “Place the Junkers’ land in peasants’ hands”, all landed property of over 100 hectares was nationalised without compensation, with the land handed over to more than half a million agricultural workers, evacuees and small farmers. This land reform, which was highly popular, destroyed the material basis of the Junkers, who had formed the backbone of political reaction and the military apparatus in the Wilhelminian empire and the Weimar Republic. Apart from this measure, the Kremlin did not systematically challenge bourgeois property and even allowed bourgeois layers to participate in East European governments with the aim of restraining the working class. Stalin sought to establish a chain of buffer states, dependent on Moscow and forming a protective shield for the Soviet Union, but not necessarily adopting the Soviet Union’s model of society. In Germany, Stalin even contemplated for some time the option of a united bourgeois state independent of both the eastern and the western blocs.

116. However, the stabilisation of Western Europe and the onset of the Cold War, with the growing economic, political and military pressure associated with it, put a stop to such plans. From 1948 onwards, the Stalinist bureaucracy came under increasing pressure from two sides. On the one hand, the working class rebelled against the escalating pressures at work and political oppression imposed by Stalin’s henchmen in Eastern Europe, in response to the West’s strengthening economy. On the other hand, these henchmen oriented themselves increasingly to the West, seeking more independence from Moscow. Moscow reacted by removing the bourgeois elements from Eastern European governments, purging “unreliable” layers from the communist parties, implementing extensive nationalisations and establishing regimes based on the Stalinist model. It was in this context that the German Democratic Republic was founded in the Soviet occupied zone on October 7, 1949.

117. The large-scale nationalisations that followed throughout Eastern Europe were a concession to the working class. The transition of industry and the banks into the hands of the state created the conditions for a planned utilisation of economic resources and guaranteed the masses a relatively high degree of social security. Despite the arbitrary methods of the bureaucracy, the nationalised forms of property yielded considerable returns into the 1970s. By 1953, the production of steel in East Germany was double what it was prior to the Second World War, and in 1969, the GDR, with a population of 17 million, produced more than the prewar German Reich, with its 60 million inhabitants. Between 1950 and 1974, production increased seven times over, although the GDR had considerable disadvantages compared to the FRG, because of the systematic removal of industrial plants to the Soviet Union and because it had no access to Marshall Plan funds and modern American methods of production.

118. The nationalisations were not, however, accompanied by a political strengthening of the working class. Quite the opposite. The Stalinist elite intensified its political repression and economic exploitation of the working class by imposing incentive wages and higher production targets. The result was the first proletarian mass rebellion against Stalinism, which broke out in the GDR on June 17, 1953. The protest by East Berlin construction workers against the lifting of work rates developed, within 24 hours, into a mass strike that was bloodily suppressed by Soviet troops and tanks. More than 100 workers were shot. Hundreds of participants and strike leaders were arrested as “counter-revolutionary agents” and thrown into prison for years. Six strike leaders were condemned to death.

## **XVI. The division of Germany**

119. The division of Germany was an important precondition for both the stabilisation of European capitalism and the maintenance of control over the working class. Fears of an overly powerful Germany had characterised the history of Europe since 1871. Now, the Federal Republic was only half the size of the erstwhile German Reich. A quarter of its territory had gone to the Soviet Union and Poland, and another fifth constituted the GDR. The Federal Republic’s population was only slightly higher than that of France, Italy or Great Britain. This was the prerequisite for its

integration into an economic alliance with its western neighbours that would finally develop into the European Union. The German working class, with its long Marxist tradition, had been split apart. In the GDR, the SED suppressed any independent political movement from below. In the FRG, the SPD declared its total obeisance to capitalism, exploited the repression of the East German working class in its propaganda and encouraged anti-communism, while at the same time suffocating any attempt at a joint mobilisation of workers in the east and west of the country. In 1953, the SPD prevented any spread of the workers' uprising from East to West Berlin. In 1956, when Soviet troops moved in to crush the Hungarian workers' revolt, and great numbers of West Berlin workers marched in solidarity towards the Brandenburg gate, the former SAP functionary and later German chancellor Willy Brandt (SPD) personally held them back. With the onset of Brandt's Ostpolitik, the SPD leadership developed close links with the SED, while the West German government assisted the GDR regime with billions in credit.

120. The ruling bureaucracy of the GDR was highly conscious of its antagonism to the socialist strivings of the working class. This was reflected in the fact that the GDR was not founded in the name of socialism. Instead, the emphasis was placed on nationalism. Conscious attempts were made to integrate right-wing forces; former members and officers of the NSDAP were given amnesties and permitted to found their own party, the NDPD (National Democratic Party of Germany). The founding manifesto of the parliament of the GDR bore the title "The National Front of democratic Germany" and made no mention of socialism as an aim of state policy. Between 1948 and 1951, the SED expelled from its ranks several tens of thousands of former workers and old communists who had links to the revolutionary past of the KPD and the working class, as well as former social democrats. They were replaced with faithful party apparatchiks. At the start of the 1950s, the great majority of the SED membership consisted of functionaries from the party, state and industry. It was only after the bureaucracy had secured its dictatorship that the SED announced it would proceed with the "planned establishment of the foundations of socialism in the GDR".

121. However, the GDR lacked the most elementary

conditions for the construction of a socialist society: workers' democracy and access to the world economy. If it could not be established "in a single country" in the much bigger Soviet Union, socialism could certainly not be built in the GDR, with its 17 million inhabitants. This fact was not altered by the GDR's economic relations with other Eastern European countries, which remained little developed and subject to bureaucratic arbitrariness. The fundamental problems of the GDR fully emerged as the economic situation gradually began to improve. The construction of a highly developed industrial society required access to the technology and division of labour of the world economy. The bureaucracy sought to resolve this problem by establishing close relations with the FRG. Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik enabled the GDR to acquire Western loans and technology, while West Germany obtained new markets for its products in the east. The GDR's foreign trade with capitalist countries began to grow much more rapidly than its trade with COMECON countries. At the end of the 1970s, 30 percent of GDR trade was with the West, including 10 percent with the FRG. The country increasingly developed into an extended workbench for West European industry, and the result was a definite improvement in living standards. The lack of consumer goods visibly eased. But by utilising the resources of the world economy, the GDR became vulnerable to its fluctuations and crises. It was not able to keep up with the rapid growth in labour productivity augured by computer technology and the globalisation of production. Between 1973 and 1986, the GDR's world share of industrial exports fell from 3.9 to just 0.9 percent, while its dependence on Western loans increased. The economic situation appeared increasingly hopeless.

122. The SED rejected a revolutionary perspective for the West German working class. In the mid-1960s, the party endeavoured to cut off East German workers from the militant struggles and protests carried out by workers and students in the FRG. At the peak of these struggles, in 1968, a deal was reached between East Germany and the West German Justice Ministry to readmit the banned KPD under the new name DKP. The DKP, which remained politically and financially dependent on the East German bureaucracy, bitterly opposed revolutionary movements in West Germany and functioned as a police force for the trade union bureaucracy.

123. Official West German propaganda presented the FRG as an exemplary democratic state. But the Federal Republic was just as little the result of the democratic completion of the bourgeois revolution as the Weimar Republic had been. Its founding was accompanied by the rehabilitation of the old elites, who were needed in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. After the conviction of some prominent Nazis in the Nuremberg trials, legal proceedings against war criminals ceased. Likewise, de-nazification measures in the state apparatus. Business magnates who had been condemned were allowed to keep their fortunes and continue their activities. In the legal apparatus, no one at all was brought to account. In business, the judiciary, the administration, and in the universities of the Federal Republic, one could find numerous former pillars of the Nazi regime.

124. The mass of the population was excluded from direct involvement in the establishment of the new state. There was no elected constituent assembly; the Grundgesetz was written by an expert committee and then ratified by the state parliaments. There was no popular vote. The Grundgesetz contains numerous restrictions on the sovereignty of the people. The tradition of Prussian authoritarianism was expressed “in restrictions of the lawmakers and of the voters’ will that are probably without parallel in any other democratic constitution”.<sup>65</sup> Thus, parties can be banned for being unconstitutional and fundamental rights forfeited. Certain Grundgesetz articles possess an eternal character and cannot be changed either by the people or by parliament. The core of democracy is defined not as the protection of the citizen from arbitrary state actions, but as the protection of the state from the will of the people. The state embodies “wehrhafte Demokratie” (militant democracy) and is obliged to oppose the will of the people and “to protect majorities from themselves in that it may withdraw certain inalienable values and freedom-securing institutions from their will”.<sup>66</sup> This was justified with the thesis of the “collective guilt” of the German people for the crimes of National Socialism.

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65 Heinrich August Winkler, “Der lange Weg nach Westen. Zweiter Band. Deutsche Geschichte vom ‘Dritten Reich’ bis zur Wiedervereinigung”, Munich 2000, p133

66 Ibid.

125. The authoritarian tendencies of the Grundgesetz found their sharpest expression in the banning of the KPD in 1956 and the Emergency Laws adopted by the CDU/CSU and SPD in 1968, at the height of the French general strike. The KPD prohibition “was a political decision, arising from the anti-communist state doctrine of the young Federal Republic”.<sup>67</sup> After pages of quotes from Marxist classics, the Federal Constitutional Court declared “Marxism-Leninism” to be incompatible with the “free democratic basic order as defined by the Grundgesetz”. It thereby created a precedent for the ruthless persecution of any political tendency that invokes revolutionary Marxism and fights against capitalism. Approximately 7,000 KPD members received prison sentences, some for several years. In some cases, the courts considered it an aggravating circumstance if the accused had already been locked up in the Third Reich for KPD membership. KPD members were banned from following their profession (Berufsverbot) and had their passports withheld; communist students were not permitted to take their university exams. Parents had their child care accreditation revoked because of their political views. Survivors of the war had their legal pension payments cancelled; compensation for those who had suffered injustice under the Nazis was refused, disallowed or had to be paid back. The Emergency Laws, which still apply today, gave the government the power to set aside constitutionally guaranteed basic rights and establish a semi-dictatorial regime.

## **XVII. The founding of the International Committee**

126. The post war events posed new political and theoretical challenges for the Fourth International that led to the emergence of new revisionist tendencies. In 1942, a group of German Trotskyists, who had emigrated to the US, had published “Three Theses on the Political Situation and the Political Tasks” which drew very pessimistic conclusions from the defeats of the working class and ruled out the perspective of socialism until the distant future. Rather than comprehending National Socialism as an expression of the decay of capitalism the “retrogressionists” saw it as the birth

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67 Christoph Seils, “Geist der NS-Zeit”, ZEIT online 17.8.2006

of a new social system, a modern form of “slave state”, which had propelled human development backwards by generations. Before there could be any consideration of socialism, an epoch of national democratic revolutions was on the agenda, in which the working class would play no independent role, but rather subordinate itself unconditionally to bourgeois-led resistance movements. The theses of the retrogressionists, which had much in common with the pessimistic conclusions drawn at the same time by leading representatives of the Frankfurt School, amounted to an argument in favour of class collaboration of the People’s Front variety.<sup>68</sup>

127. While the retrogressionists and similar tendencies quickly quit the ranks of the Fourth International, the growth of an opportunist tendency led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel produced a major split in 1953. The orthodox Trotskyists, who organised themselves in the International Committee, regarded the stabilization of capitalism as a temporary phenomenon, a product of the combined betrayals of Stalinism and social democracy and the resultant defeats of the working class. They defended the program of the Fourth International and sought ways and means to break the working class from the influence of the bureaucratic apparatuses, and, in this way, prepare for future class struggles. The Pabloite opportunists capitulated to the strengthened bureaucratic apparatuses and ascribed to them a progressive character, thereby liquidating the program of the Fourth International.

128. The conflict developed over the assessment of the states that had been formed at the end of the 1940s in Eastern Europe. The Fourth International hesitated to term the GDR and other so-called “People’s Republics” workers’ states. The nationalizations were not sufficient, by themselves, for such a definition. Equally important was who had carried them out, and in whose favour and under what conditions. Finally, the Fourth International decided upon the definition “deformed workers’ states”. The term “workers’ states” was utilised to acknowledge that capitalist private property had been eliminated through the expropriation of large estates and capital holdings, and that the property relations developed in this way had to be defended. But

the emphasis was on the term “deformed”. From their very birth, these states exhibited major deformations, which weighed far more heavily than the progressive character of the nationalizations. They lacked the most important precondition for a socialist society—the active and democratic participation of the working class. There were neither Soviets nor other organs of workers’ democracy. The bureaucracy, a privileged caste, exercised a dictatorship, controlling not only the state and political parties, but also the trade unions. The working class had neither political nor any independent union representation.

129. What weighed even more heavily was the damage caused by the Stalinists’ crimes to the socialist consciousness of the international working class. The catastrophic defeats in Germany, Spain and other countries, for which Stalinism was responsible; the execution of tens of thousands of communists in the context of the Moscow Trials, and finally the suppression of workers’ rebellions in the GDR, Poland and Hungary, repelled millions of workers from supposed communism and pushed them back into the arms of social democracy. “From the world point of view, the reforms realized by the Soviet bureaucracy in the sense of an assimilation of the buffer zone to the USSR weigh incomparably less in the balance than the blows dealt by the Soviet bureaucracy, especially through its actions in the buffer zone, against the consciousness of the world proletariat, which it demoralizes, disorients and paralyzes by all its politics and thus renders it susceptible to some extent to the imperialist campaign of war preparations”, the Fourth International stated in 1949. “Even from the point of view of the USSR itself, the defeats and the demoralization of the world proletariat caused by Stalinism constitute an incomparably greater danger than the consolidation of the buffer zone constitutes a reinforcement.”<sup>69</sup>

130. This evaluation, however, was quickly challenged. Michel Pablo, Secretary of the Fourth International at the time, regarded the deformed workers’ states as the model for the transition from capitalism to socialism, which would take centuries. In place of the class struggle between the working class and the bourgeoisie, he posed the conflict between imperialism and the

68 On the views of the Frankfurt School see point 175; on the “retrogressionists” see David North, “The Heritage We Defend”

69 Quoted in: David North, “The Heritage We Defend”, [http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage\\_index.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage_index.shtml)

Soviet Union. “For our movement objective social reality consists essentially of the capitalist regime and the Stalinist world,”<sup>70</sup> he wrote in 1951, and claimed that a forthcoming war between the United States and the Soviet Union would take the form of a world-wide civil war, which would force the Soviet bureaucracy to play the role of midwife to the social revolution.

131. This perspective amounted to the liquidation of the Fourth International and its sections. If the Stalinist bureaucracy could be transformed into a tool for socialist revolution under the pressure of objective events, then the construction of independent revolutionary parties was rendered obsolete, and even a hindrance; then it was necessary to subordinate “all organizational considerations, of formal independence or otherwise, to real integration into the mass movement wherever it expresses itself in each country”. Pablo forced entire sections to dissolve themselves as independent organizations and enter Stalinist parties; a tactic that he called “entrism sui generis”.<sup>71</sup>

132. The Pabloites applied this same perspective to the reformist parties, the trade unions and the bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonial countries. Under the leadership of Ernest Mandel, the Pabloite United Secretariat specialized in finding theoretical and political formulae that ascribed a revolutionary role to the bureaucratic apparatuses and other nonproletarian forces. Pabloism substituted for Marxism the method of objectivism, which denies the significance of the party for the development of the world revolution: “The standpoint of objectivism is contemplation rather than revolutionary practical activity, of observation rather than struggle; it justifies what is happening rather than explains what must be done. This method provided the theoretical underpinnings for a perspective in which Trotskyism was no longer seen as the doctrine guiding the practical activity of a party determined to conquer power and change the course of history, but rather as a general interpretation of a historical process in which socialism would ultimately be realized under the leadership of nonproletarian forces hostile to the Fourth International. Insofar as Trotskyism was to be credited with any direct role in the course of events, it was merely as a sort of subliminal

mental process unconsciously guiding the activities of Stalinists, neo-Stalinists, semi-Stalinists and, of course, petty-bourgeois nationalists of one type or another.”<sup>72</sup>

133. Pabloite revisionism met with resistance inside the Fourth International. In 1952, the majority of the French section rejected Pablo’s course and were therefore bureaucratically expelled. In 1953, the American Socialist Workers Party subjected Pabloite revisionism to a devastating critique. In an open letter, SWP leader James P. Cannon turned to all orthodox Trotskyists around the world. He affirmed the principles on which the Fourth International had been based since its establishment, and summarized them as follows:

1. The death agony of the capitalist system threatens the destruction of civilization through worsening depressions, world wars and barbaric manifestations like fascism. The development of atomic weapons today underlines the danger in the gravest possible way.
2. The descent into the abyss can be avoided only by replacing capitalism with the planned economy of socialism on a world scale and thus resuming the spiral of progress opened up by capitalism in its early days.
3. This can be accomplished only under the leadership of the working class in society. But the working class itself faces a crisis in leadership although the world relationship of social forces was never so favorable as today for the workers to take the road to power.
4. To organize itself for carrying out this world-historic aim, the working class in each country must construct a revolutionary socialist party in the pattern developed by Lenin; that is, a combat party capable of dialectically combining democracy and centralism—democracy in arriving at decisions, centralism in carrying them out; a leadership controlled by the ranks, ranks able to carry forward under fire in disciplined fashion.
5. The main obstacle to this is Stalinism, which attracts workers through exploiting the prestige of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, only later, as it betrays their confidence, to hurl them either into the arms of the Social Democracy, into apathy,

70 David North, “The Heritage We Defend”, [http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage\\_index.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage_index.shtml)

71 Ibid

72 Ibid



or back into illusions in capitalism. The penalty for these betrayals is paid by the working people in the form of consolidation of fascist or monarchist forces, and new outbreaks of wars fostered and prepared by capitalism. From its inception, the Fourth International set as one of its major tasks the revolutionary overthrow of Stalinism inside and outside the USSR.

6. The need for flexible tactics facing many sections of the Fourth International, and parties or groups sympathetic to its program, makes it all the more imperative that they know how to fight imperialism and all its petty-bourgeois agencies (such as nationalist formations or trade union bureaucracies) without capitulation to Stalinism; and, conversely, know how to fight Stalinism (which in the final analysis is a petty-bourgeois agency of imperialism) without capitulating to imperialism.<sup>73</sup>

134. The Open Letter made clear the political consequences of Pabloite revisionism by referring to the GDR uprising of June 17, 1953. Pablo had reacted to the uprising by declaring that the leaders of the communist parties would now be forced to make “still more ample and genuine concessions to avoid risking alienating themselves forever from support by the masses and from provoking still stronger explosions.” The Open Letter commented: “Instead of clearly voicing the revolutionary political aspirations of the insurgent East German workers, Pablo covered up the counterrevolutionary Stalinist satraps who mobilized Soviet troops to put down the uprising. ... Instead of demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops—the sole force upholding the Stalinist government—Pablo fostered the illusion that ‘more ample and genuine concessions’ would be forthcoming from the Kremlin’s Gauleiters. Could Moscow have asked for better assistance as it proceeded to monstrously falsify the profound meaning of those events, branding the workers in revolt as ‘fascists’ and ‘agents of American imperialism,’ and opening a wave of savage repression against them?”<sup>74</sup>

135. The Open Letter came to the conclusion: “The lines of cleavage between Pablo’s revisionism and

orthodox Trotskyism are so deep that no compromise is possible either politically or organizationally.” It was time “for the orthodox Trotskyist majority of the Fourth International to assert their will against Pablo’s usurpation of authority.” Cannon’s Open Letter was supported, amongst others, by the British section and by the expelled French majority. It formed the basis for the foundation of the International Committee of the Fourth International.<sup>75</sup>

### **XVIII. The liquidation of the German section by Pabloism**

136. Despite their bloody persecution, the National Socialists and the Stalinists did not succeed in destroying the Trotskyist movement in Germany during the Second World War. As soon as the war came to an end, the International Communists of Germany (IKD) resumed political activity inside the country. The Berlin group alone comprised more than 50 members. Its leader, Oskar Hippe, who had survived the Nazi regime in Germany, was arrested in 1948 by the Stalinists, and spent the following eight years in East German prisons. But it fell to Pabloism to liquidate the German section, thereby interrupting its historical continuity. As a result, petty bourgeois and Stalinist currents were able to set the tone in the student movement of the 1960s unchallenged. When the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (Socialist Workers League) was established in 1971 as the German section of the International Committee, there were no longer any Trotskyist cadre in Germany.

137. After the war, the German Trotskyists opposed the collective guilt thesis of the Stalinists, which deflected attention away from their own responsibility in Hitler’s seizure of power, and made the working class responsible for fascism. They fought for the building of a new revolutionary party. A political platform of the IKD from 1948 reads: “The first and fundamental condition, from which each German socialist must proceed today, is the realization that the policy of the two traditional ‘workers’ parties,’ KPD-SED and SPD, has run into a dead end. In their actions, both parties are directed not by the interests of the working class, but by the great power interests of the Soviet bureaucracy and Western imperialism. Every attempt at ‘reforming’ one or both these parties is doomed to failure. ... After the collapse

73 Ibid

74 Ibid

75 Ibid

of the fascist regime, the creation of a new revolutionary party of the proletariat is the first task of a socialist policy in Germany.”<sup>76</sup>

138. But the IKD soon broke with this perspective. It called for the establishment of a centrist melting pot, or, as it formulated the task, “the aggregation of the independent left groups into an organization which is a visible factor for the workers.”<sup>77</sup> In 1951 it joined together with KPD members who supported the Yugoslav leader Tito, to form the Unabhängige Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (UAPD, Independent Labour Party of Germany). Its programme was limited to reformist demands and contained no reference to socialism or to the Fourth International. Despite financial support from Yugoslavia, the UAPD collapsed within a few months.

139. The IKD followed Pablo’s tactic of entrism *sui generis* and dissolved itself into the SPD. It explained that its goal was not to fight within the SPD for the program of the Fourth International: “In the present stage of the development of mass consciousness, discussions of program are not the centre of attention within the broad organizations.” The IKD attributed a revolutionary potential to the SPD. It was driven by “social forces ... independently of the will of their present leadership, into ever sharper confrontation with the entire bourgeoisie”. In the 1950s and 1960s the prominent German Pabloites Georg Jungclas and Jakob Moneta occupied important posts inside the SPD and trade union bureaucracy. They were in close contact with prominent SPD members such as Hans-Jürgen Wischniewski and Peter von Oertzen. Starting in 1962, Moneta edited the influential trade union newspapers *Metall* and *Der Gewerkschafter*. In 1961, when the SPD expelled the Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund (SDS, Socialist German Student Federation) from the party, the publication *Sozialistische Politik* (SOPO), controlled by the Pabloites, refused to defend them because it was afraid of being “included in the incompatibility resolutions and of being robbed of its existence.”<sup>78</sup>

140. Only in 1969—three years after the SPD had entered the grand coalition and a powerful extra-parliamentary opposition had developed against it—did the Pabloites again make an independent appearance, with the Gruppe Internationale Marxisten (GIM). They adapted completely to the leaders of the student movement. The editorial board members of the GIM’s newspaper *Was Tun?* included well-known SDS leaders such as Rudi Dutschke, Gaston Salvatore and Günter Amendt. In 1986, the GIM dissolved itself. The majority united with the Maoist KPD/ML into the Vereinigte Sozialistische Partei (VSP), while a minority went into the Greens. After German reunification, the most well-known German Pabloites joined the Party of Democratic Socialism and advised the successors to the SED around Gregor Gysi. For four years, Jakob Moneta sat on the PDS executive committee.

### **XIX. The defense of Trotskyism by the Socialist Labour League**

141. The international stabilisation of capitalism in the 1950s and 60s expanded the room to manoeuvre for reformist, Stalinist and bourgeois nationalist movements. Social reforms and the independence of former colonies encouraged illusions that policies based on national reforms could lead to long term improvements and help overcome the contradictions of capitalism. The International Committee fought uncompromisingly against such illusions and the corresponding pressure of revisionism. The leading role in this struggle was played by the British Trotskyists, under the leadership of Gerry Healy.

142. In 1963, the American SWP capitulated to Pabloism. It rejected all the principles that it had defended ten years earlier in the Open Letter, and fused with the Pabloites in the United Secretariat. The reunification took place without clarifying the points at issue in 1953; referring to a “new world reality” these were declared irrelevant. At the centre of the common view of the SWP and the Pabloites was that a workers’ state had developed in Cuba after the seizure of power by the bourgeois-nationalist guerrilla movement of Fidel Castro. The SWP drew the conclusion that the nationalizations carried out by the Castro regime meant a revolution could be made with “blunt weapons” under

76 “George Jungclas 1902-1975. Eine politische Dokumentation”, Hamburg: Junius 1980, pp150-151

77 *ibid.* p156

78 *Ibid.* p175, 190, 253

the leadership of “unconscious Marxists”, who would introduce socialism under the pressure of objective circumstances and without the active participation of the working class. The admiration of the SWP for Castroism and the guerrilla war in Latin America was accompanied by an adaptation to petty bourgeois protest politics in the United States.<sup>79</sup>

143. The British Socialist Labour League vigorously opposed the SWP. The claim that petty bourgeois guerrilla leaders could establish workers’ states without a trace of independent organs of rule of the working class placed the entire perspective of the proletarian revolution in question. In 1961, the SLL wrote in a letter to the SWP: “An essential of revolutionary Marxism in this epoch is the theory that the national bourgeoisie in under-developed countries is incapable of defeating imperialism and establishing an independent national state.” With reference to similar movements in Africa and Asia, the SLL continued: “It is not the job of Trotskyists to boost the role of such nationalist leaders. They can command the support of the masses only because of the betrayal of leadership by Social-Democracy and particularly Stalinism, and in this way they become buffers between imperialism and the mass of workers and peasants. The possibility of economic aid from the Soviet Union often enables them to strike a harder bargain with the imperialists, even enables more radical elements among the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois leaders to attack imperialist holdings and gain further support from the masses. But, for us, in every case the vital question is one of the working class in these countries gaining political independence through a Marxist party, leading the poor peasantry to the building of Soviets, and recognizing the necessary connections with the international socialist revolution. In no case, in our opinion, should Trotskyists substitute for that the hope that the nationalist leadership should become socialists. The emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves.”<sup>80</sup>

144. In another letter from the same year, the SLL categorically rejected any rapprochement with the

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79 See: David North, “The Heritage We Defend”, chapter 20 et seq., [http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage\\_index.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage_index.shtml)

80 Quoted in: David North, “The Heritage We Defend”, [http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage\\_index.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/IML/heritage/heritage_index.shtml)

Pabloites: “The greatest danger confronting the revolutionary movement is liquidationism, flowing from a capitulation either to the strength of imperialism or of the bureaucratic apparatuses in the Labour movement, or both. Pabloism represents, even more clearly now than in 1953, this liquidationist tendency in the international Marxist movement. ... It is because of the magnitude of the opportunities opening up before Trotskyism, and therefore the necessity for political and theoretical clarity, that we urgently require a drawing of the lines against revisionism in all its forms. It is time to draw to a close the period in which Pabloite revisionism was regarded as a trend within Trotskyism. Unless this is done we cannot prepare for the revolutionary struggles now beginning.”<sup>81</sup>

145. Just one year after the unification of the SWP and the Pabloites, the SLL’s warning was confirmed in Sri Lanka. In 1964, for the first time, a Trotskyist party, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), joined a bourgeois coalition government. The LSSP, which had previously enjoyed much support among Tamil, as well as Sinhalese workers, submitted to Sinhala chauvinism and thus heralded the fatal development that led to the twenty-six-year civil war, with nearly 100,000 victims. The Pabloite United Secretariat shared responsibility for this betrayal. It had systematically suppressed discussion over the opportunist course of the LSSP.

146. The systematic struggle waged by the British Trotskyists against the unification of the SWP with the Pabloites created the basis for the founding of the American Workers League (WL) and the Sri Lankan Revolutionary Communist League. The Workers League emerged from a minority faction led by Tim Wohlforth, which, between 1961 and 1964 fought against the growing opportunism of the SWP. The minority faction worked closely with the SLL and, based on the latter’s advice, sought to clarify the central questions of international perspective and avoid factional conflicts over secondary or organisational issues. Even after the unification congress of 1963, the minority fought for a principled political discussion inside the SWP. But the events in Ceylon exacerbated the conflicts inside the SWP. The minority was expelled after it demanded, in a letter to the SWP membership, a discussion over the betrayal of the LSSP. The minority went on to form the American Committee

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81 Ibid

for the Fourth International (ACFI) and, in November 1966, founded the Workers League. In Ceylon, Gerry Healy intervened personally to lead a political offensive against the betrayal of the LSSP. It won a response from the best layers of students who, following years of political clarification, founded the Revolutionary Communist League in 1968. The General Secretary of the RCL was Keerthi Balasuriya. Due to their long struggle against Pabloite opportunism, the cadre of the WL and RCL were deeply rooted in the principles of the Fourth International. This proved to be decisive in the struggle against the degeneration of the British section, which broke with the International Committee in 1985-86.

## **XX. The founding of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter**

147. In the 1960s, the postwar boom began to show clear signs of crisis. Europe and Japan emerged as economic rivals of American capitalism, and the US dollar came under increasing pressure. In 1966, a recession shook the world economy. In 1971, the US administration severed the link between gold and the dollar, thereby removing the ground from under the currency system that underpinned the postwar boom. In 1973, the world economy again fell into deep recession. The working class reacted to the deepening crisis with an international offensive that reached revolutionary dimensions (France 1968), shook the Stalinist regimes (Czechoslovakia 1969), forced the resignation of conservative governments (Great Britain 1974), led to the fall of dictatorships (Greece 1974, Portugal 1974, Spain 1975) and sealed the American defeat in Vietnam. In 1968, student revolts, attracting large sections of the younger generation, erupted in Germany, France, Italy, the US, Japan, Mexico and many other countries. The historic crisis of proletarian leadership remained, however, unresolved. The Stalinist, social democratic and trade union apparatuses disoriented and suppressed these mass struggles with the assistance of the Pabloite tendencies. They betrayed promising revolutionary opportunities and led them to defeat. The repercussions were particularly disastrous in Chile, where the government of the “Socialist” Allende, with the assistance of the Communist Party, prevented the working class from taking power until the military, led by General Augusto Pinochet, felt strong enough to take control of the situation. On September 11, 1973, Pinochet carried out a putsch, murdering thousands of workers as well

as Allende himself. The inability of the working class to overcome the obstacles erected by its old organisations provided the bourgeoisie with the necessary time to stabilise and reorganise its fragile world order. Disappointment over the fact that the working class was not able to resolve the crisis in a revolutionary way was exploited by the bourgeoisie from 1975 onwards for its counter-offensive.

148. In Germany, the turning point in the class struggle was heralded by a strike of metalworkers in Baden-Württemberg in 1963. The strikers not only demanded higher wages, but also passed resolutions against the planned Emergency Laws. Employers reacted by locking out hundreds of thousands of workers for the first time since 1928. In the Ruhr district, miners mobilised against pit closures. The coalition of Christian Democrats and Liberals under Ludwig Erhard proved unable to impose budget cuts on the working class. In 1966, it was replaced by the Grand Coalition. For the first time since the end of the 1920s, the bourgeoisie felt compelled to include the Social Democrats in government in order to maintain control over the working class. Willy Brandt took over the office of foreign minister and vice-chancellor in a cabinet headed by Kurt Georg Kiesinger (CDU), a former Nazi Party member. The most important task of the Grand Coalition was to pass the Emergency Laws. In opposition to this, a broad extra-parliamentary movement emerged that coalesced, in 1967-1968, into a student revolt. In 1969, a wildcat strike wave erupted in the steel industry that temporarily got out of the control of the trade union bureaucracy.

149. The political elite reacted by replacing the Grand Coalition with the Small Coalition and placing Brandt at the head of government. The FDP, which had, until then, stood on the right of the political spectrum, switched sides, assuring the government of the necessary majority. The former SAP member Brandt brought the situation under control through far-reaching social concessions. Generous collective wage agreements were awarded to workers in both the private and public sectors. Young people “were brought off the streets” through a reform and education programme. The percentage of high school graduates rose from 5 percent of all young people in the 1960s, to 30 percent in the 1970s. The number of jobs for high school and college graduates at universities, research

institutes, hospitals, schools, social institutions and public administration increased sharply. The influence of the SPD reached its peak in these years: in the 1972 federal election, it received 46 percent of the vote and had more than a million members. At the same time, Brandt ensured that those opposed to the bourgeois order were proscribed. The Radical Decree of 1972 placed restrictions on the employment of thousands of professionals in the public service on the basis of “doubts” as to their loyalty to “the free democratic basic order”. This exerted tremendous pressure to forswear anti-capitalist objectives and adapt to the status quo.

150. Brandt also provided an important service to the ruling elite in the area of foreign policy. He improved political and economic relations with Eastern Europe and terminated the blockade against East Germany. His Eastern Policy, which at first met with strong resistance in conservative circles, provided access to urgently required new markets in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, helping German business overcome the effects of the recession. Over the long term, the Eastern policy undermined the stability of the Eastern European regimes.

151. Against the backdrop of the class struggle offensive, the perspective of the International Committee found support in Germany. On September 18-19, 1971, a number of young workers and students founded the BSA in Hanover and were recognised by the International Committee as its German section. The resumption of the historical continuity of Trotskyism in Germany posed an enormous political and theoretical challenge. The betrayal of two mass parties, and the disasters that had resulted, had left deep traces in the consciousness of the German working class—as had the centrist inheritance of the USPD and SAP, the crimes of Stalinism, and the revival of Social-Democratic reformism. In addition, intellectual and cultural life was shaped by the anti-Marxist theories of the student movement. These challenges could not be resolved by tactical and organisational initiatives alone, no matter how correct these were in themselves. The building of a section of the International Committee in Germany required systematic programmatic, historical and theoretical work. Such a task was made more difficult by the growing opportunistic tendencies within the International Committee. The French

Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) had already turned away from the fight against Pabloism in the 1960s, and broke with the International Committee in 1971. The British section, which, due to its history, enjoyed pre-eminent political authority, went the same way in the 1970s. These developments placed major obstacles in the BSA’s way, pushing it into an opportunist direction. The BSA resisted this pressure, but it was only the split with the WRP, in the winter of 1985-1986, that enabled it to comprehensively assimilate the theoretical and political inheritance of the Fourth International.

## **XXI. The conflict with the OCI and the fraction fight in the IAK**

152. The BSA emerged out of a Marxist minority faction within the Gruppe Internationale Arbeiterkorrespondenz (IAK), which had developed from an initiative of the French OCI and had worked closely with it. In 1963, the OCI had sent a delegation to Germany to discuss the political lessons of the metal workers’ strike in Baden-Württemberg. The OCI representatives identified themselves clearly as Trotskyists, translating and circulating the Transitional Programme and organising discussions on Trotsky’s writings. They were in contact with a variety of people, including social democrats seeking a left image, such as Hans Matthöfer, later to become a federal minister, and foreign policy expert Karsten Voigt; radicalised political science and sociology students; but also workers, students and apprentices who were seriously looking for an alternative to social democracy and Stalinism. One of this group was an 18-year-old engineering apprentice, Ulrich Rippert, who joined the IAK in Frankfurt in 1969. Rippert is today chairman of the PSG. From the summer of 1965, a group of political science and sociology students from the Frankfurt Fetscher-Seminar, who were in close contact with the OCI, published a journal called International Worker Correspondence (IAK). At the end of the 1960s, they were joined by a student group from Bochum.

153. At this time, the OCI was still a section of the International Committee but was increasingly distancing itself politically. In the fight against the reunification of the SWP with the Pabloites in 1963, the OCI had played only a subordinate role, leaving the debate to the SLL. In 1966, at the Third World Congress of the

International Committee, the OCI supported a motion from the SLL that affirmed that the Fourth International had successfully repelled the efforts of the revisionists to destroy it. However, less than a year later, the OCI declared that the International Committee was “not the leadership of the Fourth International”, which had been destroyed “under the pressure of hostile class forces” and had to be rebuilt.<sup>82</sup> “Reconstruction of the Fourth International” became the slogan with which the OCI distanced itself from the programmatic principles defended by the International Committee against Pabloism. This was rejected by the British SLL: “The future of the Fourth International is represented in the stored-up hatred and experience of millions of workers for the Stalinists and reformists which betray their struggles.... Only the struggle against revisionism can prepare the cadres to take the leadership of the millions of workers drawn into the struggle against capitalism and against the bureaucracy.... The living struggle against Pabloism and the training of cadres and parties on the basis of this fight was the life of the Fourth International since 1952.”<sup>83</sup>

154. The SLL warned the OCI of the consequences of its scepticism towards the International Committee: “Now the radicalisation of the workers in Western Europe is proceeding rapidly, particularly in France.... There is always a danger at such a stage of development that a revolutionary party responds to the situation in the working class not in a revolutionary way, but by adaptation to the level of struggle to which the workers are restricted by their own experience under the old leadership, i.e. to the inevitable initial confusion. Such revisions of the fight for the independent Party and the Transitional Programme are usually dressed up in the disguise of getting closer to the working class, unity with all those in struggle, not poisoning ultimatums, abandoning dogmatism, etc.”<sup>84</sup>

155. This warning was to be confirmed in 1968. As the student revolt and the general strike led France to the edge of a revolution, the OCI reacted in a centrist, not a revolutionary manner. It did not challenge the

leadership of the Stalinists, who ultimately strangled the general strike. Their programme was limited to demands for the unity of the mutually hostile trade union federations and for “a central strike committee”, without connecting this to socialist demands. It systematically avoided the question of political power, even as workers called for a “popular government” and President de Gaulle fled abroad. The OCI never placed demands on the French Communist Party and the trade union CGT to form a government. A systematic agitation in this direction would have intensified the conflict between the workers and the Stalinists and strongly undermined their credibility.

156. Under the pressure of thousands of new members, who streamed into the party in 1968, the OCI moved sharply to the right in ensuing years and ended up being taken in tow by the Socialist Party. In 1971, the Socialist Party’s leadership was taken over by François Mitterrand, a bourgeois politician who had begun his political career under the Vichy regime and served in the Fourth Republic as a Minister of the Interior and Law. Mitterrand developed a political mechanism that permitted the French bourgeoisie to overcome the crisis of 1968 and to secure its rule in the decades that followed—the Alliance of the Left”, in which he included the French Communist Party. After Mitterrand’s election to the presidency in 1981, the Alliance of the Left took office, and with a few interruptions, led the government for the next 21 years. The OCI supported Mitterrand, celebrated the Alliance of the Left as the realisation “of the workers united front” and in 1971 sent numerous members into the Socialist Party. One of them, Lionel Jospin, worked closely with Mitterrand and finally became French prime minister in 1997. On the international level, the OCI formed a bloc with centrist organisations against the International Committee. In Bolivia, it defended the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) of Guillermo Lora, a Pabloite organisation, which placed confidence in the Stalinists and the “left” military regime of Juan José Torres, and so paved the way for the bloody military dictatorship of Hugo Banzer.

157. The rightward movement of the OCI resulted in fierce conflicts within the IAK. Initially, the IAK had distanced itself clearly from the SPD and the trade union bureaucracy. In the student movement—in contrast to the Stalinist and anarchist currents of the

82 “Statement by the OCI, May 1967” in “Trotskyism versus Revisionism”, Volume 5, London 1975, p.91-92

83 “Reply to the OCI by the Central Committee of the SLL, June 19, 1967”, in “Trotskyism versus Revisionism”, Volume 5, London 1975, p.107, 114

84 Ibid. p. 113-114

SDS—it fought for an orientation to the working class and stressed that this was possible only in the fight against social democracy and the trade union bureaucracy. Thus, it explained in 1968: “The workers’ bureaucracies help the ruling class in their task of isolating the struggle of the students. Only in the struggle against these bureaucracies can students make links to the struggles of the working class, by taking part in the fight for the building of the revolutionary organisations of the proletariat.”<sup>85</sup>

158. But shortly before Willy Brandt became chancellor in 1969, the IAK changed its position. The entire group joined the SPD and stated that one could establish a workers’ government with the help of this party: “The demand placed on the SPD for a workers’ government is not only a tactic to expose it. We assume rather that the intensification of the class struggle will force the apparatuses to break more completely with the bourgeoisie than they originally intended on the basis of their counter-revolutionary ideology. So a social-democratic workers’ government is quite possible, i.e. it is possible when the control of social-democracy over the working masses can only be maintained by a social-democratic government carrying out policies which limit the power of individual capitalists or groups of capitalists.”<sup>86</sup> This was a classic Pabloite formulation: The way to workers’ power was not through the independent mobilisation of the working class under the banner of the Fourth International; the same goal could be achieved through the SPD, if the working class exerted appropriate pressure on it.

159. The IAK expressly rejected the fight for a socialist perspective within the SPD. Instead, it limited itself to trade union demands, which it termed “transitional demands”: “As the masses take up transitional demands in the first stage of their mobilisation without being conscious of the fight for the conquest of power, so we develop an organisation around the Social-Democratic Worker without demanding that the workers join the Fourth International and accept its full programme. We are, however, always ready to openly fight for its full programme. The tendency and, at a later point, organisation to be built around the Social-Democratic

Worker is not based on the programme of the Fourth International.”<sup>87</sup> While the bourgeoisie depended on Willy Brandt to contain the offensive of the working class and youth, the IAK subordinated itself to the SPD and provided it with a left cover.

160. The IAK also developed a political formula to support Brandt’s Ostpolitik. It had originally called for the reunification of Germany by the working class on a socialist basis, but from 1969 onwards it called for immediate reunification without any preconditions. In the first issue of its fraction paper in the SPD, it stated in the spring of 1971, that “the entire German working class” had given the task to Willy Brandt to stand up for “national self-determination” and “immediate reunification.”<sup>88</sup> It thus justified the penetration of German capital into Eastern Europe, the core of Brandt’s Ostpolitik, and substituted the left opposition to Stalinism with the right-wing anti-communism of the SPD. Twenty years later, when the SED regime collapsed and Willy Brandt stood beside Helmut Kohl to push for German unity, the successors of the IAK used openly anti-communist language, characterising the GDR as a “prison for 17-18 million German women, men and children”, while celebrating the fall of the wall as a triumph “of the German people (Volk)”, who could “now finally jointly celebrate its unity.”<sup>89</sup>

161. In close cooperation with the British SLL, a Marxist minority fraction was formed in 1970 against this rightward course. It founded the BSA one year later. The minority rejected subordination to the SPD. In its founding manifesto, the BSA affirmed its irreconcilable opposition to the social-democratic bureaucracy and the need to develop an independent revolutionary

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87 Internes IAK-Bulletin March 1971. “Sozial-demokratischer Arbeiter” (Social-Democratic Worker) was the name originally planned for the paper issued by the IAK inside the SPD. But finally it appeared under the name “Sozialistische Arbeiterpolitik - Organ für eine Arbeiterpolitik in der SPD” (Socialist Workers’ Policies – Organ for Workers’ Policies inside the SPD).

88 “Wer wir sind und was wir wollen”, in “Sozialistische Arbeiterpolitik – Organ für eine Arbeiterpolitik in der SPD”, 1. Mai 1971

89 Manifesto of the “Vereinigung der Arbeitskreise für Arbeitnehmerpolitik und Demokratie im vereinten Deutschland” (VAA) for the 1990 Federal Election, quoted in “Das Ende der DDR”, Arbeiterpresse Verlag, S. 447

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85 Adresse der IAK an die außerordentliche Delegierten-Konferenz des SDS, March 1968, in the pamphlet “Der Kampf der Studenten und die Rolle des SDS”

86 IAK No. 28. March 1970

party: “The working class faces the danger of entering into revolutionary struggles without a clear consciousness of the real perspective of capitalism and with illusions in the cowardly class compromise policies of the old leaderships.... Each struggle against the Concerted Action and wage policies of the government, against the new industrial relations legislation, against rationalisation measures and the closure of factories, against short-time work and unemployment, against high rents and against cuts to public services must be concentrated on the building of an alternative leadership of the working class.”

162. The fraction fight within the IAK intensified rapidly in 1971. At a summer school in Fallingbostal, near Hanover, in which representatives of the SLL and the American Workers League participated, fierce disputes erupted over Lenin’s *What Is to Be Done?* The IAK majority designated Lenin’s view, that socialism had to be brought into the working class from outside, as “out-right idealism” and put forward a spontaneous conception. The task of Marxists was to unite all spontaneous struggles. This was the essence of “the strategy of the united workers’ front”. From the spontaneous struggles, natural organisers of the working class would develop. It was necessary to build committees and forms of action where these natural organisers could rally and, on the basis of their own experiences, develop into Marxists. The minority declared war on these conceptions. In a letter, “On the meaning of the minority fraction,” it wrote: “The principled fight against the petit bourgeois mixture of radical protest and opportunist adaptation to the interests of the traitorous trade union bureaucracies, embodied in the leadership of the IAK, is at its core a fight against an entire tendency in our society that prevents the working class and youth from finding their way to Marxism. This tendency comprises numerous independent groups and tendencies in the SPD (Jusos) and trade unions. The theoretical and political fight against these tendencies, born and nourished from the petit bourgeois student movement, is indispensable for the development of Marxism in Germany.”<sup>90</sup>

163. In 1971, the OCI openly opposed the International Committee. In July, it organised an international youth meeting in Essen, to which it invited centrist and openly right-wing organisations. Together with them, it opposed an SLL motion that affirmed the historical

90 Letter “Über den Sinn der Minderheitsfraktion”, 26. Mai 1971

continuity of the International Committee and stated that there existed no revolutionary parties outside the Fourth International. One month later, the military in Bolivia carried out a putsch. When the Workers League and the SLL published a critique of Lora’s POR, which shared responsibility for this disaster, they were publicly attacked by the OCI and accused of capitulating to imperialism. In September, the Marxist minority of the IAK founded the BSA, and a month later the majority of the International Committee announced its split with the OCI.

## **XXII. The BSA under the influence of the WRP**

164. In contrast to the enormous patience and tenacity with which it had conducted the conflict with the SWP in 1963, the SLL made little effort to clarify the political questions that had led to the split with the OCI in 1971. The split was carried out in great haste and without detailed discussion in the International Committee and in the membership of the sections. The SLL made no serious attempt to develop a faction within the OCI. Instead, the split resembled a mutually agreed divorce. From the point of view of the education and clarification of the cadre, the split was “decidedly premature”, as the International Committee determined later in an analysis of the WRP’s collapse. “It represented a retreat by the Socialist Labour League from the international responsibilities it had assumed in 1961 when it took up the fight against the degeneration of the Socialist Workers Party.”<sup>91</sup>

165. The SLL later justified its avoidance of clarifying programmatic questions with the claim that the political differences with the OCI were only a by-product of philosophical differences. The split was not a question “of political positions on various questions”, but went “to the foundations of the Fourth International—Marxist theory”. The SLL had learned “from the experience of building the revolutionary party in Britain that a thoroughgoing and difficult struggle against idealistic ways of thinking was necessary which went much deeper than questions of agreement on programme

91 ICFI, “How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism 1973 – 1985”, [http://www.wsws.org/IML/fi\\_vol13\\_no1/fi\\_vol13\\_no1\\_full.shtml#anchor3](http://www.wsws.org/IML/fi_vol13_no1/fi_vol13_no1_full.shtml#anchor3)



and policy.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, the SLL twisted the statement—correct by itself—that philosophical method is manifested in political analysis, and substituted a concrete investigation of political questions with an abstract discussion of philosophical problems. Trotsky, on the contrary, had always insisted that the significance of the party lay in its programme, which had, as its content, “a common understanding of the events, of the tasks.”<sup>93</sup> When he raised the question of dialectical materialism in the conflict with Burnham and Shachtman in 1939-1940, Trotsky did so in direct connection with issues of political perspective.

166. This lack of interest in the clarification of political questions was closely bound up with the organisational successes the SLL had made as a result of its struggle against opportunism in Great Britain. In 1963, the SLL assumed the leadership of the youth organisation of the Labour Party, the Young Socialists, and following its expulsion from the Labour Party, established the YS as its own youth organisation. In 1969, after a five-year campaign, the SLL launched its daily paper, *Workers Press*, which won a large audience among workers, intellectuals and artists and brought hundreds of new members into the party. This inflow of new forces made more urgent the task of clarifying the fundamental political principles that differentiated the International Committee from petty-bourgeois opportunism. Only in this way would the new membership be politically educated to withstand the pressure of hostile class forces. Instead, the SLL adapted to the spontaneous upsurge of the working class in Britain. “But the conviction gradually took hold within the SLL leadership that the material growth of the British section, rather than the strengthening of its international political line, was the decisive precondition and essential foundation for the development of the International Committee; and from this flowed an incorrect and increasingly nationalist conception of the relations between the SLL and the International Committee of the Fourth International. The SLL proceeded from an increasingly organisational conception which held that the practical successes of the Socialist Labour League in Britain

92 “Statement by the International Committee (Majority), March 1 1972” in “Trotskyism versus Revisionism”, Volume 6, London 1975, p.72, 78, 83

93 Leon Trotsky, “The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution”, Pathfinder, p.171

were the prerequisite for the further development of the world Trotskyist movement.”<sup>94</sup>

167. The lack of clarification of the issues that had led to the split with the OCI constituted a heavy burden for the young German section. Its cadre was only superficially familiar with the lessons that the International Committee had drawn from its long political struggle against opportunism. The SLL did not encourage the BSA to turn to these programmatic and historical questions. The International Committee admitted the BSA as a section without requiring it to submit its own perspectives document. Instead, the SLL placed the emphasis on the practical side of party building—on recruitment campaigns, the publication of a newspaper, which appeared fortnightly from February 1972 as *Der Funke* and weekly from October 1976 as *Neue Arbeiterpresse*, and the building of a youth organisation.

168. The BSA grew rapidly in its first year. The Federal Republic was shaken by a series of social and political eruptions. In April 1972, the CDU-CSU tried to oust the Brandt government with a no-confidence vote that provoked strong resistance. Factory workers followed the debates in federal parliament and prepared a general strike in defence of the Brandt government. Sales and distribution of *Der Funke* and the BSA’s leaflets shot up. In the following federal election campaign, in which the SPD obtained the best result in its history, new branches of the BSA and its youth organisation *Sozialistischer Jugendbund (SJB)* were developed in more than 20 cities and suburbs.

169. The BSA called for “an SPD government, pledged to socialist policies”. It called for a vote for the SPD, while advancing at the same time its own socialist programme, and demanded that the SPD break with the FDP and adopt a programme in the interests of the working class. This tactic was based on the fact that large sections of workers still held illusions in the SPD. The tactic aimed to expose the real role of the SPD to workers, based on their own experiences. It was anchored in the experiences of the SLL, which had, in the 1960s, effectively intervened into the Labour Party with the demand “Labour to power on socialist policies,” and on the Transitional Programme, which  
 94 David North, “Gerry Healy and his place in the history of the Fourth International”, Labor Publications 1991, p. 47

characterised “the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership: ‘Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!’ ” as “an extremely important weapon for exposing the treacherous character” of the reformist and centrist organisations.<sup>95</sup> However, to the extent that this tactic was not linked to a well-thought-out revolutionary strategy, it exposed the party to the danger of swimming with the tide of opposition to the conservatives, and of being unprepared for the political challenges resulting from an election victory for the Social Democrats.

170. The British SLL succumbed to precisely this danger when it founded the Workers Revolutionary Party in 1973. The WRP based itself on a programme whose “content and underlying conception had nothing whatsoever to do with Trotskyism” and that did not go beyond the boundaries of centrism.<sup>96</sup> The main task of the new party consisted, according to its own declarations, of uniting “the working class behind a socialist programme to throw out the Tory government and replace it with a Labour government.” The SLL based itself on widespread sentiment against the Tory government of Edward Heath, and expected that the return of a Labour government would quickly bring it into conflict with the working class, thereby opening up new revolutionary possibilities. Reality turned out to be more complicated, however. IMF credits provided the Labour government with room for manoeuvre. The WRP faced a deep crisis; many new members, won on the crest of an anti-Tory wave, turned away from the party. Under such conditions, neglect of the clarification of international programmatic questions avenged itself.

171. The German section faced similar problems. After the triumph of 1972, Brandt was unable to dampen the expectations created in the election campaign. In the winter of 1973-1974, 12 million workers took part in wage conflicts. In the middle of the international oil crisis, public servants enforced an 11 percent wage increase. The SPD leadership and the FDP responded by engaging in a plot to dump Brandt. They utilised the unmasking of a GDR spy close to Brandt in order

to force his resignation and his replacement by Helmut Schmidt. Schmidt, in close cooperation with the trade union bureaucracy, immediately proceeded against the working class, introducing austerity measures. This rightward turn of social democracy, which took similar forms in Britain, France, Italy and other countries, was the prelude to a counter-offensive of the bourgeoisie that has continued to this day. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher was elected head of government in Britain; Ronald Reagan became president of the US in 1980. Both began an open confrontation with the working class and were successful, due to the betrayal of the trade unions. Since then, the living standards of the lower- and middle-income brackets have stagnated and sunk, while incomes at the top have exploded.

172. In the BSA, the SPD’s change of course produced a crisis. Many members, who had regarded the BSA as a kind of pressure group and hoped for a continued left-wing development by the SPD, turned their backs on the party. The crisis worsened when IC Secretary Cliff Slaughter came to Germany in May 1974 and insisted on a new political line. Slaughter argued that the Schmidt government would quickly come into conflict with the working class, and that the BSA must demand its ousting and the immediate calling of fresh elections. This was a break from the past line, which had taken into account the social-democratic illusions of many workers. Instead of intensifying the conflict between these workers and the SPD leaders, the new line meant an adaptation to petty-bourgeois tendencies that rejected a patient fight in the working class, which had defended the SPD government against a no-confidence vote just two years before. The demand for new elections meant that a settling of accounts with the SPD was no longer seen as the task of the working class, but of the electorate as a whole. In all probability, this would have led to the return to power of the CDU-CSU. This political line cut the BSA off from workers and caused huge difficulties.

173. In Britain, a few months after the founding of the WRP, a miners’ strike led to the fall of the Tory government and brought a Labour government under Harold Wilson to power. Within the British section, a major conflict erupted with Alan Thornett, the leader of the trade union wing of the WRP. Thornett spoke for those members who had regarded the WRP primarily as an instrument to return the Labour Party to power. He

95 The Transitional Program, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text2.htm#wg>

96 ICFI, “How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism 1973 – 1985”, [http://www.wsws.org/IML/fi\\_vol13\\_no1/fi\\_vol13\\_no1\\_full.shtml#anchor4](http://www.wsws.org/IML/fi_vol13_no1/fi_vol13_no1_full.shtml#anchor4)

opposed the development of a more critical line towards the Labour Party and collaborated secretly with the French OCI. The WRP's failure to draw the political lessons from the split with the OCI now avenged itself. Rather than patiently clarifying the political differences, the WRP leaders expelled Thornett and lost a majority of its members who worked in the factories. When, in the summer of 1975, the Wilson government imposed a wage freeze, the WRP changed course and adopted the line it had previously forced upon the BSA: it called for the overthrow of the Labour government. That represented, as the International Committee later determined, "a fundamental programmatic break with the proletarian orientation for which the British Trotskyists had fought for decades. To call for the bringing down of a Labour government, under conditions in which the revolutionary party had not yet won the allegiance of any significant section of the working class, and in which the only alternative to Labour was a Tory government, which the working class had brought down little more than a year before, was the height of adventurism."<sup>97</sup> The new orientation was "a profoundly disturbing expression of the class shift that had taken place inside the leadership of the WRP... A predominately petty-bourgeois leadership, upon whom Healy was now resting, had quickly become disillusioned with the Labour government and was impatient with the tempo of development in the political consciousness of the working class."<sup>98</sup> The WRP now turned—as the Pabloites had done two decades before—increasingly to non-proletarian forces: national liberation movements, national regimes in the Middle East, and sections of the trade union and labour bureaucracy, until finally rejecting its own history and openly breaking with Trotskyism 10 years later.

174. The WRP exerted increasing pressure on the German section to proceed in the same direction. Between 1977 and 1983, it organised a number of youth marches across Europe that absorbed a large part of the BSA's resources and energies. Gerry Healy represented these marches as a turn to the working class; as a "new practice" aimed at overcoming the political and organisational crisis of the section. They were, in reality, a turn to the bureaucratic apparatuses. Programmatically, the marches did not go beyond the demand

for jobs for unemployed youth. Even the Marx march from Trier to London, to commemorate the centenary of the death of the founder of scientific socialism, was organised in such a way that it did not offend Stalinists and left social democrats. From the point of view of cadre development, the marches were a school of opportunism. The marches had to maintain close relations with the bureaucratic apparatuses because they could not remain on the road without their material support. That excluded from the outset a political conflict or the open advocacy of Trotskyism. In countries such as Germany, where the trade unions and SPD reacted with icy enmity, the marches were dependent on humiliating handouts from the churches. Later, an International Committee inquiry found out that Healy had also used the marches to bolster his credentials with nationalist leaders in the Middle East.

175. When a broad peace movement developed around 1980, against the stationing of the nuclear medium-range Pershing II missiles on German soil, the WRP pressured the German section to adapt to this pacifist movement. In the event, the BSA participated in the peace marches, but not in the manner the WRP had planned. It printed a brochure containing the writings of Lenin and Trotsky against war and led a campaign against the pacifism of the Stalinists, who politically dominated the peace movement.

176. On Healy's urging, the German section acquired an expensive printing press in 1979 in order to publish its own daily paper. At the time, the BSA lacked the political support and material resources necessary for the realisation of such a project. A daily paper would have been feasible only if it had become the platform of an accumulation of trade union bureaucrats, pacifists, Greens and petty-bourgeois radicals—which was probably Healy's secret intention. In fact, a new daily paper actually saw the light of day that year in Germany, the *taz*, which soon developed into the unofficial organ of the Greens and is still published today. When it became clear that the BSA rejected such an orientation and could not bear the cost of a daily paper from its own resources, the WRP's attacks took openly destructive forms. Under various pretexts, party leaders were expelled and the section was forced to make financial donations driving it to the edge of ruin. Only the cadres' loyalty to internationalist principles prevented a collapse of the section. At the same time, the Ameri-

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

can Workers League began to develop a thoroughgoing criticism of the opportunism of the WRP, which provided the basis for the re-orientation of the International Committee and its German section.

177. The political problems that confronted the Fourth International at this time had their roots in the stabilisation and expansion of capitalism after the Second World War, which had thoroughly altered class relations. In order to regulate the class struggle, the imperialists relied on a broad layer of petty-bourgeois elements, who formed the social basis for the growth of opportunism. The Pabloite revisionists reflected the social pressure that these layers exerted on the Fourth International. They developed the theoretical and political formulae that served to justify the subordination of the working class to the petty-bourgeois agents of imperialism. After the capitulation of the American SWP, the British SLL, and in particular Gerry Healy, undertook the responsibility of defending the programme of the Fourth International against this revisionist attack. While the Pabloites hailed Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Mao Zedong and left talkers in the trade union bureaucracy, the SLL defended the perspective of permanent revolution and fought for the political independence of the working class. In the 1970s, the influence of these petty-bourgeois layers reached its high point. When the WRP collapsed in 1985, the balance of power between revolutionary Marxism and opportunism had already fundamentally changed. That has been underscored by the enormous theoretical, political and organisational progress the International Committee has made since.

178. The importance of the BSA in the 1970s was the fact that it resumed, in Germany, the historical thread that had been severed by the Pabloites. Regardless of the difficulties, weaknesses and errors it confronted, it avowed itself unreservedly to the perspective of the world socialist revolution. Trotsky's writings on National Socialism and his analysis of the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism played a crucial role in the recruitment and education of the founding cadre. The BSA consistently opposed the Stalinists, Maoists and anarchist groups that emerged from the student movement, and the anti-Marxist theories that dominated in the universities. It opposed "the long march through the institutions" taken by the Jusos (Gerhard Schröder) "the Spontis" (Joschka Fischer), the Maoists

(Antje Vollmer, Ulla Schmidt, Jürgen Trittin) and the Pabloites (Harald Wolf), who all ended up in the highest state and government offices. It also rejected the reactionary methods and perspectives of the Red Army Faction terrorists.

### **XXIII. From the student movement to the Greens**

179. The petty bourgeois conceptions prevailing in the post war period found their most concentrated expression amongst the leaders of the 1968 movement. The student radicalisation had a number of causes: a rebellion against conservatism in the universities and society as a whole, opposition to rearmament and the Emergency Laws, protest against the Vietnam war and the regime of the Shah of Persia, and, in particular, reckoning with the heritage of Nazism and its crimes, which had been suppressed during the era of Chancellor Adenauer. The revolt by students was closely bound up with the offensive by the working class, but their political and theoretical conceptions cut them off from the working class. The German student movement was not only one of the biggest in the world numerically speaking—it was also one of the most productive in terms of ideology. A decisive influence came from the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and other tendencies of the New Left. The writings of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Karl Korsch, Herbert Marcuse, Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich found a large audience.

180. Instead of capitalist exploitation, the leading figures of the New Left placed at the heart of their social analysis the concept of alienation, which they interpreted in a psychological or existential manner. The working class was no longer regarded as a revolutionary class, but, rather, as an apolitical, or even backward mass, thoroughly integrated into bourgeois society via the mechanisms of consumerism, the domination of the media and repressive forms of education. Herbert Marcuse, Heidegger's pupil and a member of the Frankfurt School, even detected a "proto-fascist syndrome in the working class".<sup>99</sup> The "revolution" would proceed not from the working class, but from the young intelligentsia, social fringe groups or guerilla movements. Its driving force was not the class

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<sup>99</sup> "Counter-Revolution and Revolt", Boston, Beacon press, 1972, p 25

contradictions of capitalist society, but critical thinking and the actions of an enlightened elite. The goal of the revolution was not—or was not primarily—the overthrow of the existing relations of power and ownership, but the changing of social and cultural—including sexual—habits. The representatives of the New Left considered such a cultural change to be the precondition for social revolution. Student leaders such as Rudi Dutschke and Daniel Cohn-Bendit stressed the significance of provocative action aimed at shocking the mass of the population out of their inertia.

181. The Frankfurt School transformed Marxism from a theoretical and political weapon of the proletarian class struggle into a form of supra-class cultural criticism, expressing the political pessimism, social alienation and personal frustration of sections of the middle classes. Max Horkheimer and his closest collaborator, Theodor Adorno, reverted to philosophical traditions that Marxism had opposed—the critical theory of Kant, the “critical criticism” of the Young Hegelians and various forms of philosophical subjectivism from Schopenhauer to Heidegger. Traumatized by the experience of National Socialism, they denied the revolutionary potential of the working class. Contrary to Marx, in whose view the development of the productive forces blew apart capitalist property relations and unleashed an epoch of social revolution, in their opinion, the development of the productive forces plunged society into barbarism and solidified capitalist rule.

“The powerlessness of the workers is not merely a ruse of the rulers, but the logical consequence of industrial society”, they claimed, and further: “The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression”. The only way out of this social dead end was critical thinking: “It is the servant which the master cannot control at will”.<sup>100</sup>

The revolutionary subject, therefore, according to these theorists, was the “enlightened individual” and not the proletariat.

182. The German student revolt reached its high point in the summer of 1968. After that, the SDS broke apart into competing factions. The glorification of guerrilla warfare led a small minority to draw fatal conclusions and turn to individual terrorism. Others joined an-

100 Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, “Dialectic of Enlightenment”

archist organizations and so-called K-groups, which discovered a replacement for a socialist perspective in the Stalinism of the Maoist variety. The large majority embarked upon a “march through the institutions” (Dutschke) and turned to the SPD. At the end of the 1970s, they all assembled in a new party that within 20 years would become a principal support for German imperialism—the Greens.

183. The programme of the Greens drew liberally from the Frankfurt School, such as the rejection of the class struggle, a concentration on questions of lifestyle, and scepticism towards technological progress. The anti-capitalist rhetoric of the SDS had disappeared and given way to pacifism, environmentalism and the revival of bourgeois democracy. Ingenious forms of rank and file democracy were supposed to prevent the party being corrupted by power. In reality, they freed the leadership from any control by the membership, so that the most cynical and unscrupulous representatives of the Greens were finally able to win the highest positions in public office. At heart, the Greens were retrogressive and conservative. This was most clearly shown in their economic programme, which advocated a “turn away from the national and international division of labour” and “consumer-oriented production locally and regionally”.<sup>101</sup>

184. In their social composition, the Greens were a party of the academically educated middle class. Their leadership layer consisted—and still consists—predominantly of ex-members of the student movement and various anarchist and Maoist groups. They found their followers in the more than one thousand groups belonging to the Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz (BBU, Federal Association of Civic Initiatives for Environmental Protection). They have achieved their best election results in the middle class districts of major cities and university towns, while Green Party members have the highest average income and level of education of all parties.

185. The assumption of government office by the Greens has irrevocably destroyed the myth that they

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101 Emil Peter Mueller, “Die Grünen und das Parteiensystem”, p100, 101

represent an alternative to the daily grind of bourgeois politics. They have systematically proved that one cannot change the existing society in a progressive manner without encroaching upon capitalist private property. In the state of Hesse, the greatest level of environmental pollution by the Hoechst company occurred under Green environment minister Joschka Fischer. The Greens have supported the dismantling of public sector jobs and cuts in welfare benefits (Berlin), the building of new prisons (Hesse), the establishment of camps for asylum seekers (Lower Saxony) and factory shutdowns (Brandenburg). In Hamburg, they are now governing as coalition partners of the CDU. In 1998, the Greens entered the federal government. The former pacifists took over the task of overcoming the deeply entrenched opposition to foreign military missions by the Bundeswehr. To this end, the prestigious foreign ministry was entrusted to the former street fighter Joschka Fischer. In the meantime, the Greens have become the most enthusiastic proponents of German militarism. Together with the SPD, they have also implemented the most comprehensive welfare cuts since the founding of the Federal Republic, creating a huge low wage sector.

#### **XXIV. The WRP breaks with the International Committee**

186. While the British WRP increasingly shifted away from the principles it had once defended against Pabloism, in the course of the 1970s, the American Workers League moved in the opposite direction. In response to a political crisis that led to the resignation of the WL's National Secretary Tim Wohlforth in 1974, the party made a deliberate turn towards the working class and intensified its efforts to work through the history of the Fourth International. This emphasis on the historical experience of the Trotskyist movement, within the context of the objective development of world capitalism and the international class struggle, emerged as the essential political characteristic of the Workers League. In its perspective resolution of November 1978, the Workers League stated, "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 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".<sup>102</sup>

187. The Workers League also played the leading role in the investigation "Security and the Fourth International", in which the International Committee continued its offensive against Pabloism by uncovering the extent to which the Pabloites had covered up and were implicated in the murder of Leon Trotsky and other crimes committed by Stalinism. The investigation provided clear evidence that Joseph Hansen, who had played a leading role in the breakaway of the SWP from the International Committee in 1963, had worked as an agent inside the Trotskyist movement.

188. The emphasis it placed on the history of the International Committee brought the Workers League increasingly into conflict with the WRP. In 1982, the secretary of the Workers League, David North, undertook a systematic critique of the opportunist policies of the WRP. He began with the philosophical conceptions that dominated political debate inside the WRP and had completely replaced the study of historical and political issues. North wrote a critique of Gerry Healy's "Studies in Dialectical Materialism" and demonstrated that Healy's presentation of the dialectic rejected materialism and returned to the subjective idealist philosophy that Marx had overcome in the 1840s in his critique of the Young Hegelians.

189. North summarized his critique of the political evolution of the WRP as follows: "The 'Studies in Dialectics' has brought into the open a crisis that has been developing within the International Committee for a considerable period of time. For several years (in my opinion, this began in 1976 and only began to predominate in 1978), in the name of the struggle for dialectical materialism and against propagandism, the International Committee has drifted steadily away from a struggle for Trotskyism". In particular, North attacked the the WRP's opportunist relations with bourgeois national regimes in the Middle East: "A vulgarization of Marxism, palmed off as the 'struggle for dialectics', has been accompanied by an unmistakable

102 Cited in "The Historical and International Foundations of the SEP", 2008, Point 159

opportunist drift within the International Committee, especially in the WRP. The Marxist defence of national liberation movements and the struggle against imperialism has been interpreted in an opportunist fashion of uncritical support for various bourgeois nationalist regimes”.<sup>103</sup>

190. The WRP attempted to isolate the Workers League and suppress its criticisms, but the WL responded with a further analysis of the political line of the WRP. In a letter dated January 23, 1984, to Michael Banda, the general secretary of the WRP, North wrote that the International Committee “has for some time been working without a clear and politically-unified perspective to guide its practice. Rather than a perspective for the building of sections of the International Committee in every country, the central focus of the IC’s work for several years has been the development of alliances with various bourgeois nationalist regimes and liberation movements. The content of these alliances has less and less reflected any clear orientation toward the development of our own forces as central to the fight to establish the leading role of the proletariat in the anti-imperialist struggle in the semi-colonial countries. The very conceptions advanced by the SWP in relation to Cuba and Algeria which we attacked so vigorously in the early 1960s appear with increasing frequency in our own press”.<sup>104</sup>

191. North amplified the Workers League’s criticism in a report to the ICFI on February 11, 1984: “It is clear that by mid-1978 a general orientation toward relations with nationalist regimes and liberation movements was developing without any corresponding perspective for the actual building of our own forces inside the working class. An entirely uncritical and incorrect appraisal began to emerge ever more openly within our press, inviting the cadres and the working class to view these bourgeois nationalists as ‘anti-imperialist leaders’ to whom political support must be given”. North singled out for particular criticism the WRP’s support for Saddam Hussein’s repression of the Iraqi Communist Party, the praise given to the Iranian regime of Ayatollah Khomeini and the uncritical support for the leader of the Libyan Jamahiriya, Muammar al-Gaddafi. He also cited the relations that the WRP had estab-

lished with sections of the Labour Party, including Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight, and the Greater London Council.<sup>105</sup>

192. The Workers Revolutionary Party refused to discuss the differences raised by the Workers League. Instead, it issued threats to sever relations with the Workers League if it persisted in its criticisms. This unprincipled and opportunist course had, ultimately, devastating consequences for the WRP. In 1985, shortly after the defeat of the one year long miners’ strike, a crisis broke out inside the WRP, which quickly led to its break with the International Committee and its complete destruction. The WRP’s crisis created conditions where the critique undertaken by the WL could be discussed within the entire International Committee. Prior to this, sections were either not informed of the Workers League’s critique or, as was the case for the IC delegates of the BSA, confronted such organisational pressure and political provocations that a serious study of the critique was not possible. In the autumn of 1985, delegates of the Australian, Sri Lankan and German sections met with David North in London and supported the critique made by the WL. In the weeks that followed, the entire membership of the BSA supported Workers League’s critique. Inside the WRP itself, a minority emerged, led by Dave Hyland, which also supported the International Committee.

193. The ICFI delegates refused to be utilized for the nationalist purposes of the competing WRP factions. They insisted that a political recovery of the WRP from its crisis was possible only to the extent that it returned to the principles of the ICFI and accepted the discipline of the international movement. With the exception of the internationalist minority, no faction was prepared to do so. Mike Banda and Cliff Slaughter, who had fallen out with Healy, shared his opportunist and nationalist perspective and sought to avoid any examination of the political causes of the WRP’s crisis. They would not accept international constraints upon the political alliances and activities of the WRP by recognising the authority of the ICFI.

194. When Slaughter asserted that internationalism consisted of “laying down class lines and fighting them through”, the WL Political Committee asked, “But by what process are these ‘class lines’ determined? Does it

103 Fourth International (Detroit, 1986), Volume 13, No. 2, Autumn 1986, pp. 16-18

104 Ibid, p 35

105 Ibid, p 43

require the existence of the Fourth International?... The International Committee of the Fourth International is the historical embodiment of the ‘whole programmatic base of Trotskyism and the Marxism of Marx and Lenin’. The subordination of national sections to the IC is the organised expression of their agreement with and defence of that program. Those parties which uphold Trotskyism as the contemporary development of Marxist principles and program are organised in the Fourth International and accept the authority of the International Committee. To base one’s definition of internationalism on the separation of the program from its organisational expression is to adopt the standpoint of all those revisionist and centrist opponents of Trotskyism who deny the continuity of Marxism, embodied in the ICFI, in order to retain freedom of action within their national theatre of operations”.<sup>106</sup>

195. On February 8, 1986, the WRP held a rump congress from which all supporters of the International Committee were excluded. The main document prepared for this congress was an anti-Trotskyist diatribe composed by Banda, entitled “27 Reasons Why the International Committee Should be Buried Forthwith and the Fourth International Built.” Within months of writing this document, Banda repudiated his nearly 40 year association with the Fourth International and proclaimed his admiration for Stalin. As for the WRP, its various factions disintegrated one by one. Within less than a decade, Slaughter and other former leaders of the WRP were heavily involved in the US-NATO operation in Bosnia. The only viable political tendency in the British organisation that was to emerge from the crisis and collapse of the WRP was the internationalist minority, which upheld the principles of the ICFI. This tendency established the International Communist Party in February 1986, forerunner of the present-day Socialist Equality Party, the British section of the ICFI.

196. The split with the WRP was an anticipation of fundamental changes in world politics that were to shatter the post war order in the ensuing years. After the split, the International Committee undertook an exhaustive analysis of these changes. The unparalleled integration of the world market and the internationalisation of production had stripped away the basis for the national reformist perspectives upon which both the Stalinists and social democrats had based their

politics. The “absolute and active predominance of the world economy over all national economies, including that of the United States”, was “a basic fact of modern life”. It had “raised the fundamental contradiction between world economy and the capitalist nation-state system, and between social production and private ownership, to an unprecedented level of intensity”. The class struggle would now assume an international character not only in content but also in form. “Even the most elemental struggles of the working class pose the necessity of coordinating its actions on an international scale...the unprecedented international mobility of capital has rendered all nationalist programs for the labour movement of different countries obsolete and reactionary”.<sup>107</sup>

197. The split between the revolutionary internationalists of the IC majority and the national opportunists of the WRP corresponded to these objective changes, which had already developed to an advanced stage by 1985. This was why there was rapid support for the standpoint of the WL throughout the International Committee, and why the IC was able to quickly develop a new political orientation. A large proportion of the cadre of the IC had joined the movement in the 1960s and early 70s in response to the international perspective defended by the British section, and had adhered to this perspective despite all the problems thrown up by the degeneration of the WRP. In its conflict with the WRP, the International Committee reworked and renewed the entire theoretical and historical heritage of the Fourth International.<sup>108</sup> This prepared the International Committee for the impending international shocks, and created the conditions for the deepening and development of its perspective.

198. An important gain that arose directly out of the split was the integration of an important layer of Tamil workers into the BSA. The rejection of permanent revolution by the WRP had cut off the IC from winning influence among refugees and immigrant workers who were coming into conflict with petty bourgeois

107 ICFI, “The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International”, August 1998, p. 48-49, 7

108 In particular the systematic review of the history of the Fourth International and the International Committee by David North (“The Heritage we Defend”) and the detailed analysis of the opportunist decline of the WRP (“How the WRP betrayed Trotskyism”).



nationalist organisations. The BSA was now in a position to overcome this obstacle and, in close collaboration with the Sri Lankan RCL, break a layer of immigrant workers from the influence of Tamil nationalism. Since then, this group has played an important role in the building of the International Committee in Europe and the production of the Tamil site of the WSWS.

## XXV. The End of the GDR and the Soviet Union

199. In the same year that the WRP broke apart, Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Although there appeared, on the surface, to be no connection between the two events, they were closely linked. The globalisation of production had undermined the programme of “socialism in a single country” and unleashed a profound social crisis in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev introduced reforms which, within the space of a few years, led to the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Europe and Eastern Europe. In so doing, he was reacting to a long period of economic stagnation and growing social tensions. In particular, the Solidarity movement in Poland had shocked the ruling bureaucrats in Moscow, giving rise to fears that similar movements could develop in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev sought to forestall an offensive by the working class through an extension of civic liberties (glasnost) and through economic reforms (perestroika), while setting the course for capitalist restoration. He counted on the disorientation of the working class after decades of Stalinist rule, and on the support of petty-bourgeois dissidents.

200. The restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union confirmed Trotsky’s warning that the greatest danger to the achievements of the October revolution came from the Stalinist bureaucracy. In 1938, he had written: “Either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.”<sup>109</sup> The Stalinist bureaucracy finally achieved what neither white troops nor German tanks

and American rockets had been able to: 74 years after the October revolution it liquidated the property relations that had resulted from one of the greatest popular uprisings in world history. The consequences of capitalist restoration were catastrophic for the popular masses. While a small layer of old bureaucrats and new capitalists usurped state owned property and made fabulous fortunes, factories and entire spheres of industry were closed down, whole stretches of countryside left to ruin and a once extensive education, health, pension and social system, dismantled.

201. The conflict with the WRP had prepared the International Committee for this development. In March 1987, when western politicians, bourgeois journalists, Pabloite revisionists and the renegades of the WRP were singing the praises of Gorbachev, the IC published an extensive statement that stated unequivocally: “The proposals made by Gorbachev correspond completely ... to the character of the Stalinist bureaucracy as a counter-revolutionary agency of world imperialism. The core of these ‘reforms’ is a further undermining of the gains of the October Revolution, ... the nationalised property relations, the state monopoly of foreign trade and the very existence of the workers’ state. Confronted with the growing opposition of workers to the ossified bureaucratic caste, Gorbachev has undertaken to deal with some of its worst excesses from the standpoint of defending the bureaucracy as a whole, against the Soviet proletariat. Contrary to all those Stalinists, petty bourgeois radical pacifists, reformists and revisionists of all persuasions, who today sing the praises of the democratic Gorbachev just as their predecessors acclaimed Stalin the International Committee of the Fourth International remains an irreconcilable opponent of the bureaucracy.”<sup>110</sup>

202. In 1989, the growing social tensions unleashed a wave of mass protests across Eastern Europe, toppling the Stalinist regimes like dominoes. The year began with the legalization of Solidarity in Warsaw and ended with the shooting of Ceausescu in Bucharest. Between these dates, the Berlin Wall fell on November 9. Broad social strata participated in the protests, including many workers. They expressed the widespread opposition toward the ruling bureaucracy. All of the masses’ accumulated anger and dissatisfaction burst to

109 Leon Trotsky, “The Transitional Program”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/transprogram.pdf>

110 “What is happening in the USSR? Gorbachev and the Crisis of Stalinism”, March 23 1987

the surface. The International Committee intervened decisively in these developments. It greeted the mass demonstrations, but stressed, at the same time, that a solution to the crisis in the interests of the working class could only be achieved on the basis of an international socialist perspective.

203. On November 13 1989, four days after the fall of the Berlin wall, David North delivered a speech at the Historical Archival Institute in Moscow, addressing the contradiction between Gorbachev's perspective and that of the working class: "What we see today in the Soviet Union is the complete collapse of the bankrupt program of socialism in one country. The claim that socialism could be built within the state boundaries of the USSR has been totally discredited. But the question is, how is the Soviet Union to obtain access to the world market, to the international division of labour and advanced technology? We believe there is only one of two ways: either through the integration of the Soviet Union into the structure of world imperialism... or through the unified international revolutionary struggle of the working class... It is the opinion of the International Committee that the policies being pursued by the present Soviet government are aimed at the integration of the Soviet Union into the structure of world imperialism... You must understand that the Soviet bureaucracy fears the working class much more than it fears imperialism. It is for this reason that the aim of the Soviet bureaucracy is to develop ever closer economic and political ties with the imperialists against the working class."<sup>111</sup>

204. When the GDR regime began to falter, the BSA intervened energetically. Due to vicious persecution, Trotskyists had been unable to intervene in the GDR prior to 1989. The BSA was now able to distribute large numbers of leaflets and newspapers, and in March 1990 took part in the last GDR parliamentary elections (Volkskammerwahl). It was the only political tendency that unconditionally defended all the gains of the working class while making no concessions to Stalinism. In its program published for the Volkskammerwahl, the party declared: "The working class stands at the crossroads: capitalism or socialism. Either the imperialists will reintroduce capitalism in co-operation with the regimes of Gorbachev, Mazowiecki, Modrow,

Nemeth, Calfa or Iliescu in Eastern Europe, which in Poland has already led to a drastic worsening of workers' living conditions. Or the working class will carry through a political revolution to its conclusion, bringing down the Stalinist bureaucracy, taking power in its own hands and developing a real socialist society."<sup>112</sup>

205. Irrespective of tactical differences with Gorbachev, the East German Stalinist leadership had already decided on capitalist restoration long before the first demonstrations took place in 1989. Günter Mittag, responsible for the GDR economy in the Politburo for nearly three decades, later confessed to *Der Spiegel*: "Without reunification, the GDR would have encountered an economic disaster with incalculable social consequences because it was simply not viable in the long term." He had already come to the conclusion, at the end of 1987, that "all hope is lost."<sup>113</sup> And Hans Modrow, who, as the last Stalinist Prime Minister of the GDR, prepared the reunification, wrote in his memoirs: "In my view, the road to unification had become inevitably necessary and had to be followed with determination."<sup>114</sup>

206. For its part, the working class was completely unprepared for the political events of 1989. The Stalinist falsifications of history, the murder of an entire generation of communist revolutionaries during the Great Terror of the 1930s, the suppression of any independent movement of the working class by the SED and the undermining of Trotskyism by the Pabloites, had cut workers off from the historical continuity of Marxism and the program of the Fourth International. The so-called dissidents, who emerged in the course of the 1970s, came predominantly from intellectual or artistic circles and rejected a socialist orientation. They limited their demands to those of civil rights, and, in many cases, underwent a sharp turn to the right.

207. The lack of political orientation of those demonstrating in large numbers in the autumn of 1989 was clearly revealed in the individualist form initially taken by the movement: a mass escape to the West. At the

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112 "For the international unity of the working class in the struggle against Stalinism and capitalism! For the United Socialist States of Europe!", in "Das Ende der DDR", Essen 1992

113 *Der Spiegel*, 9 September 1991

114 Hans Modrow, "Aufbruch und Ende", Hamburg 1991, p. 145

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111 Lecture by D. North at the Historical-Archival Institute, Moscow, November 1989

head of the demonstrations were representatives of the petty bourgeois opposition, whose programmes did not go beyond vague demands for more democracy and for “democratic dialogue”. They were characterised, above all, by a fear of social upheaval. “The goal of our proposals is to assure peace in our country”, declared the “Theses for a Democratic Transformation of the GDR” of the organisation “Demokratie Jetzt”. Like the German democrats of 1848, the GDR democrats of 1989 were “more frightened of the least popular movement than of all the reactionary plots of all the German Governments put together”, as Friedrich Engels had written.<sup>115</sup>

208. Faced with protests on the streets, the petty bourgeois opposition and the Stalinist rulers quickly found themselves united. The SED reacted to the mass demonstrations by sacrificing its Secretary-General of many years, Erich Honecker, and moving towards German unity under Hans Modrow, a longstanding Central Committee member. While in Modrow’s own words “the daily new exposures of abuses of office and corruption by former prominent SED and state functionaries drove indignation in the country to boiling point”, he regarded the task of his administration as preserving “the governability of the country and preventing chaos” and preparing German reunification.<sup>116</sup> To this end, he set up Round Tables with the petty-bourgeois oppositionists and took them into his government.

209. The BSA expressly warned of the consequences of this course of events: “The working class must reject with contempt all political tendencies that want to replace the Stalinist dictatorship with the dictatorship of the Deutsche Bank, i.e. with the dictatorship of imperialism. The enraged petty bourgeois at the Round Table go into rhapsodies about the advantages of capitalism at a time when the living conditions of the working class in all capitalist countries have drastically worsened over the last ten years; ... These petty bourgeois attack Stalinism because for them it was an obstacle to leading a similarly privileged life at the expense of the working class as the petty bourgeoisie in the West. Their struggle against Stalinism is a struggle

against the working class. Their goal is to smash all the achievements of the working class.”<sup>117</sup>

210. The “enraged petty bourgeois at the Round Table” also included the supporters of Ernest Mandel. The Vereinigte Linke (United Left), in which the Pabloites played an important role, declared its readiness to take over government responsibility under Modrow. Mandel personally travelled to East Berlin in order to defend Gorbachev and the SED from Trotskyist criticism. In the Stalinist youth paper *Junge Welt* he denounced the intervention of the BSA in the GDR as “tactless”. It was “evidence of a lack of political understanding when forces interfere from outside into the enormous mass movement in the GDR.” Asked about the BSA’s criticism of Gorbachev, Mandel answered: “Not to see the fact that one must defend the core of the achievements of ‘Glasnost’ against all its enemies as an enormous step forward for the Soviet working class, the Soviet people, the international working class and democratic forces throughout the world, seems to me to be a dangerous political blindness.”<sup>118</sup>

211. While the BSA courageously opposed the Stalinists and the petty bourgeois democrats, warning of the dangers inherent in the restoration of capitalism, it was itself in danger of idealising the mass movement, thus underestimating the crisis of leadership in the working class and its own political tasks. Centrist positions, systematically encouraged by the WRP in the 1970’s, resurfaced. The International Committee rigorously discussed these issues. At the beginning of 1990, David North stated that it would be “one-sided and wrong for us to concentrate only on the ‘objective’ side of events as if the collapse of the East European regimes and the post war order could somehow take place completely separately and independently from the class struggle and the conscious clash of political forces. The subjective conscious factor is by no means insignificant. The fact that Stalinism has undermined the development of the political consciousness of the working class is certainly not the least of its crimes, and its consequences are themselves an important objective factor in the

115 Friedrich Engels, “Revolution and counter revolution in Germany”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch07.htm>

116 Hans Modrow, op. cit. p. 65, 145

117 “For the international unity of the working class in the struggle against Stalinism and capitalism! For the United Socialist States of Europe!”, in “Das Ende der DDR”, p187-88

118 “Das Ende der DDR”, Essen, op.cit. pp. 119, 123

general political situation.”<sup>119</sup>

212. In further political discussions it was stressed that the “profound crisis of capitalism does not automatically translate itself into Marxist consciousness. Rather, while globalisation and world-wide integration of capitalist production enormously intensifies the contradictions of imperialism, it also breaks to pieces the old, nationally rooted organisations of the working class. The ideological crisis of the international workers’ movement is a reflection of that process.” The collapse of the Stalinist regimes did not amount to a political revolution: “The political revolution is not just an objective event it is a program. ... Any tendency to objectivise and glorify the spontaneous drift of events is extremely dangerous. It is one thing for workers to reject Stalinism. It is another thing for them to adopt a revolutionary program.”<sup>120</sup>

213. At its 12th plenum in March 1992, the International Committee drew the following conclusion from the collapse of the GDR and the Soviet Union: “The intensification of the class struggle provides the general foundation of the revolutionary movement. But it does not by itself directly and automatically create the political, intellectual and, one might add, cultural environment that its development requires, and which prepares the historic setting for a truly revolutionary situation. Only when we grasp this distinction between the general objective basis of the revolutionary movement and the complex political, social and cultural process through which it becomes a dominant historical force is it possible to understand the significance of our historical struggle against Stalinism and to see the tasks that are posed to us today.”<sup>121</sup>

214. The International Committee, however, also opposed the position that the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and China had resolved the crisis of imperialism and overcome its contradictions. The opposite was the case: “From a world historical standpoint the collapse of the East European regimes and

the post war order as a whole means that all of the fundamental contradictions of imperialism re-emerge at a much higher level. Rather than beginning a new triumphant period of capitalist growth, imperialism in fact stands on the brink of a new bloody epoch of wars and revolutions. In other words, the contradictions which have come into play cannot be resolved in a peaceful manner. This is the issue which confronts the working class. It must resolve the crisis in a progressive way. Otherwise it will be resolved by capitalism in a very reactionary way.”<sup>122</sup>

215. Only from this international standpoint was it possible to correctly understand the events in the GDR and the Soviet Union and draw the necessary conclusions. “Our perspective is that we are entering a long period of revolutionary upheavals. There will, of course, be ups and downs. There can also be setbacks, even serious setbacks. What is absolutely excluded is any rapid solution to the historical questions thrown up by the collapse of post war social relations. These issues can only be resolved within the arena of international class struggle.”<sup>123</sup>

216. The International Committee devoted considerable attention to the problem of socialist culture and the development of a socialist consciousness amongst workers. It undertook a systematic struggle against the post-Soviet school of historical falsification and historians such as Martin Malia, Richard Pipes and Dmitri Volkogonov, who sought to corroborate the thesis that socialism had failed by falsifying the history of the Russian Revolution. In this work, the IC collaborated closely with the Russian historian Vadim Rogovin, who, in his seven volume work on the Trotskyist Left Opposition, clearly demonstrated that there was a progressive alternative to Stalinism. At the same time, the IC expanded its work on cultural questions and sought to revive the intellectual traditions of the Left Opposition, which took such issues seriously. To this end, Mehring Verlag published new editions of Leon Trotsky’s *Literature and Revolution* and *Problems of Everyday Life*, as well as the first German edition of

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119 David North, “The chain of imperialism breaks at its weakest link”, *Fourth International*, Vol. 16

120 WL Internal Bulletin, Vol 4, No 3 February 1990

121 “The Struggle for Marxism and the Tasks of the Fourth International”, Report by David North, March 11 1992, *Fourth International*, Volume 19, No 1 Winter 1992, p.74

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122 David North, “The chain of imperialism breaks at its weakest link”, *Fourth International*, Vol. 16

123 David North, “The crisis of Stalinism and the perspective of socialist world revolution“ *Fourth International*, Vol. 17

Art as the Cognition of Life by Aleksandr Voronsky.

## XXVI. The bankruptcy of reformist and national organizations

217. The liquidation of the Soviet Union by the Stalinist bureaucracy was a manifestation of an international phenomenon. On January 4, 1992, just over a week after the formal dissolution of the USSR, David North explained: "All over the world the working class is confronted with the fact that the trade unions, parties and even states which they created in an earlier period have been transformed into the direct instruments of imperialism. The days are over when the bureaucracies "mediated" the class struggle and played the role of buffer between the classes. Though the bureaucracies generally betrayed the historical interests of the working class, they still, in a limited sense, served its daily practical needs; and, to that extent, "justified" their existence as leaders of working class organizations. That period is over. The bureaucracy cannot play any such independent role in the present period."<sup>124</sup>

218. That was valid for the Stalinist and reformist parties and for the trade unions. Their program, the suppression of class conflict by means of social reforms, failed due to globalization, and they openly placed themselves in opposition to the elementary interests of the working class. The trade unions were no longer, even in the broadest sense of the word, "workers' organizations". They wrested no more concessions from the employers and the government, but, rather, forced workers to make concessions in order to strengthen national competitiveness and attract capital. During the reunification of Germany, the DGB and its affiliated trade unions strangled every attempt at resistance against privatisation and factory closures and co-operated closely with the Treuhand agency (responsible for privatisation). "The trade unions, together with the churches, ensured protests did not become radicalised", Franz Steinkühler, chairman of the Metalworkers Union, later boasted. His deputy Klaus Zwickel spoke of the "dangerous high-wire act", which the trade union had undertaken. "If we had not done so, I am convinced that violence or political extremism would

have taken over."<sup>125</sup> Later, the trade unions assisted in the transfer of low wages from East to West Germany. Since then, every plan for rationalization and staff cuts such as by the car maker Opel has carried the signature of the trade unions and their works councils.

219. The SPD, and above all its chairman Willy Brandt, supported the reunification without reservation. In the following years in the states and regions, it competed with the CDU and the FDP to lower the living standards of workers. And in 1998, when the SPD took office for the first time in 16 years, it introduced the Agenda 2010 program, the most comprehensive welfare cuts since the founding of the Federal Republic. Chancellor Schröder had the support of large sections of the bourgeoisie, who thought the Kohl government was no longer capable of leading such a frontal attack against the working class. Likewise in foreign policy, the SPD-Green coalition carried out a radical change of course, deploying German troops to international theatres of war for the first time since the country's defeat in World War II.

220. In 1990, the BSA definitively abandoned the tactic of calling for electoral votes for the SPD or placing socialist demands on it. This was explained in its 1993 perspectives document: "The BSA has always regarded as its foremost task the need to break the working class from the influence of the SPD, which has been, for many decades, the most important mechanism for the maintenance of bourgeois rule in the Federal Republic. ... In the elaboration of its tactics, however, the BSA was obliged to recognise that the SPD was still identified in the working class with social reforms. ... Today, holding to such a tactic would be misplaced. The SPD has completely transformed itself from a bourgeois reformist party into a right-wing bourgeois party. A call for the casting of votes for the SPD, or placing demands on the SPD to take power would, under these circumstances, only contribute to extending the death agony of this bankrupt party and prevent the working class from carrying out the necessary political re-orientation."<sup>126</sup>

221. The same perspectives document declared, with

124 David North, "The end of the Soviet Union and the future of socialism", Fourth International Vol 19, No. 1, Autumn 1992, P. 133

125 Quoted in: "Socialist Perspectives after the collapse of Stalinism", Program of the BSA, Arbeiterpresse Verlag 1993, p. 88

126 Ibid. p.83-84

regard to the trade unions: “The destruction of the trade unions by the bureaucracy is far advanced, and any conception that the path of the working class must proceed through the old reformist organizations only serves to chain workers to the rotting corpse of the trade unions.”<sup>127</sup> In the current economic crisis, the reactionary character of the trade unions has been even more evident. While the banks have attempted to shift the consequences of their unrestrained speculative transactions upon the working class, the trade unions openly place themselves on their side and suppress every genuine mobilization of the working class. Both the rescue packages for the banks and the government savings programs have been supported by the majority of trade unions. The struggle against these attacks can only be developed further in a systematic fight against union suppression.

222. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the International Committee also undertook a thorough examination of its attitude towards the national movements and the right of national self-determination. Numerous nationalistic and separatist movements were emerging, demanding their own national states. Multinational states, which had been relatively stable under the conditions of the post-war period, were torn apart by national, ethnic and religious tensions, stoked, in the main, by imperialist powers prosecuting their own interests. Thus Germany and the US supported the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, and the US regarded the dissolution of the Soviet Union as an opportunity to expand its influence into the Caucasus and Central Asia. The growth of separatist movements, however, also had objective causes. Globalization provided “an objective impulse for a new type of nationalist movement, seeking the dismemberment of existing states. Globally-mobile capital has given smaller territories the ability to link themselves directly to the world market. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan have become the new models of development. A small coastal enclave, possessing adequate transportation links, infrastructure and a supply of cheap labor may prove a more attractive base for multinational capital than a larger country with a less productive hinterland.”<sup>128</sup>

223. The International Committee opposed these separatist movements and counterpoised to them the international unity of the working class. Their goal was not to unite different peoples in a common struggle against imperialism, as progressive national movements had once sought to carry out in India and China, but rather the fragmentation of existing states in the interests of local exploiters. Far from embodying the democratic aspirations of the oppressed masses, they served to split the working class. The stereotyped repetition of the phrase “for the right of nations to self-determination” could not replace a concrete analysis of these movements. The International Committee stressed: “It has often been the case in the history of the Marxist movement that formulations and slogans which had a progressive and revolutionary content in one period take on an entirely different meaning in another. National self-determination presents just such a case. The right to self-determination has come to mean something very different from the way in which Lenin defined it more than eighty years ago. It is not only the Marxists who have advanced the right to self-determination, but the national bourgeoisie in the backward countries and the imperialists themselves.”<sup>129</sup>

224. The clarification of the demand for self-determination and the associated struggle against the petty-bourgeois nationalists strengthened the Fourth International’s internationalist program. The International Committee clearly disassociated itself from the numerous ex-lefts and ex-radicals, who—like the Greens—supported, in the name of the right of nations to self-determination, the imperialist bloodbath in the Balkans and in other regions of the world. The analysis of the International Committee confirmed that a genuine internationalist program for the working class could be developed only on the basis of the theory of permanent revolution.

## **XXVII. The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit and the WSWS**

225. The International Committee concluded from the bankruptcy of the reformist organisations that the previous organisational form of its sections as “Leagues” or “Bund” was no longer appropriate. This

127 Ibid. p. 91-92

128 “Globalization and international working class. A Marxist assessment”, Statement of the International

Committee the Fourth International, 7 Nov. 1998, <http://www.wsws.org/de/1998/nov1998/glob-n07.shtml>

129 Ibid.

form had been selected at a time when many militant workers actively supported the social-democratic or Stalinist mass parties and trade unions. The political activity of the sections of the ICFI “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 radicalisation among the most class-conscious and politically-active elements within the ranks of these organisations. 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”, David North explained. That was no longer the case. “If there is to be leadership given to the working class, it must be provided by our party. If a new road is to be opened for the masses of working people, it must be opened by our organisation. The problem of the leadership cannot be resolved on the basis of a clever tactic. We cannot resolve the crisis of working class leadership by ‘demanding’ that others provide that leadership. If there is to be a new party, then we must build it.” Every section of the International Committee began preparations for the establishment of such parties.<sup>130</sup>

226. On March 20, 1997, a national conference of the BSA near Darmstadt founded the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit. The conference resolution explained: “In the post-war period the SPD and the trade unions still combined a bourgeois programme—the defence of private property—with the defence of social reforms. This enabled workers to secure their daily needs through these organisations, even if their politics ran contrary to workers’ long-term interests.... Today the SPD and the trade unions openly oppose the workers, even in the defence of their daily needs. Both their members and voters desert them in droves. The defence of even the most minimal demand places before workers tasks that can only be resolved through the building of a new party. Such a party cannot emerge from the rubble of the old, politically bankrupt organisations. It can develop only by assembling the most politically advanced workers around the historically developed programme of the Fourth International. That is why the BSA has

seized the initiative to create this party. It places the working class in the position to raise its own voice and intervene as an independent force in social events.”<sup>131</sup>

227. The name Partei für Soziale Gleichheit was selected on the basis of careful consideration. It expressed “the fundamental objective of the new party: it is in irreconcilable opposition to the prevailing social tendency, which is characterised by the increasing impoverishment of broad social layers on the one hand, and by the unrestrained enrichment of a small minority on the other. It stands for the goal of the socialist movement: a society in which there are no class differences and which is based on real equality between human beings. And it distinguishes itself from the political crimes, committed by the Stalinists and Social-Democratic bureaucracies, in the name of socialism, which they theoretically falsified.”<sup>132</sup>

228. The development of the International Committee into a politically unified world party after the split with the WRP culminated in January 1998 in the establishment of the World Socialist Web Site. Epoch-making developments in communications, closely followed by the International Committee, created the technological conditions for the WSWS. The Internet was an extraordinary medium for the spread of revolutionary ideas and for organising revolutionary work. For many decades, the production of newspapers had played a central and crucial role in the structure of the revolutionary movement. Lenin had dedicated a substantial part of his groundbreaking work *What Is to Be Done?* to an explanation of the role of an all-Russian newspaper. The BSA had, since its founding in 1971, published a newspaper—first *Der Funke* and then *Neue Arbeiterpresse*. But their distribution depended on the number of party members available to sell it. The Internet created the conditions to overcome this restriction and to extend the party’s readership.

229. The WSWS was not, however, merely a product of Internet technology. It was based on the same conceptions as the transformation of leagues into parties: the International Committee had to play the key role in the political re-orientation of the working class on the basis of Marxism. The WSWS relied on the entire theo-

130 David North, “The Workers League and the Founding of the Socialist Equality Party”, Detroit 1996, P. 18-19, 30

131 Partei für Soziale Gleichheit, “Grundsätze und Ziele”, Essen 1997, P. 11-12, 129

132 Ibid. P. 5

retical capital of the Marxist world movement. As the Editorial Board explained: “The World Socialist Web Site, published by the coordinated efforts of ICFI members in Asia, Australia, Europe and North America, takes as its starting point the international character of the class struggle. It assesses political developments in every country from the standpoint of the world crisis of capitalism and the political tasks confronting the international working class. Flowing from this perspective, it resolutely opposes all forms of chauvinism and national parochialism. We are confident that the WSWS will become an unprecedented tool for the political education and unification of the working class on an international scale. It will help working people of different countries coordinate their struggles against capital, just as the transnational corporations organise their war against labour across national boundaries. It will facilitate discussion between workers of all nations, allowing them to compare their experiences and elaborate a common strategy. The International Committee of the Fourth International intends to use this technology as a tool for the liberation of the working people and oppressed all over the world.”

### **XXVIII. The Left Party and the petty-bourgeois ex-lefts**

230. At the end of the 1990s, social-democratic governments returned to office in most European countries. But their rightward course rapidly undermined the dwindling support they had still enjoyed in the working class. In Germany, in the seven years of the Schröder government, the SPD lost more than 200,000 members and suffered heavy defeats in every state election. In France, the Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin, after five years in office as prime minister, received fewer votes at the presidential elections of 2002 than the fascist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen, while the representatives of the combined middle-class left received 10 percent of the vote. A vast gulf has opened up between the working class and the former reformist parties that various petty-bourgeois and post-Stalinist organisations are trying to fill. These organisations have one thing in common: they are the product of conscious initiatives by representatives of the ruling class; they are not centrist organisations moving towards socialism under the pressure of the masses. Their task consists of strangling from the outset every independent political movement of the working class.

231. For a long time, the Italian party Refounded Communism (Rifondazione Comunista) was regarded by all of these organisations in Europe as their role model. In 1991, Rifondazione emerged out of a section of the Italian Communist Party and took the entire spectrum of Italian ex-radicals, including the Italian section of the Pabloites, in tow. While it stood with one foot in the camp of extra-parliamentary protest movements, during the 1990s it provided various centre-left bourgeois governments with parliamentary majorities. In 2006, Rifondazione entered the centre-left government of Romano Prodi, which proceeded to enact substantial anti-working class spending cuts. This set the seal on their bankruptcy. After just two years, the Prodi government was so hated that it paved the way for the return of Silvio Berlusconi’s right-wing government. In 2008, Rifondazione itself failed to get back into parliament and broke apart.

232. In France, the Pabloites prepared their integration into the structures of bourgeois politics by dissolving, in January 2009, the 40-year-old Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and creating a new party that dissociated itself expressly from Trotskyism and rejected every link to a revolutionary socialist perspective. This was its reaction to the electoral successes of its presidential candidate, Olivier Besancenot, who, in 2002 and 2007, had received over 1 million votes. The programme of the new Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) does not go beyond advocating the reform of capitalism on the basis of a neo-Keynesian economic policy. The NPA strives for “a leftist coalition” with the Communist Party and the Left Party (a faction that split from the Socialist Party) in order to help the discredited Socialist Party win a new government majority. It provides an important base of support for the trade union bureaucracy, which, for its part, is deeply integrated into the capitalist state.

233. In Germany, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice (WASG) united in the summer of 2007 to form the Left Party. The Left Party unites two bureaucratic apparatuses under one roof, both of which have decades of experience in patronising and suppressing the working class. The Party of Democratic Socialism is the successor to the Stalinist state party of the GDR. In 1990, under Hans Modrow, it organised German reunification and afterwards, as social ten-



sions deepened, undertook to maintain order in East Germany. The WASG developed in the final phase of the Schröder government. It was created by longstanding bureaucrats from the SPD and trade unions who were alarmed over the decline in the SPD's membership. The initiative for the fusion of the two organisations stemmed from Oskar Lafontaine, one of the most experienced German bourgeois politicians, who for 40 years had occupied leading positions in government and in the SPD.

234. Petty-bourgeois renegades from the Trotskyist movement—such as the Socialist Alternative (SAV) and Marx21—have amalgamated with the Left Party and claim it to be the starting point for the building of “a fighting mass party with ten of thousands of members”. This is a grotesque deception. At no point does the programme of the Left Party go beyond the framework of bourgeois reforms. It defends capitalist private property and the bourgeois state and expressly placed itself behind the federal government's bank rescue package, which put billions in public funds at the disposal of the banks. Where the Left Party takes part in government, it bends over backwards to fulfill the dictates of the financial world. In the Berlin Senate, for example, it has been in coalition with the SPD since 2001 and participated in an unparalleled downsizing of the public service. The Left Party's occasional leftist phrases are exclusively aimed at subordinating any mobilisation against social cutbacks or war to the requirements of German imperialism.

## XXIX. The tasks of the PSG

235. Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, world capitalism is in deep economic and political crisis. The financial collapse that began in September 2008 with the failure of the US investment bank Lehman Brothers ushered in the deepest world recession since the 1930s and drove numerous states to the edge of the bankruptcy. This crisis was prepared over decades. Its roots lie in the contradictions of the capitalist system: the contradiction between social production and private ownership of the means of production and the contradiction between the global economy and the national state system. The situation recalls, in many respects, that of a century earlier, the eve of the First World War. At that time, the crisis of world capitalism opened up a 30-year period of violent class

conflict and wars, during which relations between the classes and between imperialist powers were forcibly transformed. Likewise, the current crisis is the prelude to a comprehensive reorganisation of economic and social relations that will be no less tempestuous than in the first half of the twentieth century. If the capitalists retain the initiative in resolving the crisis, it will lead to mass poverty, oppression and war. The only alternative is the socialist solution: the seizure of power by the working class, the socialisation and democratic control of the banks and major industries, and development of economic planning that orients to the social needs of the majority, rather than the profit interests of a tiny minority.

236. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a response to the growing contradictions of world capitalism, and further intensified them. As long as the Soviet Union existed, the imperialist powers felt compelled to suppress social and international tensions. Fearing an expansion of the October revolution, they granted concessions to the working class, and in the interests of a united front against the Soviet Union, curbed their conflicts of interest and military ambitions. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, that was no longer the case. In January 1991, a military alliance led by the US attacked Iraq. The International Committee emphasised that the war was not an isolated episode: “The as yet incomplete, de-facto partition of Iraq is the beginning of a re-division of the world by imperialism. The former colonies are to be subjugated once again.” It pointed to “the striving by American imperialism to regain its world supremacy“, as being “one of the most explosive elements in world politics“. The increasing belligerence of American imperialism represented “an attempt to reverse its economic decline by the use of military force—the only area in which the United States still maintains undisputed supremacy.”<sup>133</sup>

237. This appraisal was confirmed in the ensuing years as US imperialism became increasingly aggressive. In 1999, a US-led military alliance bombed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and forced the separation of Kosovo. This was followed in 2001 by the occupation of Afghanistan and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, a war that has cost more than 1 million lives with several million more turned into refugees. Iran and North Ko-  
133 “Against imperialist war and colonialism!” Fourth International, Vol.19 Fall-Winter 1992

rea are potential targets for American attack. While the pretext for war may vary, the goal remains the same: the subjugation and control of regions of the world that are of strategic importance for the geopolitical and economic interests of the great powers—in particular their energy supplies. American imperialism, confronted with strong rivals in Europe, China, Asia and South America, plays the leading role. But the other imperialist powers participate in these wars in one way or another, partly not to leave the field entirely to the US, partly to pursue their own imperialist interests.

238. After the defeat for Germany in the Second World War, the FRG took its place in the NATO alliance and stood at the head of the confrontation with the Soviet Union. It had a large conscripted army of 500,000 soldiers and permitted the stationing of US nuclear weapons on its territory. Until reunification, however, Germany limited its military activities to defensive operations within the sphere of NATO. From 1990 onwards, it has transformed itself into one of the most important military players worldwide. In 1999, the German army took part in the war against Yugoslavia in a combat mission for the first time. Eleven years later, there are approximately 7,000 German soldiers abroad, more than half of them in Afghanistan. While at first this took place under the pretext of a mission for “peace and security”, the German government now openly refers to the Afghanistan deployment as “war”. In Europe, the old national conflicts are re-emerging. Germany’s refusal to financially support the Greek government, which faces bankruptcy, has turned the other EU members against Berlin and placed the common currency in doubt. Hopes for the peaceful unification of Europe from above are again proving to be a utopia. European “unity” on a capitalist basis means the domination of the most powerful financial interests, the walling-off of its external borders, increasing national tensions and endless attacks on the living conditions of the working class.

239. Pacifist appeals to the ruling class or demands for disarmament cannot halt deepening national tensions, war and militarism. These arise, as Trotsky wrote in 1940 in relation to the Second World War, “inexorably from the contradictions of international capitalist interests”. “The chief cause of war as of all other social

evils—unemployment, the high cost of living, fascism, colonial oppression—is the private ownership of the means of production together with the bourgeois state which rests on this foundation.”<sup>134</sup> The fight against war and militarism is inseparably bound up with the building of an international socialist movement of the working class, whose goal is the overthrow of capitalism. The urgently necessary unification of Europe is conceivable only on a socialist basis, as the United Socialist States of Europe.

240. The Greek debt crisis is the starting point for a new offensive against the European working class. Governments have spent trillions to rescue the banks and now intend to retrieve these enormous sums at the expense of the working class. Under pressure from international speculators and the diktats of the Brussels commission, the Greek social-democratic government has decided on an unprecedented programme of cost cutting. When adjusted to German conditions, the planned budget cuts for the year 2010 correspond to a volume of €100 billion, almost twice as much as the €60 billion that the German government has pledged to save over the next six years, with its so-called debt brake. No other government has succeeded in forcing through such cuts on the basis of democratic methods. Ireland, Latvia and Hungary have decided on similar programmes, and the highly indebted Portugal, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Great Britain are next on the list. Germany and France plan their own draconian cuts to public expenditure.

241. These measures are being carried out despite the fact that social inequality has already reached levels not seen since the 1930s. In 2008, every seventh inhabitant of Germany, one of the richest countries in the world, either lived in poverty or was under threat of poverty—one third more than 10 years ago. Every fourth young adult between the ages of 19 and 25 years, and half of all single parents with small children, lived below the poverty line. At the beginning of 2009, 3.5 million were unemployed. Ever more people work in precarious conditions. Meanwhile, just over half of all jobs carry social security and health care coverage. In Germany, Europe and worldwide, the attempts to reduce living standards even further must lead to a severe sharpen-

134 Leon Trotsky, “Imperialist War And The Proletarian World Revolution”, <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/fi/1938-1949/emergconf/fi-emerg02.htm>

ing of class war.

242. The susceptibility of the world economy to crisis, the sharpening of geopolitical tensions, the growth of militarism, the undermining of democratic rights, the increase in welfare cuts and unemployment, as well as the alienation of broad layers of the population from the established political organisations, are unfailing signs of an approaching revolutionary crisis. One should not be deceived by the still relatively low level of class struggle that currently prevails. At present, the working class has no voice with which to express its interests. It has been completely abandoned by its traditional political parties, many of which still carry the old political labels “social-democratic”, “socialist” or “communist”, but these designations have long since lost any content. Politically speaking, they hardly differ from the traditional right-wing bourgeois parties, as has been demonstrated by the transformation of the British Labour Party, the Agenda 2010 programme of the German SPD and the cost-cutting programme of the Greek PASOK. Below the surface, the anger of the population is growing. It will break through the existing framework of official politics and come into open conflict with the SPD, the Left Party and the trade unions.

243. The demands of the coming revolutionary epoch can only be met by a party that bases itself on the working class, is led by the most advanced political theory, has drawn the lessons of the past struggles

of the international working class and bases its programme on a scientific understanding of the objective tendencies of social development. The International Committee of the Fourth International is the only political tendency whose political work rests on historical principles and is able to present its entire history to the working class. The social democrats, Stalinists, Pabloite tendencies and trade unions do everything they can to avoid examining their past, which is full of blunders and crimes, and to avoid any disturbance of their opportunist manoeuvres by historical principles. The International Committee will win the most determined, courageous and principled elements among workers and youth to its banner.

244. The Partei für Soziale Gleichheit will energetically promote the development of new and independent organisations for the working population and support them in the development of their programme and tactics. The growing social crisis will provoke numerous battles and forms of popular resistance. However, the decisive question remains the building of a new revolutionary leadership. Organising an international socialist movement of the working class, to bring the perspectives and history of Marxism to a new generation of workers and youth is the task of the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International.

