The Political Origins and Consequences of the 1982–86 Split in the International Committee of the Fourth International

By David North
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This lecture was delivered by David North at the opening of the Socialist Equality Party (US) Summer School on July 21, 2019. North is the national chairman of the SEP and the chairman of the International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site.

This week's lectures will concentrate on the history of the International Committee of the Fourth International, from 1982 to 1995, that is, from the initial formulation of a detailed critique of the British Workers Revolutionary Party's revisions of the theoretical foundations and political program of the Trotskyist movement, to the decision to transform the leagues of the International Committee into parties. We have in the past, and especially in the summer school of 2015, reviewed the events that led up to the split with the Workers Revolutionary Party. In recent months party members have been studying documents produced by the Workers League between 1982 and 1985.

The main focus of this school will be on the development of the International Committee in the aftermath of the final break with the WRP in February 1986. The lectures will be based on a wide range of documents, which make possible the study of discussions within the International Committee and its sections on critical issues relating to strategy, program, perspectives, and organization.

New material—which includes transcripts from discussions within the leadership committees as well as the exchange of letters between party leaders—is included in the compilation of documents, titled *Political Chronology of the International Committee of the Fourth International 1982–1991*. This is being made available to the entire party membership for the first time. These documents reveal the depth and intensity of the discussions within the International Committee and the vibrancy of its political-intellectual life. They are invaluable source material for a detailed study of the history of the International Committee. They will enable party members to examine the political process by which the International Committee and its sections developed their response to the momentous events that followed—and which had been anticipated by—the 1985–86 split in the International Committee. These documents provide an insight into how principled political discussions are conducted in a revolutionary Marxist-Trotskyist party.

What are the considerations that influenced the selection of the subject of this school and its concentration on these ICFI documents? There are many indications that the International Committee has entered a period of significant growth. We are already recruiting many new members into our movement. This process will include not only recruitment into the existing sections of the ICFI, but the establishment of new sections throughout the world. The exact speed and scale of this growth will be affected by objective events. But there is no question but that our political work, on an international scale, is intersecting with the trajectory of the class struggle driven by the escalating crisis of the world capitalist system.

We welcome the growth of our movement, which we have fought to build over many decades. But all processes are inherently contradictory. There is always the danger—as Trotsky explained in his 1923 critique of *The New Course*—that the influx of new and inexperienced recruits will lead to a lowering of the theoretical and political level of the party. This is a natural problem, which always accompanies growth. One cannot expect that young members will automatically understand the challenges and demands of revolutionary work. There may be a tendency, arising from inexperience, toward an impressionist and pragmatic response to events. It is the responsibility of older comrades to assist, with the necessary patience, the newer members.

But it would be an error to assume that the older comrades, due to their many years of experience, are endowed with political infallibility. The experience that comes with age is of considerable value, but it is not without its own problematic and negative features. Age, we are told, brings wisdom. This is a proposition that should be taken with more than a few grains of salt. Age also brings—in addition to more frequent trips to the doctor—a tendency toward conservatism and dogmatism, the mistaken belief that the response to new problems requires no more than the direct application of what is often referred to, without sufficient reflection, as the "lessons of the past." What are called "lessons" must be defined quite precisely, or one runs the risk of dissolving the specificity of the existing situation into a timeless supra-historical generality.

The political development of the party *as a whole*—of both older and younger members—the raising of its theoretical level to meet the intensifying political challenges, requires the interaction of an intense engagement with contemporary developments and the identification and critical analysis of the historical processes that constitute the essential content of the "present." This is the meaning of Hegel's statement, which I quoted so many years ago in my 1982 essays commemorating the fifth anniversary of Tom Henehan's death: "Thus cognition rolls forward from content to content … it raises to each new stage of determination the whole mass of its antecedent content, and by its dialectical progress not only loses nothing and leaves nothing behind, but carries with it all that it has acquired, enriching and concentrating itself upon itself." [1]

Developing and sustaining a program of theoretical and political education is an essential and challenging task. There is an immense need for the preparation of lectures on the "fundamentals" of Marxism, i.e., philosophical materialism, political economy and the historical origins of the socialist movement. However, without intending to underestimate the significance of classes on these foundational subjects, one must warn that this work will remain of an academic character unless it is part of an educational program that includes an intensive study of the history of the Fourth International. This vast subject encompasses the revolutionary

experience of the working class over a period of nearly a century.

Moreover, this study must be informed by a correct theoretical method. Hegel, in his *Philosophy of History*, ridiculed the different varieties of pragmatic approaches to history. "The worst kind of pragmatic historian," he wrote, "is the petty psychologist who looks for subjective motives…" Hardly any better "is the moralizing pragmatist … who sporadically awakens from his weary ramblings to utter edifying Christian reflections, attacking events and individuals in the flank with his moral onslaughts, and throwing in an edifying thought, a word of exhortation, a moral doctrine, or the like." [2] Hegel was referring, obviously, to Robert Service.

Hegel was an objective idealist, whose dialectic presented the historical process as the logical unfolding and reconstruction in the philosophical mind of the Absolute Idea. Marx and Engels extracted from Hegel's mystical idealist presentation the real materialist process at work in history. Engels, writing in 1888, reworked, on a materialist basis, Hegel's critique of pragmatic history. The basic weakness of the pragmatic approach to history, Engels explained, was that "it judges everyone according to the motives of the action; it divides men who act in history into noble and ignoble and then finds that as a rule the noble are defrauded and the ignoble are victorious." [3]

Engels continued:

> When it is a question of investigating the driving powers which—consciously or unconsciously, and indeed very often unconsciously—lie behind the motives of men who act in history and which constitute the real ultimate driving forces of history, then it is not a question so much of the motives of single individuals, however eminent, as of those motives which set in motion great masses, whole peoples, and then again whole classes of the people in each people, and even this, not momentarily, giving rise to the transient flaring up of a straw-fire which quickly dies down, but to lasting action resulting in a great historical transformation. [4]

This is the approach that necessarily guides our study of the history of the Trotskyist movement. Our focus is not on the assumed "motives" of the individuals who played at different points major roles in that history, but on the objective historical and social processes that found conscious expression in the political struggles of the Fourth International.

If we take as its starting point the founding of the Left Opposition in 1923, the history of the Trotskyist movement spans almost an entire century. The subject of that history is the conscious struggle of the Marxist vanguard of the international working class to defend and develop the program and strategy of world socialist revolution in the aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917. The "content that stirs" within this history are the monumental events of the twentieth century—wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions—that have drawn billions of people into struggle and cost the lives of hundreds of millions. Such momentous events cannot be explained adequately merely in terms of the motives of individuals, however important a role they may have played at various points in the history of the Trotskyist movement. One must always strive to uncover the objective conditions, social forces, and class interests—often not adequately recognized by those active in the political process—that manifested themselves in the actions of parties and individuals. Those who imagine that they are bending history to their subjective will are invariably the tools of the most reactionary social forces and political processes. The Marxist revolutionist understands that history can be "mastered" only to the extent that its dialectical laws are understood and, to the greatest extent possible, acted upon. Trotsky described with his customary brilliance the relation between Marxist analysis and subjective revolutionary determination:

> The revolutionists of our epoch, who can be linked only with the working class, possess their own special psychological characteristics, qualities of intellect and will. If it is necessary and possible, revolutionists forcefully shatter the historical obstructions. If this is not possible, they make a detour. If it is impossible to make a detour, revolutionists patiently and persistently keep scrapping and chipping away. They are revolutionists because they are not afraid to shatter obstacles or to employ relentless force. They know the historical value of these things. It is their constant endeavor to deploy the full capacity of their destructive and creative work; that is, to extract from every given historical situation the maximum that it is capable of rendering toward the advancement of the revolutionary class.
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> In their activities, revolutionists are limited only by external obstacles, not by internal ones. That is, they must train themselves to evaluate their situation, the material and concrete reality of their entire area of activity, in its positive and negative aspects, and to draw the correct political balance sheet. [5]

The Marxist revolutionist's relation to history is dynamic. The Trotskyist movement strives to locate its present-day analysis and activity within the context of an entire revolutionary epoch. This disciplined scientific approach is incompatible with individualistic, impressionist and pragmatic—that is, opportunist—politics. The perspective of the Trotskyist movement is determined not by the needs of the day, but by the demands of the historical epoch.

The revolutionary party must be conscious of the historical foundations and future implications of its decisions and actions. But this high level of political consciousness requires a detailed knowledge of the history of the Fourth International.

This is a vast subject, spanning almost an entire century. But it is possible to identify four distinct stages in the history of the Trotskyist movement. The value of such a periodization is that it enables us, first, to locate more precisely the position of the International Committee in the trajectory of the historical development of the Fourth International; and, second, to clarify the relationship of the historical development of the Fourth International to the global crisis of capitalism and the process of world socialist revolution.

The first stage in the history of the Fourth International encompasses a period of 15 years, from the formation of the Left Opposition in October 1923 to the founding congress of the Fourth International in September 1938. During these tragic years, dominated by the struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy and its nationalist perspective of socialism in one country, Trotsky developed the theoretical and political foundations of what was to become, in the aftermath of the accession of the Nazis to power in Germany, the Fourth International. The central strategic principle that guided the struggle against Stalinism and the formation of the Fourth International was formulated by Trotsky in his 1928 Critique of the Draft Program of the Communist International.

Trotsky wrote:

> In our epoch, which is the epoch of imperialism, i.e., of *world* economy and *world* politics under the hegemony of finance capital, not a single communist party can establish its program by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of developments in its own country. This also holds entirely for the party that wields state power within the boundaries of the USSR. On August 4, 1914,

> the death knell sounded for national programs for all time. The revolutionary party of the proletariat can base itself only upon an international program corresponding to the character of the present epoch, the epoch of the highest development and collapse of capitalism. An international communist program is in no case the sum of national programs or an amalgam of their common features. The international program must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of the world economy and of the world political system taken as a whole in all its connections and contradictions, that is, with the mutually antagonistic interdependence of its separate parts. In the present epoch, to a much larger extent than in the past, the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not vice versa. Herein lies the basic and primary difference between communist internationalism and all varieties of national socialism. [6]

The first stage witnessed a series of political disasters, caused principally by the betrayals of the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies. It was the period of Popular Frontism—that is, the subordination of the working class by the Stalinist parties to the bourgeois liberal representatives of imperialism and finance capital—and of the Moscow Trials and the Stalinist terror, which annihilated the Bolshevik cadre that had led the Russian working class to victory. Insisting on the historical necessity of the Fourth International, Trotsky opposed the many centrist organizations that claimed it was premature to proclaim a new International. For the founding of an International "great events" were required. "Great events," Trotsky answered, had taken place: the greatest defeats of the working class in history. Only by building the Fourth International and resolving the crisis of revolutionary leadership would it be possible to reverse the pattern of defeats and secure the victory of socialism.

The second stage of the history of the Fourth International begins with the founding congress of September 1938 and ends in November 1953 with a major split in the Fourth International. This historical period encompasses the assassination of Trotsky, the entirety of World War II, the establishment of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, the re-stabilization of capitalism in Western Europe and Japan, the outbreak of the Cold War, the victory of the Chinese Revolution, the outbreak of the Korean War, and the death of Stalin.

All of these tumultuous events were reflected in the political development of the Fourth International. The outbreak of World War II in September 1939 immediately opened up divisions within the American Socialist Workers Party, as a minority faction led by James Burnham, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern—in response to the August 1939 signing of the Stalin-Hitler Non-Aggression Pact—repudiated the designation of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers state. The struggle within the SWP—to which Trotsky, in the final months of his life, contributed several documents that are among his most brilliant and far-sighted—culminated in a split in April 1940.

Far more was involved in this critical struggle than a dispute over what words should be used to define the class nature of the Soviet state. At the very heart of the dispute were the most fundamental questions of historical and political perspective: Was this the epoch of socialist revolution? Had the working class exhausted its historically-progressive role and proved incapable of creating a socialist society? Was the Soviet bureaucracy a parasitic caste produced by a series of exceptional circumstances—i.e., the backwardness and isolation of the Soviet Union, the international defeats of the working class—or a new class ruling over a form of post-capitalist exploitation not foreseen by Marxism?

Within a few weeks of the 1940 split Burnham, acting on the logic of his theoretical and political conceptions, repudiated socialism and moved quickly into the orbit of American imperialism. Shachtman's break with socialism followed a somewhat more circuitous route. Following his repudiation of the unconditional defense of the Soviet Union, even when it confronted the invasion of Nazi armies, Shachtman proceeded to proclaim the principle of the unconditional defense of bourgeois democracy, even when that defense involved direct collaboration with the political, military and intelligence agencies of American imperialism.

During the war another revisionist tendency emerged, the "Three Theses" group. Advancing views that ran parallel to those of Shachtman, the Three Theses group argued that the Third Reich marked the onset of a period of universal historical retrogression, which had removed socialism from the realm of political possibilities. Humanity, it claimed, had been thrown back a century and was compelled to retrace its steps. The political challenge of the epoch was the reestablishment of bourgeois democracy and national independence.

Burnham, Shachtman and the retrogressionists reflected shifting political moods within sections of the middle class left intelligentsia, who were in the process of separating themselves from the working class and the perspective of socialist revolution. Another manifestation of that process emerged in the form of a revisionist tendency in the Fourth International. Its leaders, Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, responded to the Soviet military victories and the establishment of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe by attributing to the Stalinist bureaucracies a revolutionary role. The "deformed workers states" in Eastern Europe, they argued, anticipated the political form through which socialism would be realized in the course of several centuries. The Fourth International had no independent, let alone historically significant role to play in this process.

By the early 1950s, the Pabloite tendency was attempting to compel the sections of the Fourth International to liquidate its organizations, not only into the Stalinist parties, but into those of the social democrats and bourgeois nationalists as well. By 1953, the Fourth International was no longer a politically homogeneous organization. To prevent the liquidation of the Fourth International, the faction of orthodox Trotskyists led by James P. Cannon issued the Open Letter of November 1953, proclaiming a split inside the Fourth International and the formation of the International Committee. The split brought the second stage of the history of the Fourth International to a conclusion.

The third stage began with the publication of the Open Letter and ended with the suspension of the British Workers Revolutionary Party from the International Committee in December 1985 and the final severing of all relations with the British national opportunists in February 1986. This period encompasses virtually the entire post-World War II boom. It includes such events as Khrushchev's secret speech, the Hungarian Revolution, the outbreak of a massive wave of anti-colonial struggles (i.e., Vietnam, Egypt, Algeria, the Congo), the establishment of the Castro regime in Cuba, the US intervention in Vietnam and the subsequent eruption of the massive worldwide student protest movement, the counter-revolutionary massacre in Indonesia of 1965–66, the Cultural Revolution in China, the French General Strike of May–June 1968, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system in August 1971, the overthrow of Allende in September 1973, the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973, the victory of British miners over the Tory government in March 1974, the Portuguese Revolution in April 1974, the collapse of the Greek Junta in July 1974, the resignation of Nixon in August 1974, the defeat of the United States in Vietnam in May 1975, the Iranian Revolution of 1978–79, the coming to power of Thatcher and Reagan in 1979 and 1980, and the subsequent initiation of a process of social and political reaction.

Throughout this explosive period, during which powerful mass movements of the working class posed objectively the possibility of socialist revolution, the International Committee had to contend not only

with the relentless pressure of the Stalinist and social democratic parties, trade unions and related organizations. The Pabloite organizations, allied with the aforementioned bureaucracies, as well as a broad stratum of petty-bourgeois radicals and anti-Trotskyist intellectuals, sought to isolate the International Committee, combining relentless falsifications of Marxist theory and the principles of the Fourth International with an unending series of political and organizational provocations.

The first and second stages each encompass 15 years. The third stage, which concluded with the 1986 split, lasted 33 years. The fourth stage, which begins in 1986 and has continued until the present, has also spanned 33 years. The 1985–86 split occurred at the exact midpoint in the entire 66-year history of the International Committee. It is instructive to contrast the third and fourth stages. From 1953 to 1986, the Pabloite opportunists exerted immense pressure on the Fourth International, from both within and without the sections of the ICFI. They were an endless source of political disorientation and provocation. In social terms, the Pabloite organizations were the means by which imperialism and its Stalinist and social democratic bureaucratic agencies politically mobilized sections of the anti-Marxist radical petty bourgeoisie to disrupt and isolate the International Committee. Moreover, the Pabloite organizations played a significant political role in containing and diverting the upsurge of the working class between 1968 and 1975, and thus intensifying the political pressure on the International Committee.

The British and French sections of the IC had played a critical role in opposing Pablo and Mandel in 1953. Between 1961 and 1963 the British Socialist Labour League, supported by the French, led the fight against the American Socialist Workers Party's unprincipled reunification with the Pabloites. But in the late 1960s, despite deceptively impressive organizational gains in Britain and France, the Socialist Labour League and the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste began to adapt their perspective and activity to the prevailing national political milieus, dominated by the Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies. The split between these organizations in 1971 took place under conditions in which the political differences between the OCI and SLL were left unclarified. The transformation of the SLL into the WRP—implemented entirely on the basis of nationally-grounded tactical considerations—accelerated the opportunist degeneration of the British section.

The British organization's increasingly nationalist focus led to an ever more apparent departure from the program and principles of Trotskyism. This was particularly apparent in its abandonment of the theory of permanent revolution and its orientation to the national bourgeoisie of the less developed countries.

This right-wing and essentially Pabloite course generated opposition within both the Revolutionary Communist League, the Sri Lankan section of the ICFI, and the Workers League in the United States. Both sections had their origins in the ICFI's opposition to the Pabloite reunification of 1963, a critical factor in the subsequent development of both sections. As early as 1971, Comrade Keerthi Balasuriya and the RCL leadership expressed their differences with the British SLL's support for the Indian invasion of East Pakistan, which had been ordered by the bourgeois government of Indira Gandhi. But this principled criticism was suppressed by the British organization without discussion within the International Committee. The SLL sought retribution for the RCL's criticism by willfully isolating the Sri Lankan organization and subjecting its leaders to vicious provocations.

The development of opposition within the Workers League involved a somewhat more protracted and complicated process. The removal of Wohlforth as national secretary in 1974 (who then rejoined the SWP) made possible the systematic education of its entire cadre on the basis of the history of the Trotskyist movement. The initiation of the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the assassination of Leon Trotsky—known as *Security and the Fourth International*—played a critical role in the political development of the Workers League. It also represented, in very real and objective terms, a political offensive by the Trotskyist movement against the counter-revolutionary agencies of both the capitalist state and the Stalinist bureaucracies.

The substantial development of the Workers League after 1974 prepared it for the political struggle that began in 1982, when differences with the WRP were initially presented. During the first stage of this struggle, the Workers League appeared to be completely isolated. But within little more than three years, the Trotskyist opposition to the WRP's Pabloite politics gained a decisive majority in the International Committee. The transformation that took place within the International Committee between August 1985 and February 1986 bears comparison to a political revolution.

Bear in mind that at the so-called "Tenth Congress of the International Committee" in January 1985, the leaders of the Workers Revolutionary Party barred any discussion of the differences that had been raised by the Workers League over the previous three years. The perspectives document prepared by the WRP for discussion at the Congress consisted of disjointed and bombastic declarations that were later to be appropriately described by the International Committee, in *How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism*, as "The Ten Stupidities of Cliff Slaughter."

Healy, Banda and Slaughter sought to disguise their political bankruptcy by staging one political provocation after another against the sections of the International Committee. But by the end of 1985, the orthodox Trotskyists—defending the theory of Permanent Revolution—had finally regained control of the International Committee and suspended the WRP from membership.

In studying the history of the 1982–86 conflict, it is essential to recognize the complex intersection of the inner-party struggle and the broader historical, political, intellectual and social context in which the split developed (and, of which, the latter was a highly conscious political expression).

It is not possible to really understand the events of 1982–86 apart from this broader context. Even the most abstract element of the differences that emerged between the Workers League and Workers Revolutionary Party—those relating to philosophy and the dialectical method—were related to developments taking place outside the ICFl. However esoteric and jumbled Healy's neo-Hegelian "practice of cognition" may have appeared to be, his retreat from philosophical materialism and embrace of a highly subjective and voluntaristic methodology replicated in many critical respects elements of anti-Marxist theories that were becoming dominant among petty-bourgeois intellectuals in the aftermath of 1968.

In developing the critique of Healy's revisions of Marxism in 1982, it was necessary to reconstruct the theoretical-intellectual process of Marx and Engels' break, between 1843 and 1847, with left Hegelianism and their elaboration of the materialist conception of history. Healy's claim that human history was to be understood as "the growth of the creative element, man's initiative, both employers and working class," [7] not to mention countless other passages that revived and magnified in a truly grotesque manner the subjective idealism of the left Hegelians, served very definite political ends: the abandonment of a political program based on establishing the political independence of the working class. By 1983 Cliff Slaughter was attacking the Workers League's "too heavy emphasis" on this political independence. It is not difficult to provide innumerable examples of petty-bourgeois, anti-Marxist theorists, writing during the same period, who were attacking both Marxian materialism and its insistence on the revolutionary role of the working class.

To provide just one very well-known example, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, written by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and brought out by Verso, the Pabloite publishing house in 1985, was devoted entirely to substantiating Cliff Slaughter's 1983 criticism of the Workers League's

"too heavy emphasis" on the working class. They wrote: "What is now in crisis is a whole conception of socialism which rests upon the ontological centrality of the working class…" I am sure that Laclau and Mouffe knew nothing about Slaughter's 1983 letter, nor is it likely that Slaughter was conversing with them about my criticisms of the WRP. But, nevertheless, Slaughter, Laclau and Mouffe were all articulating intellectual and political conceptions that were pervasive among broad sections of petty-bourgeois anti-Marxist theorists.

The opposition of the Workers League did not arise automatically out of the developing crisis of Stalinism, Social Democracy, bourgeois nationalism, and the global restructuring of world capitalism. Certainly, this created a new relationship of social forces and a more favorable environment for the orthodox Trotskyists and contributed to the victory over the anti-Trotskyist opportunists and renegades.

However, the defeat of the WRP and the ejection of the opportunists from the International Committee was not a pre-ordained and automatic process. It was a struggle that was undertaken consciously and deliberately. But the initiation of the conflict and the form of its development were also determined by historical factors, which exerted an immense influence on the political consciousness of the leadership and cadre of the Workers League.

Clearly, in the critique of Healy's *Studies in Dialectical Materialism* documents, we were very consciously basing ourselves on the entire theoretical capital of the Marxist movement, going all the way back to its origins.

Moreover, we were aware of the towering intellectual and political legacy of Leon Trotsky, whose work preserved and developed the principles and ideals of the 1917 October Revolution. *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, adopted at the founding congress of the SEP in 2008, presented a concise summary of Trotsky's place in history:

> He was not only the co-leader of the October Revolution, the implacable opponent of Stalinism and the founder of the Fourth International. He was the last and greatest representative of the political, intellectual, cultural and moral traditions of the classical Marxism that had inspired the mass revolutionary workers' movement that emerged in the last decade of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th. He developed a conception of revolutionary theory, rooted philosophically in materialism, directed outward toward the cognition of objective reality, oriented to the education and political mobilization of the working class, and strategically preoccupied with the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. [8]

The writings of Trotsky, which we studied assiduously, exposed the nature of the Stalinist betrayal of the October Revolution and developed the strategic orientation and programmatic foundations of socialist revolution in the contemporary world. We also drew political inspiration and real knowledge from the pioneering work of the Socialist Workers Party, under the leadership of the great American revolutionary, James P. Cannon.

Neither the formation of the American Committee for the Fourth International nor the foundation of the Workers League in 1966 would have been possible without the fight that was waged by the Socialist Labour League in the early 1960s against the SWP's unprincipled reunification, orchestrated by Joseph Hansen, with the Pabloite International Secretariat. Those who joined the Workers League in the early 1970s studied, and I mean studied, the major documents published in the first four volumes of the series, *Trotskyism versus Revisionism*. That is the critical element of the history of the British section that the Workers League never disassociated from.

It must be stressed that the Workers League had, from the earliest days, a determined orientation to the working class. Despite all the difficulties it confronted, the Workers League was imbued with confidence in the revolutionary role of the American working class. It was here that the best traditions of "Cannonism" found expression.

The political history of the WL and the theoretical-political work of the section had sensitized the WL leadership, imbued with the history and principles of the Trotskyist movement, to objective economic processes and political events. This generated political dissatisfaction and disagreement with the course pursued by the WRP.

Having the advantage of being able to look back over a period of nearly 40 years, we can recognize that the conflict initiated by this critique, which culminated in the suspension of the WRP from the International Committee in December 1985, and the complete severing of relations in February 1986, was a critical event in the history of the world Marxist movement. The very survival of the Fourth International was at stake. Except for the International Committee, the movement founded by Leon Trotsky had been politically liquidated by the Pabloites. In all the countries where the Pabloites had been able to establish organizational control, they had destroyed the Trotskyist organizations by turning them into political appendages of the Stalinist, social democratic or bourgeois nationalist organizations. By 1985, the Workers Revolutionary Party, which had by that point capitulated to Pabloism, was close to completing the same wrecking operation. As we were to later discover, in secret communications Healy was promising both bourgeois nationalist regimes in the Middle East and trade union bureaucrats in Britain that the full resources of the WRP would be placed at their disposal.

Of course, efforts would have been made to sustain and rebuild the Trotskyist movement. I am certain that there would have been in all the sections of the International Committee comrades devoted to Trotskyism, who remained determined to rebuild the Fourth International. But their efforts would have been burdened by the disorientation that would have followed the collapse of the WRP had there not been a highly developed analysis of the underlying causes of the 1985 crisis. In fact, it was the existence of the detailed written critique, developed by the leadership of the Workers League between 1982 and 1984, of Gerry Healy's theoretical charlatanry and the WRP's capitulation to Pabloite revisionism that refuted Cliff Slaughter's cynical lie that the WRP's political crisis was just one element of the "equal degeneration" of the entire International Committee. Had the ICFI not survived the crisis of 1985–86, there would not exist an *international* politically unified revolutionary Marxist party in the world today.

But the International Committee not only survived the crisis. It emerged from the split as a vastly strengthened organization. The political significance of the split of 1985–86 is demonstrated when one compares the development of the International Committee during the 33 years prior to the split, to its political development after the break with the Workers Revolutionary Party. The decisive defeat and ejection of Pabloite opportunism created the conditions for an immense theoretical, political and organizational development of the International Committee of the Fourth International. The work of theoretical and political clarification made possible by the expulsion of the national opportunists signified nothing less than a renaissance of Trotskyism.

Between 1982 and 1986, the orthodox Trotskyists defended the political heritage and program of the Fourth International. The essential historical significance of the defense of Trotskyist principles was revealed by the world events that unfolded in the aftermath of the split. We now know, of course, that the split of 1985–86 anticipated immense global political, geopolitical, and socio-economic changes.

As the WRP repudiated Trotskyism, it sought new allies among the

bourgeois nationalists, the social democratic reformists, and the Stalinist parties. It viewed the smaller sections of the International Committee with contempt. What need was there for the "Trotskyite groupos" (a phrase used by Healy with ever greater frequency in the years prior to the split)? The renegades could hardly imagine that within five years of the 1986 split the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union would all be dissolved, and that the mass Stalinist organizations would be smashed to pieces, thus fulfilling Trotsky's prophesy upon founding the Fourth International in 1938, that "The great events that rush upon mankind will not leave of these outlived organizations one stone upon another."

Healy, reduced to a pathetic wreck, went to his grave in December 1989 still believing that his hero, Mikhail Gorbachev, was leading a political revolution. Amidst the tumultuous events that followed the split, the International Committee had not only to repair the damage that had been done by the renegades. It had to undertake a far-reaching theoretical and political renewal of the Fourth International. This challenge could not be met by limiting ourselves to the repetition of familiar political formulae and slogans. It was necessary to apply creatively and imaginatively the Marxist method, refracted through the prism of historical experience, to the analysis of unprecedented events for which there existed no ready-made answer.

The extent of the theoretical work conducted by the International Committee is indicated in a review of the plenary meetings of the IC held during the six years that followed the split:

The First Plenum of the ICFI (May 18–June 9, 1986) was preoccupied with an analysis of the betrayal of the WRP. It established that the collapse of the WRP was the product of opportunism. During that plenum, which lasted two weeks, comrade Keerthi and I worked together to write *How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism 1973–1985* .

The Second Plenum of the ICFI (September 29–October 12, 1986) examined the impact of the WRP's opportunism throughout the International Committee and developed a critique of the "tactical opportunism" which distorted the development of perspectives in different sections of the IC. We also prepared a resolution on the International Communist Party in Britain and began work on a perspective for the RCL in Sri Lanka.

The Third Plenum of the ICFI (March 10–23, 1987) produced an analysis of the relations between the WRP and MAS (Movement for Socialism) in Argentina, and also the statement "What Is Happening in the USSR," written by Bill Van Auken and Nick Beams, which analyzed perestroika and glasnost. The review of the history of MAS was important, not only because of the intrinsic significance of the events in Argentina, but also because, in the aftermath of their break with the International Committee, Slaughter and his supporters claimed that a new foundation for the Fourth International would be created through an alliance with the organization of the notorious Argentine opportunist, Nahuel Moreno.

The Fourth Plenum of the ICFI (July 20–27, 1987) began discussion on the drafting of an international perspectives document. The delegates agreed that it was necessary for the ICFI to elaborate, in opposition to the universal renunciation of Marxism and even the most elementary principles of the class struggle, the objective driving forces that would lay the global economic and geopolitical foundations of a new wave of revolutionary struggle by the international working class.

The Fifth Plenum of the ICFI (November 11–20, 1987) was held under conditions that verified the timeliness of the work on perspectives had already been demonstrated. The crash of international markets had occurred on October 19, 1987. The theoretical basis of the analysis of this event had already been elaborated in the work carried out in the aftermath of the Fourth Plenum on the globalization of production and the intensifying conflict between the world market and the nation state system. The plenum also developed a further analysis of the tasks of the Revolutionary Communist League, producing a statement on the United Socialist States of Sri Lanka and Tamil Eelam.

The Sixth Plenum of the ICFI (February 9–13, 1988) was held just a few weeks after the sudden and untimely death of Keerthi Balasuriya, at the age of 39, on December 18, 1987. The plenum concentrated on the relationship between international strategy and national tactics in the work of the sections of the ICFI.

The Seventh Plenum of the ICFI (July 23–26, 1988) studied and adopted unanimously the international perspectives resolution.

The Eighth Plenum of the ICFI (June 15–24, 1989) reviewed the development of the International Committee since the 1985–86 split, discussed the deepening crisis of the Gorbachev regime, and decided that I should travel to the Soviet Union.

The Ninth Plenum of the ICFI (December 11–16, 1989) reviewed the events in Eastern Europe, and, especially, the Deutsche Demokratische Republik (DDR). I reported on my trip to the Soviet Union in November, during which I had delivered a lecture at the Historical-Archival Institute in Moscow, attended by nearly 200 people.

The Tenth Plenum of the ICFI (May 6–9, 1990) concentrated on a review of the political and historical significance of the dissolution of the Deutsche Demokratische Republik.

The Eleventh Plenum of the ICFI (March 5–9, 1991) conducted an extensive discussion of the US invasion of Iraq. The ICFI decided to hold an International Conference against Imperialism and War later that year. Following the plenum, the ICFI issued a Manifesto that explained the significance of the Gulf War and provided the programmatic basis for the international conference, which was actually held in November.

The Twelfth Plenum of the ICFI (March 11–14, 1992) examined the dissolution of the USSR in the context of the history of the international socialist movement. The plenum began with my report, "The Struggle for Marxism and the Tasks of the Fourth International."

As should be clear from this review of the twelve plenums held in the six years following the split, the scope of the work of the ICFI was enormous. I should point out that the brief summary of each of these plenums hardly encompasses the full range of events and political experiences that were reviewed at these politically intense meetings. For example, in many of these meetings there were extensive discussions of the developments in Sri Lanka, which were critical for developing the strategy of permanent revolution and reevaluating the attitude of the Fourth International to the demand for national self-determination. By the time of the launching of the *World Socialist Web Site* in 1998, another five plenums were held. The fifteenth plenum in August 1995 discussed the reasons for and implications of the transformation of the leagues into parties. The eighteenth plenum in January 1998 gave the final go ahead for the launching of the WSWS.

In all this work, the fundamental political principle that guided our efforts was that of Marxist internationalism. We insisted upon the primacy of world strategy over national tactics, and that the appropriate response to problems that arise within the national sphere could be derived only on the basis of an analysis of global processes. On this basis, the International Committee was able to develop a level of international collaboration that had not existed in the entire history of the Fourth International. Actually, the word "collaboration" does not adequately encompass the nature of the interaction between ICFI sections that developed in the aftermath of the split with the WRP nationalist renegades. As I stated in my report to the Detroit membership of the Workers League on June 25, 1989:

> The scope of this international collaboration, its direct impact on virtually every aspect of the practical work of each section, has

> profoundly and positively altered the character of the ICFI and its sections. The latter are ceasing to exist in any politically and practically meaningful way as independent entities. Upon the foundation of a common political program, a complex network of relationships has emerged within the ICFI which binds together every section. That is, the sections of the ICFI comprise interconnected and interdependent components of a single political organism. Any breaking of that relationship would have devastating effects within the section involved. Every section has now become dependent for its very existence upon this international cooperation and collaboration, both ideological and practical. [9]

The advances in the sphere of program, perspective and organization between 1986 and 1992 prepared the subsequent transformation in 1995–97 of the leagues of the ICFI into parties and, in 1998, the launching of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The progress made by the International Committee during the past third of a century has demonstrated what could be achieved by the Fourth International once it was able to eject the opportunists and develop the revolutionary movement on the basis of Marxist principles.

In his speech of October 18, 1938, Trotsky reviewed the work that had prepared the foundations of the new International:

> The Bolshevik-Leninists, the international pioneers, our comrades across the world, searched the way of the revolution as genuine Marxists, not in their feelings and wishes, but in the analysis of the objective march of events. Above all were we guided by the preoccupation not to deceive others nor ourselves. We searched seriously and honestly. And some important things were found by us. The events confirmed our analysis as well as our prognosis. Nobody can deny it. Now it is necessary that we remain true to our program and to ourselves. It is not easy to do so. The tasks are tremendous, the enemies—innumerable. We have the right to spend our time and our attention on the jubilee celebration only insofar as from the lessons of the past we can prepare for the future. [10]

When Trotsky recorded this speech, he was surveying the results of 15 years of political work and struggle, from 1923 to 1938. We are now looking back over work that spans more than twice that period of time, 33 years. Trotsky's words remain intensely relevant. Our tasks remain "tremendous" and our enemies "innumerable." But we also found "some important things" in the course of more than three decades, and there is no question, that "the events confirmed our analysis as well as our prognosis."

Is there another political party in the world that would care – or, should I say, dare—to have the political prognoses and analyses that it produced between 1986 and 1992 compared to the documents produced by the International Committee? Who among the university academics and think-tank specialists correctly evaluated the nature of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost*, let alone foresaw the dissolution of the Stalinist regimes between 1989–1991?

As for the Pabloites, they understood nothing and foresaw nothing. Since 1951 Ernest Mandel, alongside Michel Pablo, had insisted that the Stalinist bureaucracy would guide the Soviet Union and its satellite regimes in Eastern Europe to socialism. He hailed Gorbachev as the fulfillment of this delusionary perspective. Mandel's biographer recalls: "In his 1989 book *Beyond Perestroika: The Future of Gorbachev's USSR*, a study of glasnost and perestroika published simultaneously in London and Paris, Mandel sketched four possible scenarios for what Gorbachev had set in motion. He did not devote a single word to the possible restoration of capitalism." [11]

While Mandel gazed upon Gorbachev's Kremlin and saw a rainbow glowing above it, the International Committee foresaw the approach of the abyss. In the report given to the Detroit membership of the Workers League on June 25, 1989, I said:

> All our renegade opponents and, indeed, all Pabloites have this in common, that they attack the International Committee for speaking of capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China. They insist that the bureaucracy cannot carry through a change in property relations, arguing that the bureaucracy is based on and rooted in the state property relations which were established either in 1917 or in the aftermath of the Second World War. That represents a complete falsification of Trotsky's position. Trotsky warned again and again that the bureaucracy, if not overthrown by the working class, would inevitably move in the direction of the restoration of capitalist property. [12]

This report was given just three weeks after the Tiananmen Square massacre in China and little more than three months before the eruption of the political crisis in East Germany that would bring upon the rapid dissolution of the DDR. Even then, the analysis of the International Committee was dismissed as the jeremiad of a political sect. But this "sect" had the incomparable advantage of basing its analysis on the theoretical work of Leon Trotsky.

Understanding nothing of the nature of the Stalinist regimes, and, therefore, having failed to foresee their dissolution, bourgeois theorists proved no less incompetent in formulating their analyses of the trajectory of world politics in the aftermath of the events of 1989–91. It is hardly necessary to review Fukuyama's "End of History" theory, which years ago ceased to be taken seriously by anyone, least of all by its author, who has publicly renounced his own creation. As for the late Eric Hobsbawn's "Short Twentieth Century," this impressionist reaction to the dissolution of the Soviet Union has been refuted by the obvious fact that the multiplying crises of the new century bear a painful resemblance to those of the last one.

False theories have consequences. The global triumph of capitalist-based democracy anticipated by liberal theorists failed to materialize. The democratic daydreams of 1991 have given way to the fascist nightmares of 2019. Nearly 75 years after the collapse of Hitler's Third Reich, fascism is a growing political force throughout the world. In the United States, Trump uses language that has never before been used—at least, not publicly—by an American president. His speeches, not to mention his daily Tweets, are acquiring an openly fascist character.

Eastern Europe is dominated by xenophobic nationalist parties. In Italy, the deputy prime minister, Matteo Salvini, makes no secret of his admiration of Benito Mussolini. In Germany itself, 30 years after the reunification, political life is dominated by the fascist resurgence. Despite the overwhelming hostility to the neo-Nazi right, it is being systematically supported and strengthened by a conspiracy involving powerful forces within the state and the political establishment. The *Alternative für Deutschland* [AfD] is the official political arm of this conspiracy. The CDU-CSU-SPD coalition government is the political enabler of the conspiracy, maneuvering behind the scenes to make the AfD the most influential political party in Germany, despite the fact that it received only 13 percent of the vote in the last election. The network of Nazi terrorists who have been protected by the police and intelligence agencies as they carry out political assassinations—most recently the murder of CDU politician Walter Luebke—is the paramilitary force of the fascists.

The *Verfassungsschutz*, a branch of the Interior Ministry, is the judicial arm of the neo-Nazi resurgence. It is difficult to determine where, exactly, the *Verfassungsschutz* ends and the armed terrorists begin. The assassins carry out their operations in full confidence that the *Verfassungsschutz* will provide them with the necessary legal cover. In any event, they are collaborating in their common war to eliminate opposition to capitalism and imperialism in Germany.

On May 23, 2019, the *Verfassungsschutz* issued a 56-page response to the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei's appeal of its placement on the Interior Ministry's list of subversive organizations. Later this week there will be a more detailed analysis of the *Verfassungsschutz* response and the legal and political reply of our movement to this attack on its democratic right to conduct political activity. The *Verfassungsschutz* document bases itself explicitly on totalitarian legal doctrines that were introduced by the Nazis after they came to power in 1933. It revives the doctrine of *Willensstrafrecht*, which criminalizes all ideas that might, at some unspecified point in the future, encourage hostility and political opposition to the existing state and social order.

The *Verfassungsschutz* does not dispute that the SGP conducts its activities within the framework of the law. According to the *Verfassungsschutz*, it is not the SGP's overt actions, but the party's ideas that are criminal. Specifically, it encourages thinking with the use of concepts and categories that counterpoise class to nation; it strives to develop within the working class consciousness of its social interests; it promotes hostility to capitalism; it denounces imperialism and militarism; and it rejects all compromises with the main political parties and trade unions.

The *Verfassungsschutz* bases its response on a detailed review of the program and published statements of the SGP, especially its *Statement of Principles* of May 23, 2010, from which it quotes the following declaration: "The strategic goal of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei and the International Committee of the Fourth International is to educate and prepare the working class for the revolutionary struggle against capitalism, the establishment of workers' power and the building of a socialist society." [*Verf*, p. 8] The response emphasizes that the SGP "understands itself as a Trotskyist party which, in accordance with its ideological orientation, refers in all its fundamental writings above all to the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky and professes its allegiance to his teachings. In addition, the plaintiff [SGP] relies in particular on Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht." [Ibid, p. 9]

The *Verfassungsschutz* states:

> On the basis of its Marxist thinking in terms of class—which, as has been shown, is not compatible with the ideas of the constitution—and its propagation of the class struggle, the plaintiff demands the overcoming and overthrow of "capitalism," and not only in a sense that is related to the economic system, but as the overcoming of the liberal democratic basic order. According to the communist interpretation, "capitalism" is regarded as the core problem responsible for all further political deficits. It is therefore fundamentally opposed not only as an economic system but also as a social order. The plaintiff avowedly seeks to establish a socialist state and social system. [Ibid, p. 22]

The underlying assumption of this indictment is that capitalism and the "liberal democratic order" are coequal and equivalent. Of course, from a historical standpoint, this argument can be made—but it is one that undermines the democratic pretensions of this "order." Because if the liberal democratic order is inseparable from capitalism, it must at a certain point cease to be "liberal," to the extent that liberalism, however problematically, is identified with the defense of democratic rights. Within the framework of this definition, the more capitalist the social order, the less liberal it can be. This was a point that was made very forcibly by the celebrated American liberal philosopher, John Dewey, in his 1935 essay, "The Crisis in Liberalism." Capitalism and liberalism, he argued, had become incompatible, as a consequence of the economic development of modern society. He wrote:

> Back of the appropriation by the few of the material resources of society lies the appropriation by the few in behalf of their own ends of the cultural, the spiritual, resources that are the product not of the individuals who have taken possession but of the cooperative work of humanity. It is useless to talk about the failure of democracy until the source of its failure has been grasped and steps are taken to bring about that type of social organization that will encourage the socialized extension of intelligence. [13]

The *Verfassungsschutz* response, shot through with hypocrisy and deceit, is not concerned with democratic theory. It draws its inspiration not from Dewey, but from Carl Schmitt and Josef Goebbels. It argues explicitly that Marxist conceptions cannot be legal because the opposition to capitalism leads inexorably to opposing the existing forms of political and economic organization. It insists on the unbreakable link between democracy, capitalism, and private economic interests. Even though Marxist and Trotskyist conceptions are propagated through legal means, they raise the specter of a revolutionary overturn. Therefore, the ideas must be proscribed and suppressed.

No less dangerous for the existing order than its opposition to capitalism is the SGP's denunciation of imperialism and militarism. The *Verfassungsschutz* cites remarks made by Comrade Christoph Vandreier in a 2017 radio interview, explaining the party's struggle against war:

> What you have to do to prevent war is [create] an international socialist movement. The masses themselves must intervene in political events. They must overthrow capitalism internationally on the basis of a socialist perspective and build a society that overcomes the nation-states and puts an end to the division of the world into nation-states and the possession, the private ownership of the means of production. [Ibid, p. 34]

Significantly, the *Verfassungsschutz* response fully acknowledges that the SGP "rejects separate acts of violence by individuals, also because these involve the danger of playing into the hands of the capitalist state." [Ibid, p. 40] However, the report then emphasizes that "this rejection applies only to 'separate individuals who resort to violence,' but not to the 'collective struggle of the working class.'"

Under no circumstances, the *Verfassungsschutz* insists, can such mass struggles be considered legal and compatible with the "liberal democratic order." The working class is denied even the right to defend itself against the fascist assaults on its democratic rights. The report denounces Trotsky's declaration, in the *Transitional Program*, that "it is necessary to propagate the necessity of creating workers' groups for self-defense." This demand was formulated at a time when Hitler ruled Germany, Mussolini Italy, and striking workers in the United States were regularly confronted with well-organized squads of heavily-armed fascists, not to mention the repressive forces of the capitalist state.

The *Verfassungsschutz* denounces the *World Socialist Web Site*, whose

articles "are explicitly intended to give readers a 'socialist orientation' on the basis of 'Marxist analysis.'" [Ibid, p. 48] It cites the SGP's publishing arm, the Mehring Verlag, which, the document notes, "publishes, among other things, German translations of Trotsky's works as well as works by David North." [Ibid, p. 48]

The SGP and the ICFI are the principal and immediate target of the *Verfassungsschutz's* attack on democratic rights. Its authors are not political yahoos. They have obviously poured over the documents of our party, not to mention the works of Trotsky and the great theoreticians of socialism, going back to Marx and Engels. The *Verfassungsschutz* makes it clear that it views the SGP and ICFI as the standard bearers of contemporary Marxian socialism. But its legal implications and consequences extend beyond the ideas of our party. The introduction of the concept of *Willensstrafrecht* is aimed at the criminalization of every form of opposition to capitalism, imperialism, social inequality and war. The document of the *Verfassungsschutz* expresses in pseudo-legal form the ferocious hostility to socialism—rooted in a fear of mounting working-class discontent and its political radicalization—that is fueling the efforts to legitimize fascist ideas. Professor Jörg Baberowski, whom the SGP has done so much to expose, is not some sort of isolated eccentric academic. He is, rather, a highly active and visible representative of a social phenomenon that was well-known in the 1920s and 1930s, the fascist intellectual.

A substantial number of avowedly fascist theorists—some from the past (for example, Carl Schmitt and Julius Evola), but many alive and active (such as Alain de Benoist, Paul Gottfried, and Alexander Dugin)—are becoming increasingly prominent, as their ideas find expression in government policies. Most of these fascist ideologists are not well known, but this does not lessen their political significance.

The ruling elite and its representatives recognize that it may not be wise to call attention to the fascist inspiration of their reactionary policies and political agitation. As the editor of a recently published volume titled *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right* warns:

> Almost none of [the Greek] Golden Dawn's or [the Hungarian] Jobbik's voters will have heard of Evola, and even fewer would share his views on gender, war, or paganism, but Evola's thought is still of indirect importance for Greek and Hungarian politics, as it undoubtedly is for the politics of other countries whose politicians are more cautious about what they put on their websites and which authors and publishers they write forwards for. In the US, for example, President Trump's former "chief strategist," Steve Bannon, has referred to Evola and Dugan only obliquely, and has only once mentioned his appreciation of Guénon, the French esotericist, who inspired both Evola and Dugin. These key thinkers of the radical Right, then, matter everywhere that the Right is resurgent, in America as much as in France, Greece, Russia, and Hungary. [14]

The ideological and political resurgence of fascism exposes the bankruptcy of the "triumph of capitalism" and the "death of Marxism" narratives that were developed in the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the Stalinist regimes and the restoration of capitalism. To a great extent, these narratives were constructed to serve as political propaganda, with the requisite catch phrases. There was little in the way of analysis. But an assumption that underlay virtually all responses—whether from those who hailed the dissolution of the Stalinist regimes or from those who responded with demoralization—was that the upheavals in Eastern Europe and the former USSR were unrelated to any broader crisis of the global order, with as yet unrecognized but far-reaching consequences for the United States and all the other major imperialist powers.

The analysis developed by the International Committee, even as the events were unfolding, demonstrated a level of historically-informed foresight that can be justly described as unique. At the Tenth Plenum of the International Committee, held in May 1990, there was an extensive discussion of the significance of the dissolution of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. In the course of that lengthy discussion that began on May 6, 1990, I stated:

> Certainly, the events which have taken place in East Germany and the experiences which the BSA [*Bund Sozialistische Arbeiter*] has had in East Germany are very important and must be discussed and analyzed. But at this point in the discussion it is necessary for us to approach these events within the framework of our international analysis and to arrive at certain conclusions as to how we understand the world situation.
>
> I don't believe that we can develop a perspective in Eastern Europe simply on the basis of the assertion that the drive for the reimposition of capitalism is going to meet resistance from the working class. That's true, of course, but there are more fundamental questions involved. At the heart of our analysis has been the insistence that what we are witnessing at the present time is the breakup of all the relationships which were established by imperialism with the aid of Stalinism at the end of the Second World War.
>
> There are two possible interpretations which can be given to the events taking place in Eastern Europe. One can say that this represents a historic triumph of capitalism over socialism; the working class has suffered a massive historical defeat; the perspective of socialism has essentially come to ruin, and we stand on the threshold of a whole new period of capitalist development. Or—and this is, of course, the standpoint of the International Committee, and this distinguishes us from all other tendencies—that the breakdown of the imperialist order opens up a period of profound disequilibrium which is going to be resolved internationally in the course of massive political and social struggles; that what predominates today is a level of instability unequalled at any time since the 1930s. Our analysis can't, of course, base itself on the outcome of the first stage of events in Eastern Europe. Otherwise I think one is left with what is a very pessimistic conclusion.

The discussion continued on May 7. While recognizing the breakdown of the old post-World War II order, did we foresee a rapid establishment of a new global equilibrium that would make possible a prolonged and peaceful development of world capitalism? I sought to answer this question as follows:

> There are two sides of this question which we have to consider in arriving at an answer: first, the relationship between the imperialist powers and, second, the relationship between the classes, not simply on a national but on a world scale. The question is: will the imperialists be able to work out a new and stable equilibrium peacefully? …
>
> This is the decisive question: is it to be expected that the imperialists can arrive peacefully and harmoniously at a new world balance of power, a new international equilibrium? Will they be willing to sacrifice national interests for the sake of international harmony? To say Yes assumes 1) that the bourgeoisie will behave

fundamentally differently than it has in the past and 2) that the contradictions which exist between the imperialists today are of a lesser magnitude than those that existed in 1914 and 1939.

Even if one were to concede that it is theoretically possible that the bourgeoisie, contrary to past historical experience, will pursue such an "enlightened" course, that is, even if one were to assume that they are prepared to enter into arrangements which are in very fundamental respects disadvantageous to their interest as a national bourgeois power, the fact remains that concessions made by any national bourgeoisie on the international arena would have to be redressed within the domestic borders. What the national bourgeoisie concedes to its imperialist rivals will be compensated for with increased pressure upon its own working class.

And here we come to the second issue, that is, the state of international class relations. Will the new equilibrium—assuming that such an equilibrium can be worked out peacefully—will such an equilibrium be arrived at without generating class struggle of revolutionary dimensions? The betrayal of its leadership notwithstanding, the working class today represents a far more massive social force than it did at the turn of the century. There is no turning back the clock of history. [15]

This analysis had been verified. But we are now at a very advanced stage of the crisis that the ICFI so clearly identified nearly three decades ago. At that time, we predicted that this crisis would generate a new upsurge of revolutionary struggle. We are now witnessing the beginning of that upsurge.

This brings us to the most critical question. Having traced the long historical trajectory of the Trotskyist movement, back to its origins in 1923, and having identified the four distinct stages of its development, how should the present stage of our work be characterized.

We are now witnessing the intersection of a new revolutionary upsurge of the international working class with the political activity of the International Committee. The world crisis that we are analyzing is one in which the International Committee is an increasingly active and direct participant.

The critical preparatory work of removing the Pabloites, rebuilding the world party on an internationalist foundation, elaborating the international strategy of the ICFI, defending the historical heritage of the Fourth International, converting the leagues of the International Committee into parties, and establishing the *World Socialist Web Site* were the main achievements of the fourth stage. These achievements made possible a vast expansion in the political influence of the International Committee and a significant growth of its membership. This stage is concluded.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has begun the fifth stage of the history of the Trotskyist movement. This is the stage that will witness a vast growth of the ICFI as the World Party of Socialist Revolution. The objective processes of economic globalization, identified by the International Committee more than 30 years ago, have undergone a further colossal development. Combined with the emergence of new technologies that have revolutionized communications, these processes have internationalized the class struggle to a degree that would have been hard to imagine even 25 years ago. The revolutionary struggle of the working class will develop as an interconnected and unified world movement. The International Committee of the Fourth International will be built as the conscious political leadership of this objective socio-economic process. It will counterpose to the capitalist politics of imperialist war the class-based strategy of world socialist revolution. This is the essential historical task of the new stage in the history of the Fourth International.

The attack on our German section by the *Verfassungsschutz* is a clear political statement that the ruling elite recognizes that the program and ideas of our movement have the potential to gain a mass following in the working class. The report notes that the SGP has received only a small vote in the September 2017 federal election. But the *Verfassungsschutz* immediately adds the following caveat: "On the other hand, the plaintiff has, through its participation in the German federal elections, including the associated election advertising also in the public broadcasting corporations, certainly gained a definite degree of public awareness and attention."

This acknowledgment of the political stature of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei is, in one sense, a compliment. But it is also a threat, and it must be taken seriously. The appropriate political and practical countermeasures must be taken.

To meet the demands of this global development of the class struggle it is necessary for the cadre of the International Committee to draw upon the entire theoretical and political capital of our world party. This is the foundation upon which will develop the work of the party during this new, fifth stage in the history of the Fourth International.

Footnotes:

[1] *Leon Trotsky and the Development of Marxism*, (New York: Labor Publications, 1985), pp. 18-19

[2] *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 20

[3] "Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, Volume 26 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990), p. 388

[4] Ibid, p. 389

[5] *Problems of Everyday Life*, by Leon Trotsky (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), pp. 137–38

[6] https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1928/3rd/ti01.htm#p1-01

[7] Cited in "A Contribution to a Critique of G. Healy's 'Studies in Dialectical Materialism,'" *Fourth International*, Volume 13, No. 2, Autumn 1986, p. 17

[8] *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party* (Detroit: Mehring Books, 2008), p. 59

[9] *Workers League Internal Bulletin*, Volume 3, Number 4, June 1989, p. 5

[10] https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/10/foundfi.htm

[11] *Ernest Mandel: A Dream Deferred*, by Jan Willem Stutje (London and New York: Verso, 2009) p. 240

[12] *Workers League Internal Bulletin*, Volume 3, Number 4, June 1989, p. 7

[13] *John Dewey, The Later Works*, Volume 11, edited by Jo Ann Boydston [Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991], p. 39

[14] *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, edited by Mark Sedgwick (Oxford University Press, 2019), p. xxv

[15] *Workers League Internal Bulletin*, Volume 4, Number 7, June 1990, pp. 13–17