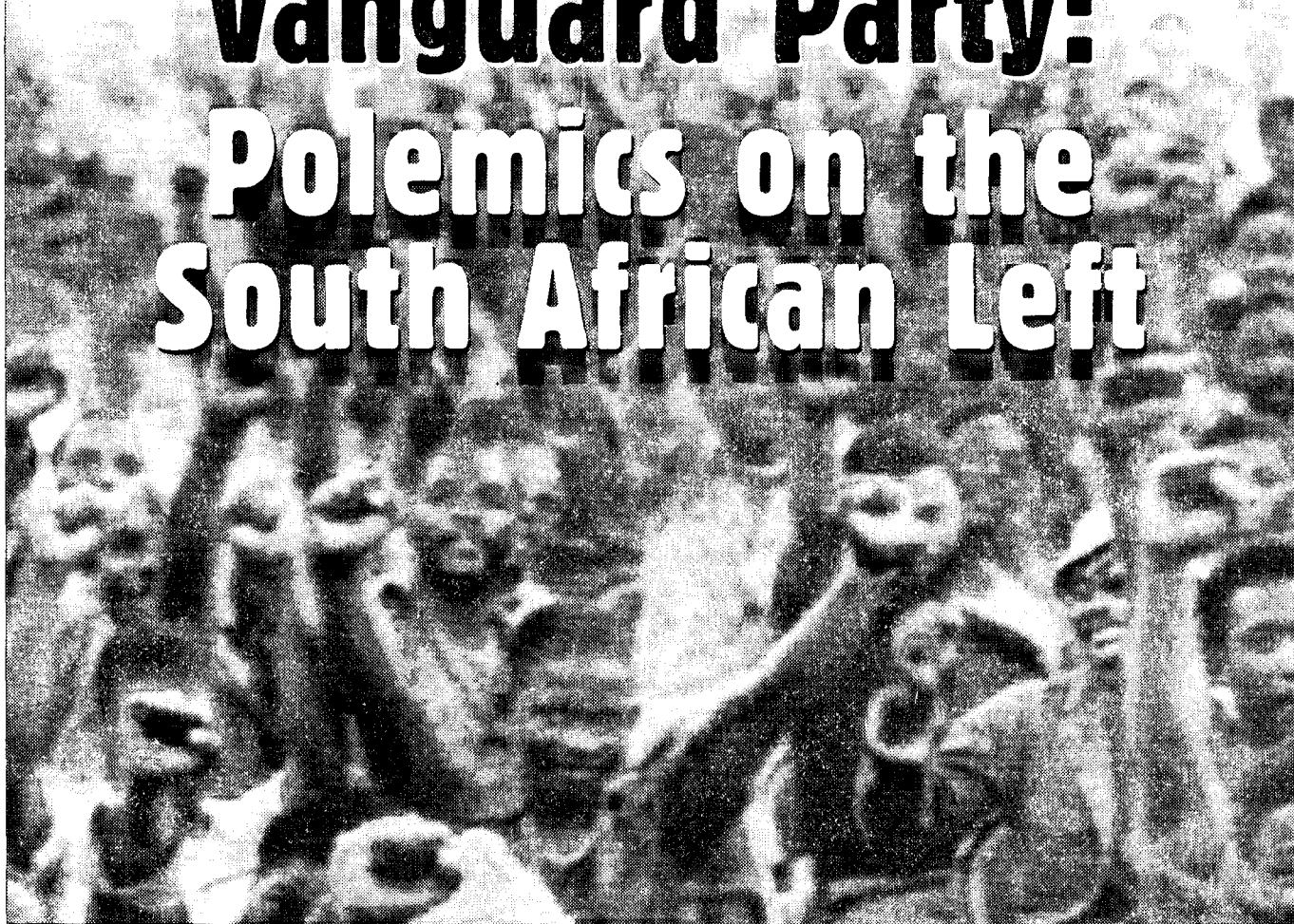


International Communist League
(Fourth Internationalist)

The Fight For a Revolutionary Vanguard Party: Polemics on the South African Left



Mark Peters

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Introduction

With the election of Nelson Mandela in 1994 as South Africa's first black president, the African National Congress has become the primary political agent for the Randlords and their senior partners in Wall Street and the City of London, bringing to fruition the process of "reconciliation" initiated with Mandela's release from prison. Indeed, Mandela has stated that one of his most important accomplishments has been creating "an investor-friendly environment." Police still break the strikes of black and coloured workers and expel squatters from their shantytowns as before, but they now do so in the name of a "democratic, non-racial" South Africa. The economic base of the old apartheid system—the superexploitation of black labour by the white capitalists—remains while the political superstructure has undergone a radical change. The "new" South Africa can thus be defined as neo-apartheid.

At the same time, under the rubric of "black empowerment," we are beginning to see the formation of a black capitalist class drawn from the leading cadre of the ANC who now drive BMWs, wear Pierre Cardin suits and have moved into posh, formerly all-white suburbs. This development is personified by Cyril Ramaphosa, former head of the National Union of Mineworkers and subsequently ANC parliamentary leader, now the deputy chairman of New Africa Investments, the country's largest black-owned corporation. In their own way the black masses recognise the bourgeoisification of one-time leaders of the "liberation" struggle whom they contemptuously describe as hopping aboard the "gravy train."

But despite popular denunciations of the "gravy train," black African workers and other toilers remain tied to their exploiters and would-be exploiters by their traditional and continuing support to the ANC abetted by its longtime ally, the reformist South African Communist Party (SACP), which historically enjoys the allegiance of advanced sections of the proletariat. To break the chains of neo-apartheid and achieve genuine national and social liberation, the working class must transcend the ideology of nationalism, the false belief that the black African people—brutally oppressed by the white rulers of South Africa—all have a common interest which stands higher than class divisions.

The ideological dominance among the black masses of nationalism in its various forms is also indicated in that the main perceived "radical" opponents of the ANC are the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and AZAPO (the successor to Steven Biko's Black Consciousness Movement). While the ANC/SACP-led

Congress of South African Trade Unions is the principal organisation of black labour, another sizable trade-union grouping, the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU), is politically run in bloc by the PAC and AZAPO. The division of the labour movement into two union federations led by rival nationalist parties, as well as a number of independent unions led by leftists, weakens the workers in the day-to-day struggles with the employers and is potentially very dangerous. We stand for industrial unionism. All workers in a given industry should be in one union governed by the principles of internal democracy, with one worker, one vote.

To the left of the ANC/SACP are a number of small groups which claim to be or are generally regarded as Trotskyist. The material in this pamphlet presents a revolutionary Marxist position, theoretically and programmatically, on key questions of debate within the South African left, including elements of the SACP, in recent years: whether South Africa has now become a stable bourgeois democracy, moreover, one which can carry out the ambitious economic and social reforms promised by the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme; how to build a mass workers party, its nature and relation to the trade unions; the doctrine of "socialist nation-building" in the countries of the so-called "Third World."

The core of the pamphlet consists of letters from our organisation, the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), to the New Unity Movement, the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) of Neville Alexander and the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International. We are here publishing for the first time a presentation given by a representative of the ICL to a WOSA national conference in 1995. Also included is an exchange with the Comrades for a Workers Government originally published in May 1995 in *Workers Vanguard*, the newspaper of our American section. Additionally, we have reprinted Trotsky's 1935 "Letter to South African Revolutionaries," a letter to his South African supporters which addresses the slogan of a "black republic" and also discusses what attitude, strategy and tactics a proletarian revolutionary vanguard should have toward the ANC.

This pamphlet supplements two previous publications. "South Africa and Permanent Revolution" (published in 1991 as No. 8 in our *Black History and the Class Struggle* series) covered the township revolt of the mid-1980s, the rise of a powerful black workers movement and the legalisation in 1990 of the ANC and Communist Party. "South Africa Powder Keg" (*Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12), published in

1995, analysed the neo-apartheid arrangement and put forward a proletarian revolutionary perspective under the new conditions of the Mandela/De Klerk "Government of National Unity."

The central and underlying theme of the material in this pamphlet is a defence of the Trotskyist concept and programme of permanent revolution in opposition to the various and intertwined currents of nationalism and reformism prevailing on the South African left. The theory of permanent revolution holds that the national bourgeoisie in backward countries is so weak, backward and imperialist-dependent that it can no longer play any progressive role. National liberation and social and economic modernisation in "Third World" countries can be achieved only under the leadership of the working class, through proletarian revolution and its extension to the imperialist centres of West Europe, North America and Japan.

Our Marxist understanding that the working class is the only progressive class in the contemporary world, including in backward countries, is in no sense a glorification of trade-union militancy for its own sake. Quite the contrary. The workers in South Africa and elsewhere can achieve a substantial and permanent improvement in their living conditions only by overthrowing the capitalist order and replacing it with a planned, collectivised economy. This, in turn, requires, especially in a country like South Africa, that the working class, under its vanguard party, place itself at the head of all oppressed sections of society. As we wrote in the letter to WOSA (9 March 1995), what is needed in South Africa is a revolutionary workers party which:

"does not simply defend the particular interests of the working class, especially its unionized sector, but is fighting to eradicate *all forms* of national and social oppression—the mass homelessness in the black townships, the hideous conditions of the millions of Africans still trapped on the 'tribal homelands,' the degradation of women (e.g., polygamy) in rural villages where tribal traditions remain strong. To unite all of the oppressed, a workers party must staunchly champion the democratic rights of those who have cause to feel threatened by the ANC's brand of nationalism—e.g., coloureds, Indians, Zulu villagers, immigrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other neighboring African states." [emphasis in original]

Our programme for proletarian leadership in the struggle for national liberation is encapsulated in the formula of a "black-centred workers government." Under a black-centred workers government there would be an important role and full democratic rights for coloureds, Indians and other Asians, and those whites who accept a government centrally based on the black working people. Many South African leftists object to this slogan, arguing that by acknowledging that there are differences and divisions among the non-white masses, we echo the line of the apartheid rulers who constantly played "divide and rule" among the

racial groupings, while coercively reimposing tribal identity on urban blacks. These leftists, instead, cling to the ANC-promoted illusion of "nonracialism" which conveniently enables them to ignore the real and dramatic expressions of division along colour, national and tribal lines in Mandela's neo-apartheid state. The nationalist fiction of a "rainbow nation" is their means for denying reality, because they have no programme to change reality.

Just as the theory of permanent revolution would have predicted, this capitalist regime, based on superexploitation of the black proletariat, must frustrate the aspirations of every section of the oppressed. Widespread expectations for better housing and jobs cannot be met; even simple democratic demands such as the right to an education for all children or the right of women to birth control and abortion are denied to the overwhelming majority by social inequality and lack of facilities. If the masses' frustration does not find expression along *class* lines it will fuel and embitter every other kind of division.

Unwilling to draw a class line against the ANC government, the colourblind South African "leftists" must be silent or worse as communities which once joined together in defying the apartheid butchers are now pulling apart. Recently some protests of coloured township residents against payment of back rates have been infused with a virulently anti-black thrust. Capitulating to false consciousness, most "leftists" quietly acquiesce to the ANC view that coloureds might as well be punished for having had more "privileges" than blacks, and see the police repression meted out to the protests by the regime as justifiable. Meanwhile other leftists tail after "movements" in the coloured community like People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), "anti-crime" vigilantes influenced by Muslim fundamentalists and fundamentally hostile to black rule.

Similarly the "left" generally does not bother to fight for full rights for the "immigrant" workers from elsewhere in Africa who today face unemployment and deportation. A party with a perspective of workers revolution in South Africa would militantly fight the chauvinist attacks on immigrants and seize every such means to extend the struggle beyond the borders of the country to offer the toiling masses of the less-developed regions of the continent a road forward out of hideous poverty and oppression.

In South Africa, *class exploitation is integrally bound up with national oppression*. Despite a sizable coloured proletariat, especially in the Western Cape, and an urban Indian working class in Natal, the overwhelming majority of workers in the white-owned factories, mines and farms are black Africans. Black Africans make up 80 percent of the country's overall

population, actually more if one takes into account the recent wave of immigration from neighbouring African states. As Trotsky wrote to his followers in South Africa in the mid-1930s:

"It is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the state.

"Insofar as a victorious revolution will radically change not only the relation between the classes, but also between the races, and will assure to the blacks that place in the state which corresponds to their numbers, insofar will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character." [emphasis in original]

Our recognition that proletarian revolution in South Africa is the supreme act of national liberation in no way entails support to nationalism as an ideology or to the project of "nation-building." The letter to the New Unity Movement is primarily devoted to criticising their programme of "nation-building" not only in the particular South African context but also more generally in the neocolonial states of Africa, the Near East and the Indian subcontinent. As Leninists, we defend the democratic right of self-determination—i.e., the right to form their own, separate state—for *all* nations.

The doctrine of "socialist nation-building," while espoused in South Africa by groups claiming the Trotskyist tradition, is closely akin to the old Stalinist dogma of "building socialism in one country." The bankruptcy of this nationalist perversion of Marxism is now manifest. As Trotsky predicted, under the economic, political and military pressures of world capitalism the Kremlin bureaucracy disintegrated in the mid-late 1980s. This directly posed the alternatives of proletarian political revolution or capitalist counterrevolution. Given the deterioration of socialist consciousness among the Soviet working class brought about by generations of Stalinist rule, it was counterrevolution which prevailed. The resulting destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 was a historic defeat for the working class and oppressed peoples throughout the world.

This can be seen clearly in South Africa. For decades, the Soviet Union had been the ANC's primary international sponsor, supporting it in various diplomatic forums and providing arms for its symbolic guerrilla actions. As the Kremlin regime fell apart under Gorbachev, the ANC leaders came to terms with the white racist rulers of South Africa and their senior American and British imperialist partners.

During the Cold War, bourgeois-nationalist regimes in Africa and Asia were able to play off Washington and Moscow, thereby giving themselves a certain room to manoeuvre. The Mandela regime has no such option as it faces the unbridled domination of imperialist capital on a global scale. Thus Mandela, Mbeki & Co. explain away the failure to carry out the promised

reforms of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, the privatisation of state-owned enterprises, their drive to hold down wages and so on by pointing to the pressures of the world capitalist market, low-wage competition from East Asia, the harsh demands of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, etc.

In their own way, the bourgeois nationalists of the ANC are expressing an important truth: the condition of the working class and other oppressed toilers in South Africa cannot be determined in national isolation but is integrally linked to the struggle between labour and capital on a global scale. A socialist revolution in South Africa would confront formidable enemies: the Western imperialist powers emboldened and strengthened by the final undoing of the Russian Revolution and determined to obliterate any obstacles. Yet a socialist revolution in South Africa, centred on the black proletariat, would immediately find strategically powerful allies. The "New World Order" is anything but stable. A militant young proletariat in countries such as South Korea and Indonesia poses a challenge to right-wing regimes, while the powerful working class of Western European countries like Italy and France has begun a round of sharp struggles of its own which could threaten the control of the reformist bureaucrats and go toward a struggle for power.

Elsewhere, millions of union members, students and others were active in solidarity with the struggle against white supremacy in the apartheid state. Racial minorities and immigrants facing persecution identified strongly with the South African masses. In particular, a South African workers revolution would have an immediate radicalising impact on American black workers, who have historically tended to be a vanguard layer of militant class struggle and social activism in the U.S. Thus even within the strongest imperialist bastions, revolutionary South Africa will find a powerful echo.

For the perspective of permanent revolution in South Africa to become a reality requires the forging of a *revolutionary vanguard party* modelled on the Bolshevik Party built by Lenin in the Russian tsarist empire, a party which led the first and only successful proletarian revolution in history. This party united the most politically advanced worker militants with the best of the leftist intellectuals. The Bolshevik Party was built through political and polemical struggle against the reformist pseudo-Marxists (the Mensheviks), the populist Social Revolutionaries and the left nationalists of the various oppressed peoples of the tsarist empire. Similarly, we seek to aggressively confront the different currents of the South African left in political and polemical struggle with the aim of forging the nucleus of an authentic Leninist-Trotskyist party through a process of splits and fusions—revolutionary

regroupment—on a clear programmatic basis.

We begin this pamphlet with an article written by Trotsky in 1935 as a letter to South African Trotskyist comrades. At that time South Africa was still a semi-colony of Britain, then the world's dominant imperialist power. Still to come were World War II, the coming to power of the Nationalists and their apartheid scheme in 1948, the "Suppression of Communism," the explosive mass struggles led largely by the ANC, and the emergence of the powerful black trade-union movement. Today the new "black" government presents a very dif-

ferent face of the continued class rule of exploiters and oppressors. But while particular aspects analysed by Trotsky and the corresponding tasks for revolutionists have changed over the last 60 years, the article admirably sets out the basic framework and programme of revolutionary Marxists: the fight for working-class power through the construction of a vanguard party on a programme of complete political independence of the proletariat from its class enemies and unity with its class brothers and sisters around the globe.

—April 1997

Letter to South African Revolutionaries

by Leon Trotsky

This letter dated 20 April 1935 was written in response to a draft document by the Trotskyist comrades of the Workers' Party of South Africa. Trotsky's letter was later published in South Africa in Workers' Voice, November 1944. The present text is reprinted from International Socialist Review, Fall 1966.

The theses are clearly written on the basis of a serious study of both the economic and political conditions of South Africa, as well as of the literature of Marxism and Leninism, particularly that of the Bolshevik-Leninists. A serious scientific approach to all questions is one of the most important conditions for the success of a revolutionary organization.

The example of our South African friends again confirms the fact that in the present epoch only the Bolshevik-Leninists, that is, the consistent proletarian revolutionaries, take a serious attitude to theory, analyze the realities, and are learning themselves before they teach others. The Stalinist bureaucracy has long ago substituted a combination of ignorance and impudence for Marxism.

In the following lines I wish to make certain remarks in regard to the draft theses which will serve as a program for the Workers' Party of South Africa. Under no circumstances do I make these remarks in opposition to the text of the theses. I am too insufficiently acquainted with the South African conditions to pretend to a full conclusive opinion on a series of practical questions.

Only in certain places am I obliged to express my disagreement with certain aspects of the draft theses. But here also, insofar as I can judge from afar, we have *no differences in principles* with the authors of the theses. It is rather a matter of certain polemical *exaggerations* arising from the struggle with the pernicious national policy of Stalinism.

But it is in the interest of the cause not to smooth over even slight inaccuracies in presentation, but, on the contrary, to expose them for open deliberations in order to arrive at the most clear and blameless text. Such is the aim of the following lines dictated by the desire to give some assistance to our South African Bolshevik-Leninists in this great and responsible work to which they have set themselves.

The South African possessions of Great Britain form a dominion only from the point of view of the white minority. From the point of the black majority, South Africa is a slave colony.

No social upheaval (in the first instance, an agrarian revolution) is thinkable with the retention of British imperialism in the South African dominion. The overthrow of British imperialism in South Africa is just as indispensable for the triumph of socialism in South Africa as it is for Great Britain itself. The struggle for the expulsion of British imperialism, its tools and agents, thus enters as an indispensable part of the program of the South African proletarian party.

A Black Republic?

The overthrow of the hegemony of British imperialism in South Africa can come about as the result of a military

defeat of Great Britain and the disintegration of the Empire. In this case, the South African whites could still for a certain period—hardly a considerable one—retain their domination over the blacks.

Another possibility, which in practice could be connected with the first, is a revolution in Great Britain and her possessions. Three-quarters of the population of South Africa (almost six million of the almost eight million total) is composed of non-Europeans. A victorious revolution is unthinkable without the awakening of the native masses. In its turn, that will give them what they are so lacking today—confidence in their strength, a heightened personal consciousness, a cultural growth.

Under these conditions the South African Republic will emerge first of all as a "black" republic; this does not exclude, of course, either full equality for the whites, or brotherly relations between the two races—depending mainly on the conduct of the whites. But it is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the state.

Insofar as a victorious revolution will radically change not only the relation between the classes, but also between the races, and will assure to the blacks that place in the state which corresponds to their numbers, insofar will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character.

We have not the slightest reason to close our eyes to this side of the question or to diminish its significance. On the contrary, the proletarian party should in words and in deeds openly and boldly take the solution of the national (racial) problem in its hands.

Nevertheless, the proletarian party can and must solve the national problem by *its own* methods.

The historical weapon of national liberation can be only the *class struggle*. The Comintern, beginning in 1924, transformed the program of national liberation of colonial people into an empty democratic abstraction which is elevated above the reality of class relations. In the struggle against national oppression different classes liberate themselves (temporarily) from material interests and become simple "anti-imperialist" forces.

In order that the spiritual "forces" bravely fulfill the task assigned to them by the Comintern, they are promised, as a reward, a spiritual "national-democratic" state—with the unavoidable reference to Lenin's formula: "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry."

The thesis points out that in 1917 Lenin openly and once and for all discarded the slogan of "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" as if it were a necessary condition for the solution of the agrarian question. This is entirely correct.

But to avoid misunderstanding, it should be added: a) Lenin always spoke of a revolutionary *bourgeois* democratic dictatorship, and not about a spiritual "people's" state; b) in the struggle for a *bourgeois* democratic dictatorship he offered not a bloc of all "anti-czarist forces," but carried out an independent class policy of the proletariat.

An "anti-czarist" bloc was the idea of the Russian Social-Revolutionaries and the Left Cadets, that is, the parties of the petty and middle bourgeoisie. Against these parties the Bolsheviks always waged an irreconcilable struggle.

When the thesis says that the slogan of a "Black Republic" is *equally* harmful for the revolutionary cause as is the slogan of a "South Africa for the Whites," then we cannot agree with the form of the statement. Whereas in the latter there is the case of supporting complete oppression, in the former there is the case of taking the first steps toward liberation.

We must accept decisively and without any reservations the complete and unconditional right of the blacks to independence. Only on the basis of a mutual struggle against the domination of the white exploiters can the solidarity of black and white toilers be cultivated and strengthened.

The Choice Is Theirs

It is possible that *after victory* the blacks will find it unnecessary to form a separate black state in South Africa. Certainly we will not *force them* to establish a separate state. But let them make this decision freely, on the basis of their own experience, and not forced by the *sjambok* of the white oppressors. The proletarian revolutionaries must never forget the right of the oppressed nationalities to self-determination, including full separation, and the duty of the proletariat of the oppressing nation to defend this right with arms in hand if necessary.

The thesis quite correctly underlines the fact that the solution to the national question in Russia was brought about by the October Revolution. National democratic movements by themselves were powerless to cope with the national oppression of czarism. Only because of the fact that the movement of the oppressed nationalities, as well as the agrarian movement of the peasantry, gave the proletariat the possibility of seizing power and establishing its dictatorship, did the national question as well as the agrarian find a bold and decisive solution.

But the very conjuncture of the national movements with the struggle of the proletariat for power was made politically possible only thanks to the fact that the Bolsheviks during the whole of their history carried on an irreconcilable struggle with the Great Russian oppressors, supporting always and without reservations the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, including separation from Russia.

The policy of Lenin in regard to the oppressed nations did not, however, have anything in common with the policy of the [Stalinist] epigones. The Bolshevik Party defended the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination *with the methods of proletarian class struggle*, entirely rejecting the charlatan "anti-imperialist" blocs with the numerous petty-bourgeois "national" parties of czarist Russia (PPS, the party of Pilsudski in czarist Poland, Dashnaki in Armenia, the Ukrainian nationalists, the Jewish Zionists, etc., etc.).

Temporary Alliances

The Bolsheviks have always mercilessly unmasked these parties, as well as the Russian Social-Revolutionaries, their vacillations and adventurism, but especially their ideological lie of being above the class struggle. Lenin did not stop his intransigent criticism even when circumstances forced upon him this or that episodic, strictly practical, agreement with them.

There could be no question of any permanent alliance with them under the banner of "anti-czarism." Only thanks

to its *irreconcilable* class policy was Bolshevism able to succeed in the time of the Revolution to throw aside the Mensheviks, the Social-Revolutionaries, the national petty-bourgeois parties, and gather around the proletariat the masses of the peasantry and the oppressed nationalities.

"We must not," says the thesis, "compete with the African National Congress in nationalist slogans in order to win the native masses." The idea is in itself correct, but it requires concrete amplification. Being insufficiently acquainted with the activities of the National Congress, I can only outline our policy concerning it on the basis of analogies, stating beforehand my readiness to supplement my recommendations with all the necessary modifications.

(1) The Bolshevik-Leninists put themselves in defense of the Congress, in all cases when it is being attacked by the white oppressors and their chauvinistic agents in the ranks of the workers' organizations.

(2) The Bolshevik-Leninists place the progressive over the reactionary tendencies in the program of the Congress.

(3) The Bolshevik-Leninists unmask before the native masses the inability of the Congress to achieve the realization of even its own demands, because of its superficial, conciliatory policy. In contradistinction to the Congress, the Bolshevik-Leninists develop a program of revolutionary class struggle.

(4) Separate episodic agreements with the Congress, if they are forced by circumstances, are permissible only within the framework of strictly defined practical tasks, with the retention of full and complete independence of our own organization and freedom of political criticism.

The thesis brings out as the main political slogan not a "national democratic state," but a South African "October." The thesis proves, and proves convincingly:

(a) that the national and agrarian question in South Africa coincide in their bases;

(b) that both these questions can be solved only in a revolutionary way;

(c) that the revolutionary solution of these questions leads inevitably to the dictatorship of the proletariat which guides the native peasant masses; and,

(d) that the dictatorship of the proletariat will open an era of a soviet regime and socialist reconstruction. This conclusion is the cornerstone of the whole structure of the program. Here we are in complete agreement.

But the masses must be brought to this general "strategic" formula through the medium of a series of tactical slogans. It is possible to work out these slogans, at every given stage, only on the basis of an analysis of the concrete circumstances of the life and struggle of the proletariat and the peasantry and the whole internal and international situation. Without going deeply into this matter, I would like briefly to deal with the mutual relations of the national and agrarian slogans.

The thesis several times underlines that the agrarian and not the national demands must be put in the first place. This is a very important question which deserves serious attention. To push aside or to weaken the national slogans with the object of not antagonizing the white chauvinists in the ranks of the working class would be, of course, criminal opportunism, which is absolutely alien to the authors and supporters of the thesis. This flows quite clearly from the text of the thesis which is permeated with the spirit of revolutionary internationalism.

The thesis admirably says of those "socialists" who are fighting for the privileges of the whites that "we must recognize them as the greatest enemies of the revolution." Thus we must seek for another explanation, which is briefly indicated in the text itself: The backward native peasant masses directly feel the agrarian oppression much more than they do the national oppression.

It is quite possible. The majority of the natives are peasants; the bulk of the land is in the hands of a white minority. The Russian peasants during their struggle for land put their faith in the Czar for a long time and stubbornly refused to draw political conclusions.

From the revolutionary intelligentsia's traditional slogan, "Land and Liberty," the peasant for a long time only accepted the first part. It required decades of agrarian unrest and the influence and action of the town workers to enable the peasantry to connect both slogans.

The poor enslaved Bantu hardly entertains more hope in the British King or in [former British Labour politician Ramsay] Macdonald. But this extreme political backwardness is also expressed in his lack of self-consciousness. At the same time, he feels very sharply the land and fiscal bondage. Given these conditions, propaganda can and must first of all flow from the slogans of the agrarian revolution, in order that, step by step, and on the basis of the experience of the struggle, the peasantry may be brought to the necessary *political and national* conclusions.

Role of Advanced Workers

If these hypothetical considerations are correct, then we are not concerned with the program itself, but rather with the ways and means of carrying the program to the consciousness of the native masses.

Considering the small numbers of the revolutionary cadres and the extreme diffusion of the peasantry, it will be possible to influence the peasantry, at least in the immediate future, mainly if not exclusively, *through the medium of the advanced workers*. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to train advanced workers in the spirit of a clear understanding of the significance of the agrarian revolution for the historical fate of South Africa.

The proletariat of the country consists of backward black pariahs and a privileged, arrogant caste of whites. In this lies the greatest difficulty of the whole situation. As the thesis correctly states, the economic convulsions of rotting capitalism must strongly shake the old barriers and facilitate the work of revolutionary coalescence.

In any case, the worst crime on the part of the revolutionaries would be to give the smallest concessions to the privileges and prejudices of the whites. Whoever gives his

little finger to the devil of chauvinism is lost.

The revolutionary party must put before every white worker the following alternative: either with British imperialism and with the white bourgeoisie of South Africa, or with the black workers and peasants against the white feudalists and slave-owners and their agents in the ranks of the working class.

The overthrow of the British domination over the black population of South Africa will not, of course, mean an economic and cultural break with the previous mother-country, if the latter will liberate itself from the oppression of its imperialist plunderers. A Soviet England will be able to exercise a powerful economic and cultural influence on South Africa through the medium of those whites who in deed, in actual struggle, have bound up their fate with that of the present colonial slaves. This influence will be based not on domination, but on proletarian mutual cooperation.

But more important in all probability will be the influence which a Soviet South Africa will exercise over the whole of the black continent. To help the Negroes catch up with the white race, in order to ascend hand in hand with them to new cultural heights, this will be one of the grand and noble tasks of a victorious socialism.

In conclusion, I want to say a few words on the question of a legal and illegal organization, concerning the constitution of the party.

The thesis correctly underlines the inseparable connection between organization and revolutionary tasks, supplementing the legal apparatus with an illegal one. Nobody, of course, is proposing to create an illegal apparatus for such functions as in the given conditions can be executed by legal ones.

But in the conditions of an approaching political crisis, there must be created special illegal nuclei of the party apparatus, which will develop as need arises. A certain part, and by the way, a very important part, of the work cannot under any circumstances be carried out openly, that is, before the eyes of the class enemies.

Nevertheless, for the given period, the most important form of the illegal or semi-legal work of revolutionaries is the work in mass organizations, particularly in the trade unions. The leaders of the trade unions are the unofficial police of capitalism; they conduct a merciless struggle against revolutionaries.

We must have the ability to work in mass organizations, not falling under the blows of the reactionary apparatus. This is a very important—for the given period, most important—part of the illegal work. A revolutionary group in a trade union which has learned in practice all the necessary rules of conspiracy will be able to transform its work to an illegal status when circumstances require this. ■

Letter to the New Unity Movement

28 February 1994

New Unity Movement
Wynberg, South Africa

Dear comrades,

For some time we have been reading with great interest the materials of the New Unity Movement, which you have kindly sent us. While we have many differences, we have observed that in the past few years your literature has cited with approval certain views expressed in *Workers Vanguard*, especially our militant opposition to the capitalist counter-revolution in East Europe and the former Soviet Union. As well, your article, "The Truth About the Kurds' Suffering," in the New Unity Movement *Bulletin* (June-July 1991), presented a position closely parallel to our own. And we both stand in hard opposition to the "power sharing" deal between the petty-bourgeois nationalist African National Congress (ANC) and the white ruling class represented by De Klerk's National Party.

In our press we touched on some of our differences concerning the course of the South African revolution. For instance, in "South Africa: Down with Neo-Apartheid!" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 543, 24 January 1992), we wrote:

"The one group which has unambiguously denounced the ANC 'power-sharing' scheme and its vicarious popular-front maneuvers is the New Unity Movement centered on the Western Cape region. Continuing the tradition of the 1940s Non-European Unity Movement, which opposed the ANC's wartime collaboration with the South African government, New Unity calls in its 'Ten Point Programme' for non-collaboration, non-racialism and no negotiations with the apartheid regime. It opposes not only Codesa but also comes out hard against the 'Patriotic Front,' and describes the idea of a 'negotiated settlement' as a 'ruling class strategy to divert and cripple the liberation struggle' (NUM *Bulletin*, December 1991/January 1992). But while criticizing the capitalist system, the 'minimum programme' of the New Unity Movement consists exclusively of democratic demands, culminating, once again, in the call for a constituent assembly.

"New Unity ends its statement against the 'peace accords' saying that what's needed is to 'build unity, the basis of one nation, upon a basis of demands for full democratic rights in a united non-racial, non-sexist workers' republic' (NUM *Bulletin*, October/November 1991). But South Africa is not one nation. There are different national, racial and ethnic groups, with whites on top and black Africans on the bottom. The goal of communists is not to forge 'one South African nation' but to achieve political and social equality for all of its diverse peoples. While militantly opposing a negotiated sellout of the masses' struggle against apartheid, and placing themselves in the Trotskyist tradition, New Unity does not pose the *proletarian centrality* of the struggle for socialist revolution in South Africa which is necessary to achieve the most basic democratic and egalitarian demands. Thus, as we have written, in fighting to build a racially integrated Leninist-Trotskyist party:

'The central strategic task for a communist vanguard in South Africa is to set the proletarian and plebeian base of the ANC against the petty-bourgeois nationalist and collaborationist tops in the struggle to create organs of *dual power*, the basis for a black-centered workers government.' ('South Africa and Revolution,' in the Spartacist pamphlet series *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 8, July 1991)"

In this letter, in the hopes of initiating a fruitful interchange of views, we would like to explore in some depth the ques-

tion of "nation-building," and in particular we are responding to the views presented by Hosea Jaffe in his address for the 7th Annual Conference of the NUM in January 1992. In that address, on "The International Situation: Lessons for South Africa," Comrade Jaffe raises a number of political and programmatic criticisms of the International Communist League centering on our views on what is clearly a central issue: the national question in so-called Third World countries.

In his report, Comrade Jaffe sharply criticized our position on the Palestinian question and our support for the Eritrean struggle for national liberation in Ethiopia. Jaffe quotes from our article "Pax Americana Targets Palestinians" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 533, 30 August 1991), in which we called for a "right of self-determination for the Palestinian people which does not come at the expense of the national rights of the Hebrew-speaking people." He misconstrues our position by claiming that this "recognizes Israel," whereas we explicitly call for "the overthrow of the Zionist capitalist state" as well as of "its Hashemite neighbor," Jordan. We stand for a binational Palestinian workers state within a socialist federation of the Near East.

In his same 1992 speech, Jaffe railed against "Eurocentrics standing on Trotsky's grave" who "supported the imperialist divide-and-rule 'Biafra' plot in the late 1960's, and for 30 years backed the secession from Ethiopia of 'Eritrea.'" He goes on to denounce those who "proclaimed the bloody birth of that most wretched neocolony, Bangladesh, as the beginning of a 'Red Bengal.'" While we never glorified "Red Bengal," we did support the right of the East Bengalis to form their own separate state in the face of murderous repression by the Punjabi military junta ruling Pakistan. And we supported the same right for the Igbos (Ibos) and Eritreans in similar circumstances. Similarly we have supported the right of national self-determination for the Kurds in the Near East and for the Tamil regions in Sri Lanka (a position defended by our Sri Lankan supporters in the face of intense Sinhalese chauvinism).

We adhere to the programmatic position on the national question developed by Lenin in tsarist Russia (which he called "a prison house of peoples") and which became the basis for the nationally federated Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Lenin stood for the right of self-determination (i.e., secession) for consolidated nations such as Poland and the Ukraine, and for the right of regional autonomy for peoples, like the Bashkirs and Tatars of Central Asia, who had not yet attained the prerequisites of nationhood such as a potentially independent political economy, or in some cases even a written language.

In the name of progressive "nation-building" within the framework of the existing neocolonial states of Asia and Africa, the New Unity Movement appears to reject in principle and in practice the right of national self-determination or even regional autonomy. In his report, Jaffe treats all national secessionist movements in the Third World as a form of imperialist divide-and-rule tactics. In reality, the Western imperialist powers generally support the suppression of rebellious national minorities by their neocolonial client states—NATO Turkey against the Kurds, Pakistan against the East

Bengalis, Haile Selassie's Ethiopia against the Eritreans. Where they have supported secessionist movements, it was usually against Soviet client states (e.g., Angola, Iraq).

Central to the New Unity Movement's view on the national question is the doctrine of "nation-building" in both South Africa and other Third World countries. In his 1992 address, Jaffe stated:

"Anti-imperialism is not simply class struggle, but nation-class struggle. It means 'We build a nation.'

"This is the FIRST task and meaning of SOCIALISTS. A socialist who is not an anti-imperialist builder of a nation for, by, in and of oppressed peoples is a windbag, not a socialist. Anti-imperialists who fly the flag 'We build a nation' are a thousand times more socialist than 'Socialists' who fly the Red Flag and cry to the moon for a world in which there will be no more nations."

We seek to be guided by Marx and Engels, who in the *Communist Manifesto* declared that "the workers have no fatherland," and further that "Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties" first of all by the fact that "in the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality."

The New Unity Movement's doctrine of "nation-building" appears to us to a large extent a reaction to the particular mechanisms of white-supremacist rule in South Africa: the British-backed Smuts regime and the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, which took over in 1948, sought to artificially *retribalize* the black African population. South Africa was declared a white man's country and the Bantu-speaking population were made "citizens" of tribal "homelands" (the bantustans) ruled over by traditional chiefs like the Xhosas' Kaiser Matanzima and bantustan satraps like KwaZulu's Gatsha Buthelezi. Hence, the Non-European Unity Movement and its successors saw overcoming tribal identity as strategically key to mobilizing the black masses against the white ruling class.

The Unity Movement's doctrine of "nation-building" was defined not only in response to the bantustan system imposed by the white ruling class but also to the collaborationist strategy of the ANC and Stalinist Communist Party. The ANC's 1955 Freedom Charter states "there shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races." This is an implicit acceptance of a racially or ethnically federated governmental system which would perpetuate the privileged political position of the white ruling caste in a less extreme and overt form. Now, openly repudiating the democratic principle of "one person, one vote," Mandela and De Klerk have agreed to a coalition government of "national unity" in which the white parties will have effective veto power over all major policy questions.

South Africa is moving toward a set-up in which the white bourgeoisie has coopted the moderate wing of the nationalist movement around the ANC leadership, which claims to represent all South African ethnic groups—Zulu, Xhosa and other black peoples, as well as coloured, Indian and white—on a "non-racialist" basis. Whereas in the past the Afrikaner nationalist regime insisted that the various peoples of South Africa were separate nations in order to justify apartheid, today the white bourgeoisie speaks of "national unity" to perpetuate its exploitation of the black African, coloured and Indian toilers.

The New Unity Movement rightly states: "The ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance is the paid agent of imperialism and is needed to bargain with De Klerk for a negotiated settlement to share power with the present ruling class to the disadvantage of the oppressed." But the present hold of the ANC over the non-white oppressed cannot be broken in the name of "nation-building" but only through the struggle against the superexploitation of the black toilers, which is the *bedrock* of South African capitalism—that is, through the struggle for workers revolution.

Since the 1940s the Non-European Unity Movement and its successors have sought to compete with the ANC and Stalinists on the terrain of nationalist politics, presenting themselves as more principled and uncompromising champions of the democratic rights of the oppressed and disenfranchised non-white masses. But those democratic rights can be achieved only through a proletarian revolution which seizes both political power and the gold mines, factories and other means of production from the white ruling class. Not the slogan "We build a nation" but rather the program of a black-centered workers government can galvanize the African, coloured and Indian toilers against the Randlords and all their black front men.

South Africa is not a nation but a colonial-derived state. Unlike the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, it attracted a large and permanent European settler population, not merely a thin strata of colonial administrators, traders and plantation owners. This white settler population spawned a South African bourgeoisie, which has transformed the country into a relatively industrialized economy and a regional imperialist power through the totalitarian subjugation and brutal super-exploitation of the indigenous black African population.

None of the diverse peoples of South Africa constitute a nation because they are all integrated into a single political economy. The whites are a racially defined, privileged caste. A large proportion of the black African population is thoroughly intermingled and *partially* detribalized in major "townships" like Soweto. However, tribal divisions have by no means been overcome among black Africans and can in fact feed into a bloody civil war manipulated by the white ruling class.

Both the New Unity Movement and we of the International Communist League recognize the reactionary and dangerous character of Inkatha, the Zulu tribalist movement led by Buthelezi. We would also point to a certain Xhosa tribalist component in the ANC's support. This was most pronounced a few years ago when Chris Hani, in close collaboration with bantustan chief Kaiser Matanzima, launched a major ANC recruitment drive in the Transkei. As we wrote at the time:

"With the overwhelming weight of national oppression, until now workers' allegiances have been drawn, with the aid of the reformist Communist Party, to the petty-bourgeois nationalism of the ANC, which is unable to overcome the tribal/ethnic divisions adroitly exploited by the South Africa rulers."

— "South Africa and Revolution," *Workers Vanguard*
No. 520, 15 February 1991

The Communist Party has long argued that the essential characteristic of South Africa was "colonialism of a special type," as a justification for its reformist program of "two-stage" revolution. In the 1930s, some of the early South African Trotskyists, in rejecting the Stalinist Comintern's call for a "native republic" in South Africa, tended to ignore the national oppression of blacks. But in his only substantive

writing on South Africa, Trotsky emphasized that blacks in South Africa are subject to a special form of national/colonial oppression—with the dominant white layer enjoying a privileged bourgeois democracy (at the time within the British colonial framework), while benefitting from its position atop the downtrodden black and non-white masses:

“The South African possessions of Great Britain form a dominion only from the point of view of the white minority. From the point of the black majority, South Africa is a slave colony....

“Under these conditions, the South African republic will emerge first of all as a ‘black’ republic; this does not exclude, of course, either full equality for the whites or brotherly relations between the two races—depending mainly on the conduct of the whites. But it is entirely obvious that the predominant majority of the population, liberated from slavish dependence, will put a certain imprint on the state.

“Insofar as a victorious revolution will radically change the relation not only between the classes but also between the races and will assure to the blacks that place in the state that corresponds to their numbers, thus far will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character.”

—“On the South African Theses,” *Writings* [1934-35]

The central democratic, as distinct from socialist, task of the South African revolution is not consolidating a non-existent nation but transferring political power from the privileged white minority to the disenfranchised black majority. Today, with a massive, well-organized black proletariat, we have sought to capture Trotsky’s concept in our slogan for a “black-centered workers republic.”

It is entirely possible that under proletarian class rule, a South African nation will evolve through widespread intermarriage and the development of a common culture and language or languages. However, “nation-building” is in no sense the supreme goal of the socialist revolution, nor will national integration be confined to the peoples now living within the borders of the South African state.

It appears to us that from a theoretical standpoint the NUM’s views on the national question in Africa derive from the traditions of the old Non-European Unity Movement, as do those of Neville Alexander. Alexander writes: “So there is a territorial state approach to start with. The existing South African state forms the boundaries of the potential nation, not the particular existing cultures” (in Alex Callinicos, ed., *Between Apartheid and Capitalism: Conversations with South African Socialists* [1992]). More generally, Alexander argues: “Surely, Zambians and Nigerians, Kenyans and Zaireans, Angolans and Algerians are nations and not just conglomerations of language groups?” (*Language Policy and National Unity in South Africa/Azania* [1989]).

In our opinion these are neocolonial states encompassing diverse peoples. Since the European colonialists drew their borders arbitrarily between two or more countries, a single tribe or people often has been dismembered between two or more countries, while two or more historically antagonistic peoples have often been forced together in a single state. For example, the Ovimbundu people were divided between the Portuguese colony of Angola and the German colony of Südwestafrika (Namibia). The boundaries of almost all African states, including South Africa, are arbitrary and artificial and have no national legitimacy. Hence the artificiality, in our view, of any “nation-building” project within the confines of the 1910 Union of South Africa.

Anglo-American and the other Randlords economically dominate all of southern Africa. According to the latest statistics available to us, over 40 percent of the gold miners on

the Witwatersrand—the key value-producing proletariat in the region—come from *outside* the borders of South Africa, mainly from Lesotho and Mozambique. We believe that all such workers and their families should have access to full citizenship rights in South Africa. Clearly a democratic, egalitarian and rational solution to such questions can be worked out only in the framework of a socialist federation of southern Africa.

In the New Unity Movement’s view, the South African revolution is akin to the nation-building achieved by the bourgeois revolutions in West Europe in the pre-imperialist epoch. But this is exactly the *opposite* of the national policy carried out by the Bolshevik Revolution in the former tsarist empire. The assimilation of the remnants of peoples into the nascent West European nations from the 17th through the 19th centuries, although a violent and brutal process, was central to the expansion of the capitalist economy in its progressive phase and therefore led to a higher level of social development. The unification of Germany in the 1860s under Bismarck was followed by the country’s rapid transformation into a leading industrial power.

However, in Africa and Asia today, the weak native bourgeoisies, dependent on and shackled by imperialism, *cannot* transform these neocolonial states into modern industrial societies. Hence “nation-building” becomes synonymous with oppression of national and ethnic groups by the dominant people, such as the suppression of the Eritreans, Tigreans and Somalis by the Amharic elite in Ethiopia or the murderous subjugation of the Igbos in Nigeria by the Hausa-dominated military regime backed and armed by British imperialism. And more generally, while the colonial independence movements fought under the banner of nationalism, the latter is not ultimately opposed to imperialism. Indeed, following independence the imperialists have sought to coopt and control the new nationalist rulers.

Central to Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution is the understanding that in the colonial and ex-colonial countries the historic tasks achieved by the bourgeois-democratic revolutions in West Europe and North America can be achieved only through proletarian revolution. Such revolutions do not aim at the forced assimilation of diverse peoples into a unitary “nation,” but rather secure the democratic rights of all nations and national groups.

We believe that a democratic solution to the national question in southern Africa should be based in particular on the Bolshevik program for Central Asia. Just as the Western imperialist powers subjugated and colonized *pre-national* peoples in southern Africa (e.g., the Zulus, Shona, Ovimbundu), so the Russian tsarist autocracy subjugated and colonized *pre-national* peoples in Central Asia (e.g., Bashkirs, Tatars, Kazakhs).

In 1913, Lenin wrote:

“It is beyond doubt that in order to eliminate all national oppression it is very important to create autonomous areas, however small, with entirely homogeneous populations, towards which members of the respective nationalities scattered all over the country, or even all over the world, could gravitate, and with which they could enter into relations and free associations of every kind.”

— V. I. Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question”

In the same article, he quoted a party conference resolution which stated that “the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions must be determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social

conditions, national make-up of the population, etc.," *not* the internal administrative divisions of the tsarist empire. Lenin pointed out that regional self-government did not contradict the Marxists' upholding of the need for a centralized state. On the contrary, "the principle of centralism" is applied "democratically, not bureaucratically."

These principles became the basis for the formation of the Soviet workers state. The Bolsheviks did not proclaim as their aim the forging of a single Soviet nation, melding together Russians and Bashkirs, Ukrainians and Azeris. While encouraging the intermingling and unity of all Soviet peoples, they formed a federated state with constituent national republics and autonomous regions. Lenin and Trotsky understood it was necessary to demonstrate to the Turkic-speaking Bashkirs and Tatars, for example, that the Russian-centered Soviet workers state was not a new and disguised form of the Russian empire, that the unity of Soviet peoples did not mean forced Russification. Significantly, the dying Lenin's struggle against the bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution centered on the defense of the rights of the minority national republics. He denounced Stalin's trampling on the Georgian Soviet government as akin to the tsarist program of "Russia, one and indivisible."

South Africa/Azania, one and indivisible, is not and cannot be the program for workers revolution in southern Africa. We maintain that a socialist federation of southern Africa should be modeled on the early, pre-Stalinist Soviet federation. In such a socialist federation the Ovimbundu in Angola and Namibia, the Ndebele in Zimbabwe, Zulus in Natal and all other peoples who so desire should have the right of regional autonomy. The New Unity Movement seems to equate all forms of ethnically based regional autonomy with the bantustan system of the apartheid state. But there is a fundamental difference between forced tribalization and the voluntary exercise of limited political sovereignty by distinct peoples in the areas they inhabit. Such limits would include, among other things, guarantees for the democratic rights of minorities living in these regions. Thus, a Zulu autonomous region in Natal would not be permitted to expel or discriminate against Indians or Xhosa-speakers.

Our support for the right of regional autonomy in a *future South African workers state* in no way implies support for reactionary Zulu separatism in Natal today. *In the present context*, we would oppose a move to secession by Inkatha, which would be comparable to and undoubtedly allied with a revolt of right-wing whites to form a bitter-end apartheid *volkstaat*. But things can change. It cannot be excluded that military clashes could lead to an ethnic civil war, particularly, for example, if there were massacres of Zulus by what was essentially the continuation of the SADF with ANC support/participation. That is by no means the current situation, as all reports agree that the ANC presently has the support of a majority of the Zulus, especially in the urban areas. But should such an ethnic polarization develop, Marxists would have to envisage the possibility of recognizing the right of self-determination of a Zulu nation compacted and separated off through war. In Nigeria, we would not have been for "independence" of the Eastern Region before the Biafran War of 1966-67, but when that war posed the question of the *right to exist* of the Igbo people, proletarian revolutionaries were duty-bound to come to their defense (more on this below).

Of course, a workers state could also be confronted with a counterrevolutionary drive waving the flag of national rights.

Here again the experience and example of the Bolshevik Revolution is relevant to South Africa. At the beginning of the Russian Civil War of 1918-21, the Bashkir leader Zeki Validov, a Muslim nationalist, allied himself with Cossack and White forces against the Soviet government. Trotsky's Red Army smashed this counterrevolutionary *mélange* with Validov himself changing sides in mid-battle. *After* the Bolsheviks won the Civil War, they established a Bashkir Autonomous Region as part of a nationally federated Soviet workers state.

Of course the national question in pre-1917 Russia was posed differently than in South Africa. The minority peoples of the tsarist empire were oppressed by a despotic government based on the numerically dominant nationality, the Russians. In South Africa, the black African majority is oppressed and fragmented by the white, European-derived minority. However, socially backward Zulu villagers, still steeped in tribal tradition, might experience forced assimilation into a unitary South African "nation" as a form of ethnic oppression at the hands of the Xhosa or coloured elite.

South Africa is not exempt from the Leninist principle that overcoming national, racial and religious divisions among the toiling masses demands that the communist vanguard fight for the democratic rights and national equality of all peoples. This is relevant not just for backward rural regions but in order to forge solid inter-ethnic *working-class unity* in the urban areas where there is a tremendous intermingling, not just Zulu and Xhosa, but also minority peoples such as the Tswana, and the relatively more privileged coloured and Indian populations whose rights must also be respected. One cannot simply wish away the divisions created by the history of imperialist domination.

In his 1992 address to the New Unity Movement conference, Jaffe maintains: "Self-determination is just only when it is against an 'oppressor nation.' An 'oppressor nation' is defined in Lenin's *Imperialism* as an IMPERIALIST nation." Here Jaffe exempts the neocolonial rulers of Asia and Africa from ever being guilty of national oppression, a view *counterposed* to the views of Lenin and Trotsky.

The Bolshevik government of Lenin and Trotsky defended the democratic rights of minority peoples in *neocolonial states* as well as those directly oppressed by the imperialist powers. Take the case of the Caucasian nation of Georgia, which between 1918 and 1920 was ruled by the Menshevik social democrats as a client state of first German and then British imperialism. The Menshevik regime in Tbilisi brutally oppressed and massacred the Ossetians, Abkhazians and other Caucasian mountain peoples. Trotsky's pamphlet exposing and attacking the Georgian social democrats is dedicated in part "To the memory of the revolutionary leaders of the peasant revolts in Ossetia, Abkhasia, Adjaria, Guria, etc., shot by the Menshevik government of Georgia." Precisely because the Bolsheviks militarily defended the national rights of the Caucasian mountain peoples against greater Georgian chauvinism, these peoples became a major base of support for Soviet power in the region.

It appears to us that the New Unity Movement views all national struggles in the Third World through the prism of the South African apartheid system, especially before the recent Mandela-De Klerk "power sharing" deal. In his report, comrade Jaffe equates Eritrea—the most economically developed region in the Horn of Africa—with the barren bantustan of KwaZulu. It is necessary to recognize the basic *difference*

between the mechanisms of direct colonial and indirect neocolonial rule. In Africa and also the Indian subcontinent, the colonial authorities, using the classic Roman imperial principle of divide and rule, propped up the traditional rulers and exploited national, tribal and religious divisions and enmities to prevent a unified national liberation struggle. However, *in their neocolonial client states, the imperialists prefer strong central governments*—in some cases run by formerly persecuted nationalists—who crush all regional separatist and national secessionist movements so as to better exploit the country on behalf of international capital.

The shift from colonial to neocolonial methods is quite clear in the case of India. The British raj contained over 500 Indian potentates who were allowed to rule over their own “independent” principalities as long as they recognized the “paramount power” of the British crown. At the same time, the liberal nationalists of the Indian National Congress were persecuted, with Gandhi, Nehru and the others spending long years in prison.

However, when Britain, bankrupt at the end of World War II, recognized it could no longer maintain direct colonial rule in India, it worked out a deal with the Congress leadership (after first encouraging the creation of a Muslim state in Pakistan, born in hideous bloodletting on both sides). The last British viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, pressured the princes to surrender their “sovereignty” to the new Indian and Pakistani states. Two historians of the maneuvers surrounding Indian independence pointed out:

“The princes’ fathers may have been the surest friends of the raj; in the new era opening in India, Britain would have to find new friends elsewhere, among the Socialists of Congress. Mountbatten was determined to make them, and he knew he was not going to do it by subordinating India’s natural interests to those of a little caste of anachronistic autocrats.”

— Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre,
Freedom at Midnight (1975)

The few princes who sought to preserve their satrapies were immediately smashed by the new Indian army which was simply the core of the old British colonial army bequeathed to Nehru & Co.

The Western imperialist powers are intrinsically indifferent to the borders and national make-up of the African and Asian neocolonial states. They will support the suppression of a national minority by a loyal client regime, such as the Kurds in NATO Turkey, and encourage the same national minority against a regime regarded as hostile, especially one which was friendly to the former Soviet Union, such as the Kurds in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. The International Communist League, while defending Iraq against the imperialist onslaught in the 1991 Gulf War, supports the right of self-determination of the Kurds and calls for a socialist republic of united Kurdistan in a socialist federation of the Near East.

An article on the Kurdish question in the NUM *Bulletin* (June/July 1991) stands in some contradiction to your general opposition to national secessionist movements in the Third World as pawns of imperialism. This article, which drew heavily on *Workers Vanguard*, noted that “the Kurdish struggle could be the key in exposing Bush’s ‘New Order’ in the Near East,” and noted that “Only when the working class, in league with its class brothers and sisters in this region and throughout the world, takes its place at the head of the Kurdish nation will this long-suffering people finally achieve their liberation.”

The imperialists’ cynical manipulation of national struggles in the Third World is exemplified in the Horn of Africa,

which in the mid-1970s saw a complete *reversal of alliances*. Jaffe is indignant that “They [*Workers Vanguard*] claim that the 2000-year-old ‘Ethiopian Empire’ is the ‘product of imperialism’” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 531, 19 July 1991). In fact, it was in the late 19th century that the small Amharic kingdom of Menelik II, using modern weaponry supplied by the British and French imperialists, conquered the surrounding East African peoples and defeated the Italians at Adowa. When Mussolini sought to avenge that humiliating defeat by attacking Haile Selassie’s Ethiopia in the mid-1930s, the Trotskyists unconditionally defended backward Ethiopia against Italian imperialism.

After World War II, in order to enlarge his realm and gain a port on the Red Sea, Haile Selassie demanded the annexation of Eritrea, which had been part of the medieval Ethiopian kingdom 13 centuries earlier. Later a province in the Ottoman empire, Eritrea became an Italian colony in the 1890s and was taken over by the British as a “protectorate” during World War II. Under colonial rule, Eritrea became the most economically advanced region in the Horn of Africa with a relatively strong, leftist working-class movement. In 1952, Eritrea was attached to Ethiopia due to the diktat of U.S. imperialism, which took over from the British the role of great-power protector of Selassie’s feudal kingdom. A former U.S. foreign service officer in charge of the American embassy in Addis Ababa wrote:

“The United States understood that Haile Selassie would regard its position on Eritrea as a critical test of friendship. It did not think Eritrea would be a viable entity on its own, and it was concerned that it might not be able to keep its military communications in [the Eritrean capital] Asmara if Eritrea were to become independent. So it eventually decided to support handing the former Italian colony over to Ethiopia.”

— David A. Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union* (1985)

So here we have an American diplomat who was on the spot stating that it was Western imperialism which enlarged the “Ethiopian empire.”

Over the next two decades, Ethiopia was the largest recipient of U.S. financial and military aid on the African continent. Yet American arms and money did not enable Haile Selassie to crush the Eritrean national liberation struggle, which was supported by the Soviet Union, China and the Arab states. Moscow and Beijing did so to weaken a major American client state, the Arab regimes to get back at the Ethiopian autocrat for his staunch support to Zionist Israel (which in turn provided him with “counterinsurgency experts” to suppress the Eritrea revolt). At the same time, the neighboring country of Somalia, a historic enemy of Ethiopia, had become a Soviet client state. With Anglo-American backing, Haile Selassie had seized the Somali-populated region of Ogaden; in this case, the Somali campaign to take back the province was a genuine and legitimate struggle for national unity.

In 1974 the decrepit feudal autocracy of Haile Selassie was overthrown by a nationalist military coup under the slogan of “Ethiopia First.” Despite the “socialist” rhetoric of the military junta (the Derg), Washington initially kept up a modest level of aid to Addis Ababa in order to maintain, in the words of a 1975 National Security Council memo, a “continuation of the traditional Ethiopian ties with the west.” However, the Derg needed more substantial military support to crush the Eritrean revolt and soon found a more generous patron in Brezhnev’s Russia. Dumped by the Kremlin, the “Islamic socialist” regime in Somalia then turned to Washington for

support. Amid the cynical maneuvers by the American imperialists and Soviet Stalinist bureaucrats, our position was consistent and principled. As we wrote at the time:

"Especially now, Marxists must champion the elementary democratic right of the oppressed tribes and peoples of Ethiopia to *political secession*. As long as Ethiopia remains a 'prison house of peoples' (as Lenin dubbed the tsarist empire), the development of proletarian and socialist consciousness among the toilers will be poisoned by chauvinism on the part of the Amharas and petty-bourgeois nationalism among the multiplicity of oppressed peoples. Thus, we call for the military victory of the anti-junta forces fighting in Eritrea and the Ogaden against the Ethiopian army."

— "Storm Over the Horn of Africa."
Workers Vanguard No. 195, 3 March 1978

The same principles governed our position in the Biafra War of 1967-69. Nigeria represents an extreme case of the artificiality of the neocolonial states of sub-Saharan Africa. Prior to the British colonization in the 1890s there were no cultural, political or economic ties between the Hausas of what became Nigeria's Northern Region and the Igbos of the Eastern Region. The Hausas spoke a Hamitic language related to Amharic and Berber; the Igbos spoke one of the Niger-Congo languages common to most peoples of central Africa. The Hausas were Muslims; the Igbos were animists who were converted to Christianity. The Hausas were a highly class-stratified society ruled over by the Fulani aristocracy, who resided in walled cities. The Igbos lived in tribal villages without any higher or centralized political structure. The British actually appointed Igbo "chiefs" in order to rule through them.

Kwame Nkrumah correctly pointed out from his own pan-Africanist perspective:

"Nigeria became an entity not because of affinity of its peoples but because the rivalry between France and Britain at the turn of the century made it necessary for Britain to control the Niger and its hinterland.

"The subsequent unity of Nigeria was a product of the railways, roads and ports developed by the imperial power which compelled peoples of different ethnic origins and traditions to co-operate irrespective of the fact that bigger ethnic groups that make up Nigeria had closer historical and cultural connections with the surrounding peoples now lying outside Nigeria than they had with each other."

— reproduced in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (1971)

British colonial rule in Nigeria favored the Fulani aristocracy, who played a role somewhat comparable to the bantustan chiefs in South Africa. During the 1950s, the Hausa-dominated Northern People's Congress *opposed* independence from Britain while the petty-bourgeois nationalist parties based on the Igbos and Yorubas were agitating for it. When in 1960 the British decided it was opportune to grant Nigeria formal independence, they devised a federal constitution which ensured the dominance of the Northern Region. The Fulani aristocracy thus became the main prop of the new neocolonial state while the Igbo petty bourgeoisie—teachers, civil servants, military officers—were the main social base for anti-British nationalism.

The Biafra War clearly shows that the rhetoric of nationalism ("nation-building") in sub-Saharan Africa serves as a cover for tribalist domination. When Igbo officers took over the federal army in 1966 and proclaimed as their cause "one strong nation," the Hausa elite threatened secession. When the Northerners, with British help, retook the military high command, they massacred over two million Igbos in the name of Nigeria's "integrity."

When in early 1966 Igbo junior officers staged a military coup, assassinating the most prominent Hausa aristocrats, leadership was taken over by the army chief of staff, General Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi, who proclaimed a new "nation-building" program:

"All Nigerians want an end to Regionalism. Tribal loyalties and activities which promote tribal consciousness and sectional interests must give way to the urgent task of national reconstruction. The Federal Military Government will preserve Nigeria as one strong nation."

— *Ibid.*

In response to the Igbo-led nationalist coup, the Fulani aristocracy threatened secession of the Northern Region while Hausa mobs began to massacre Igbos living in the North. However, in July the Hausa elite regained control of the federal army in a countercoup *instigated by British imperialism*. Ironsi and over 300 Igbo officers were killed. A leading participant in the July countercoup, General Olusegun Obasanjo (who subsequently became Nigerian president), later revealed the extent of British complicity:

"The second coup was actively encouraged if not assisted by some British officials and university lecturers working and living in the North. It was no secret that to the British the North was more amenable and less refractory than the South. It must also be mentioned that the British High Commission in Lagos and the American Embassy were partly instrumental in making sanity and good judgement prevail against a unilateral break-up of the country immediately after 29 July 1966."

— quoted in Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, *The Biafra War* (1990)

Following the countercoup, over 100,000 Igbos were massacred in the Northern Region. Fearing for their lives, the two million Igbos living outside their traditional homeland fled to the Eastern Region (Biafra). When in early 1967 the Hausa-dominated federal army threatened to occupy the Eastern Region, the Igbos declared Biafra independent in the name of national self-determination and survival.

The Biafra War was indeed the result of an imperialist plot, but in exactly the *opposite way* than comrade Jaffe maintains. In the name of preserving "Nigerian unity," the British instigated and supported the bloody subjugation of the Igbos by their traditional Hausa clients. As Labour prime minister Harold Wilson stated on the eve of a visit to Lagos in 1969:

"We are friends of Nigeria, we created a unified Federal Nigeria, it is our purpose to help preserve the integrity of Nigeria.... It is our policy, we continue to supply on a limited scale arms, not bombs, not aircraft, to the Government of Nigeria because we have always been their suppliers."

— reproduced in Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict*

The New Unity Movement's position for "nation-building" in Third World countries goes hand in hand with a pessimistic attitude toward the revolutionary capacity of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries. Thus, Jaffe stated at the 1992 NUM conference:

"Anti-imperialism fights for the world-wide abolition of imperialism carried out by fortresses built by struggling workers and peasants of the 'South' and 'East' to undermine and fell the citadels of the 'West,' if possible with but if necessary *without* the help of the workers of that 'West'....

"Anti-imperialism is the struggle for the equality of nations, the equal distribution of resources, wealth and opportunities among all nations. This can happen only by levelling down the imperialist countries and levering upwards the semi-colonial countries. This may not seem like socialism to a USA, European or Japanese 'socialist' who prefers equality inside nations to equality between nations and who thus puts a halo around the 'class struggle' and damns anti-imperialism as 'bourgeois nationalist'." [emphasis in original]

This view is alien to Trotskyism and is more akin to the 1960s Maoist-Stalinist doctrine of “the countryside of the world” surrounding and eventually conquering “the cities of the world.” This pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric in no way prevented the Maoist regime of People’s China from allying itself with U.S. imperialism against the Soviet Union and Vietnam when the opportunity presented itself in 1971.

Trotsky insisted that while the proletariat might first take power in one or another backward country, where the bourgeois order was weaker, world socialism could be built only by extending proletarian revolution to the advanced capitalist (i.e., imperialist) countries:

“Backward countries may, under certain conditions, arrive at the dictatorship of the proletariat sooner than the advanced countries, but they will come later than the latter to socialism.

“A backward colonial or semi-colonial country, the proletariat of which is insufficiently prepared to unite the peasantry and take power, is thereby incapable of bringing the democratic revolution to its conclusion. Contrariwise, in a country where the proletariat has power in its hands as the result of the democratic revolution, the subsequent fate of the dictatorship and socialism depends in the last analysis not only and not so much upon the national productive forces as upon the development of the international socialist revolution.”

— *The Permanent Revolution* (1929)

Comrade Jaffe’s rigid counterposition between the working class in North America and West Europe, on the one side, and the workers and peasants of the Third World on the other is at variance with contemporary social and economic realities. Recent decades have seen a *radical change* in the national and ethnic composition of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries. To use Jaffe’s terminology, a large and increasing proportion of the working class in the “West” comes from the “South” and “East.”

Especially since World War II, the oppressed and segregated descendants of black African slaves have made up a large and strategically placed component of the industrial proletariat in the United States. Over the past generation ever larger numbers of North American workers have come from Latin America and the Caribbean. Germany’s coal mines, steel mills, auto and machine tool factories are manned not only by ethnic Germans but also by Turks, Kurds, South Slavs and other “foreign” workers. One has only to take a bus or visit a hospital in London to see the vital role played by West Indians and South Asians in the British economy. The number of Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian workers in France is no small fraction of their national and class brothers in North Africa. And the number of black African proletarians in France is greater than in most of the neocolonial states of sub-Saharan Africa.

The *international* character of the working class created by world capitalism is not an abstract ideal but an unquestionable social fact. Black and Hispanic workers in the United States, Turkish and Kurdish workers in Germany, North African and black African workers in France can act both as

a vanguard of proletarian class struggle in the imperialist centers and a link to social revolution in the neocolonial states of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The necessary and decisive factor is leadership by a genuine communist—i.e., internationalist—party. Third World nationalist prejudices are a major *obstacle* to the revolutionary mobilization of the most oppressed and radicalized sections of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries.

World socialism will indeed bring about the *economic equality of all peoples*, not only among the present inhabitants of the advanced capitalist countries. But this has nothing to do with the reactionary utopia of global leveling-down. To maintain that the worldwide abolition of imperialism can take place without the assistance of the workers of the West is in substance identical to the Stalinists’ nationalist program of building “socialism in one country.”

Marx always insisted that socialism could only be achieved at the highest level of development of the productive forces, for otherwise want is generalized and every example of “local communism” would be undermined by international commerce. Trotsky in his analysis of the Soviet degenerated workers state noted how the isolation and relative economic backwardness of the USSR generated a privileged bureaucracy that distributes scarce goods. And he accurately predicted that Stalinism would eventually lead to social counterrevolution if the bureaucracy were not overthrown by proletarian political revolution.

Proletarian revolution will lead to the expropriation and centralized control of the productive wealth of North America, Europe and Japan. The full, rational utilization of economic resources, particularly investment embodying the most advanced technology, will produce a quantum leap in labor productivity, moving rapidly toward a fully automated economy. The resulting vast increase in output will allow the massive transfer of productive resources to the more backward countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. And in Africa, the enormous industrial and mineral resources of South Africa will not be limited to “nation-building” south of the Limpopo River, but will enable the impoverished masses of the entire continent to escape from famine and destitution.

The achievement of global economic equality, and with it the dissolution of the nation-state, will be a lengthy and difficult process. But this remains the basic goal of communism. And that is why we believe that a genuinely revolutionary socialist party cannot be nationally limited but must be a constituent part of a communist international organization based on Leninist principles.

We hope that these observations will be a beginning for a fruitful exchange of views between our organizations and look forward to your reply.

Comradely,
Joseph Seymour
for the International Secretariat

Two Letters to the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action

Reprinted from *Spartacist (English Edition) No. 52, Autumn 1995.*

9 March 1995

Workers Organisation for Socialist Action
Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear comrades,

Over the past several years, and particularly as historic developments have taken place in South Africa, we have carefully read your materials. As you are aware, in the April 1994 elections the International Communist League called for critical support to the candidates of the Workers List Party. On a number of issues we have taken up the positions of WOSA in our press, as well as seeking substantive exchanges with representatives of your group when they were in the U.S. or Europe. In particular, we had an exchange of views on the questions of the workers party and permanent revolution when comrades Prof Ndlovu and Neville Alexander were on tour here in late 1993 and 1994.

This letter attempts to go into what appear to us to be some of our principal differences, and more generally to discuss our different strategies for building a revolutionary workers party in South Africa. These differences derive in part from a different assessment of what is likely to happen in the "new" South Africa, and in part they reflect an underlying strategic-programmatic divide going back to the split in the workers movement at the time of the 1917 October Revolution and to the heritage of Lenin and Trotsky, on which we stand today. We undertake this in the conviction, as we have expressed since the inception of the Spartacist tendency, that the fight to reforge the Fourth International will necessarily involve a revolutionary regroupment of cadres from different currents, through a process of programmatically based splits and fusions.

When representatives of the ICL visited South Africa last fall [1994], they were asked repeatedly by the comrades of WOSA why we call them "left-reformist." Actually, it was not WOSA but the platform of the Workers List Party which we characterized as left-reformist, in outlining the reasons for our critical support to the WLP in the April 1994 elections. We emphasized the importance of running a working-class party in opposition to the ANC:

"The question of political organization of the proletariat, independent from and in opposition to the nationalist ANC, is a key strategic question for South Africa today. In this regard, the WLP does draw a crude class line and a vote for it will be seen in South Africa as a vote for a workers party rather than the ANC."

However, we also spelled out our criticisms of the WLP election manifesto:

"*Never once* does it define itself in reference to the ANC, nor even mention it, which takes some doing in South Africa today. Nor does it raise the need for a *socialist revolution* against the neo-apartheid ANC/NP capitalist regime. While calling for 'self-defense and a workers' militia,' the WLP platform does not call for smashing and replacing the existing capitalist state machine which is the direct continuity of the apartheid state.... "While the WLP speaks of 'a socialist democracy' and 'democratic planning process,' this is in the spirit of European social

democracy rather than the kind of revolutionary regime based on workers councils (soviets) that would be needed in order to expropriate the wealth of the Randlords and crush the bitter-end resistance of the apartheid racists backed by international imperialism."

— "ANC/De Klerk Deal Is Betrayal of Black Freedom,"
Workers Vanguard No. 599, 29 April 1994

This article is reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12 (February 1995). Since the April elections, WOSA, which had seemed to us a formation marked by the characteristic contradictions of centrism, appears to have for all practical purposes liquidated its public face into the Workers List Party.

We have raised the slogan of a Bolshevik workers party for South Africa in a way clearly and sharply *counterposed* to a reformist party such as the Brazilian Workers Party. The reformist character of a party based on the working class is in no way determined by whether or not it formally claims to stand for socialism as an ultimate goal. The British Labour Party [at the time this letter was written] retains Clause IV, advocating the nationalization of industry, in its constitution. The South African Communist Party (SACP), which is now playing a major role in administering the neo-apartheid capitalist state, has not (yet) formally renounced "Marxism-Leninism." Nonetheless, both of these parties are manifestly reformist.

We reject the notion that the South African working class must pass through the experience of a mass reformist party before a revolutionary party can develop out of it—a kind of two-stage theory of party building. In the current South African situation key to building a revolutionary party of a mass character is effecting a *left split* in the SACP, which has become the dominant party of the organized proletariat and is rife with inner contradictions.

There is a widespread belief, extending from the Western imperialists to most of the left, that South Africa is now a stable bourgeois democracy. Political conflicts will supposedly be resolved through compromises and deals in the coalition government and parliament and through future elections. Especially on the left, it is assumed that a strong, legally recognized trade-union movement has become a permanent feature of South Africa's economic and political life.

Contrary to such a view, we believe that the present period of political openness and a coalition government ranging from black African union bureaucrats to Afrikaner bankers is unstable and transitory. Sooner rather than later the Government of National Unity is going to fracture, and South Africa will be thrown into a period of violent political turmoil and conflict. If these conflicts do not center around a class axis, they will be fought along racial, ethnic and tribal lines. When the current, fragile neo-apartheid order breaks down—and it will break down—if the workers movement does not seize state power, various sectors of the desperate non-white population will compete with each other over available scarce resources. Thus the black working class and plebeian masses *cannot simply defend* the gains and positions of organizational strength achieved during the struggles of the 1980s.

A revolutionary workers party must be built to lead the

working class in the struggle for state power, drawing in the rest of the oppressed black African, "coloured" (mixed-race) and Indian masses, along with anti-racist whites, with the program and perspective elaborated by Trotsky as the *permanent revolution*. We elaborated such a program for workers revolution in the four-part series on the "South Africa Powder Keg" we ran last July-September in *Workers Vanguard* (and reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12).

This program raises a number of transitional measures such as factory occupations, workers control and workers militias, leading to a black-centered workers government based on workers councils to expropriate capital without compensation, crush the inevitable bourgeois reaction and fight to extend the revolution internationally, particularly to the advanced capitalist, i.e., imperialist, countries. This reflects our underlying strategic perspective of permanent revolution, elaborated by Trotsky on the basis of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. This holds that in the imperialist epoch a simply bourgeois-democratic revolution in the backward capitalist countries is not possible, and that to achieve even democratic demands such as agrarian revolution and national independence it is necessary for the proletariat, led by its communist vanguard, to take power, proceeding from democratic to socialist tasks and seeking to take the revolution to the imperialist centers. This was, in fact, the program of the early Communist International, which was then renounced by the conservative bureaucracy that coalesced around Stalin and his nationalist watchword of building "socialism in one country." The bankruptcy of that policy, fought against by Trotsky and the International Left Opposition, is today manifest with the collapse of the Stalinist-ruled states of East Europe and the USSR.

In our reading of materials published by WOSA, we find no mention of the program of permanent revolution, which Trotsky laid out in his 1934 comments on the theses by some of his South African supporters. And on a number of issues where we have differed with WOSA, underlying the differences is your rejection of this perspective in practice. For example, on the issue of the constituent assembly, while we raised this democratic demand as part of a program to lead the South African masses fighting against apartheid to a struggle for workers power, the way WOSA presented this was to pressure the bourgeoisie to grant a constituent assembly which is "synonymous with the demand for unfettered democracy" (*Workers' Voice* No. 2, March 1991). This goes back to the classic "revolution in stages"—first (bourgeois) democratic, later for socialism—that was characteristic of the Stalinists and the Mensheviks. We commented on this in our articles, "WOSA: Constituent Assembly Fetishism" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 548, 3 April 1992), and "South Africa: ANC Pushes 'Post-Apartheid' Swindle" (*Workers Vanguard* No. 532, 2 August 1991), which are attached to this letter. The fundamental issue of permanent revolution is also reflected in the question of what kind of workers party we seek to build.

A Revolutionary, Not a Reformist, Workers Party

Our central criticisms of the Workers List Party are programmatic. The WLP election manifesto contains but a single, oblique sentence against the ANC/SACP for administering the neo-apartheid capitalist state: "We reject the idea of a government of national unity that includes the racists." The implication here is that the main source of your opposi-

tion to the ANC stems from its present political bloc with the National Party. For proletarian revolutionaries, opposition to the ANC is in no sense derived from Mandela's current cohabitation with De Klerk. It would be unprincipled to give electoral support to the ANC, which has become a bourgeois-nationalist formation, even if it ran independently of and against the National Party. And it would be unprincipled to support the SACP as long as it remains allied to the ANC. Yet these basic political positions, which go back to Marx's struggle for the political independence of the proletariat, are nowhere stated in the WOSA/WLP literature which we've read.

Your current, central agitational slogan is that of "Mass Workers Party," not a revolutionary workers party—a significant difference, for the former implies that numbers and influence are to be valued above programmatic principle and political combativity. And, indeed, you advocate a party that would be broader, more inclusive, more heterogeneous than the SACP. A statement on the background to the Workers List Party, included in a publication on its founding conference in April 1994, proclaims: "It is hoped that at this historical cross-roads looming on the horizon, all pro-worker, pro-democracy and pro-socialism forces will converge in order to establish an independent mass party of the workers which will be able to defend and promote the interests of the workers politically and at other levels" (*Workers List Party National Conference* [May 1994]).

When in 1993 the reformist union leader Moses Mayekiso (currently an SACP parliamentarian) spoke favorably of forming a new workers party, he, too, put forward a so-called broad church conception bringing the SACP "together with left sections of the ANC as well as other left forces like WOSA and many independent socialists and social democrats" (*South African Labour Bulletin*, July/August 1993). Such a party could include, for example, the likes of Jeremy Cronin, the leading ideologist of the SACP right wing. And what about the current [SACP-allied and former MK commander] defense minister Joe Modise?

Understandably, the role and nature of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), which arose out of mass trade-union struggles in the late 1970s-early '80s, has loomed large in discussions of a new workers party in South Africa, including among the comrades of WOSA. Like South Africa, Brazil is a relatively industrialized Third World country, which, moreover, has the largest black population outside of Africa. Because of its recent origins, the PT has appeared to stand outside the historical division of the workers movement between social democracy and Stalinism. Additionally, the Brazilian supporters of Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat have played an active role in the PT since its inception. Indeed, Mandel & Co. love to boast of their comrades' influence in the mass party of the Brazilian workers.

We note that an official representative of the PT, Beti Burigo, was invited to the 1993 WOSA National Conference, and her address was a major focus of discussion. She presented a classic statement of social-democratic reformism, that the PT would achieve governmental power through bourgeois-democratic means and then gradually introduce socialism:

"The general platform was anti-monopolies, anti-imperialism and anti-latifundio (anti-large landed property), building links between immediate workers' demands and the socialist perspective.

"The implementation of the reforms would depend on workers' organisation and consciousness, readiness to fight and

defend the [PT] government. But the government would have a decisive role in dismantling bourgeois mechanisms of rule, propelling the reforms and stimulating workers' self-organisation."

— WOSA 3rd National Conference (April 1993)

In an introduction to the conference proceedings, the WOSA editors commented: "The experience of the PT was repeatedly shown to be relevant both as an example to be emulated (inner-party democracy, the right to tendencies, etc.) and as a warning of difficulties ahead (the pitfalls of parliamentarism, the dangers inherent in the social contract, etc.)." This evenhanded evaluation obscures the basic fact that the PT is a reformist, i.e., counterrevolutionary, party, whose central aim is to *administer the capitalist state* while claiming to represent the workers' interests.

Such reformist parties lull and disarm the workers, deflecting proletarian struggle from the necessary goal of revolution. To justify their trampling on the workers' aspirations when they are in power, these parties usually actively *seek* to govern in coalition with bourgeois parties. For the sake of maintaining such "popular front" coalitions, the workers are urged to temper their demands. Meanwhile, the ruling class gathers its forces. Either the workers are demoralized and demobilized by the popular front, or the ruling class moves when it is ready to crush the workers organizations as happened in Chile in 1973 when the bloody Pinochet coup against Salvador Allende's Unidad Popular government murdered 30,000 workers and leftists.

The PT's Lula ran in last year's Brazilian presidential elections explicitly as the candidate of a popular-front coalition of the PT with the smaller bourgeois parties. During the campaign Lula even indicated his willingness to "participate" in a government with the rival bourgeois candidate, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who is an old friend of his. We do not doubt that the comrades of WOSA condemn Lula's abject class collaborationism, but this stems from the very nature of the PT which is described by its secretary general, José Dirceu, as "a left social-democratic party" (*Folha de São Paulo*, 5 October 1994).

We refer you to our article on the Brazilian elections ("Brazil: IMF Candidate Wins Elections," *Workers Vanguard* No. 608, 14 October 1994) and the declaration of fraternal relations with Luta Metalúrgica (Brazil) in the same issue. The comrades of Luta Metalúrgica give vivid testimony as to the bureaucratic internal regime of the PT, despite its talk of "inner-party democracy" and the "right of tendency," since they were purged in 1989 as the leadership of the PT in the steelmaking center of Volta Redonda for opposing Lula & Co.'s formation of the Frente Brasil Popular with bourgeois forces.

While a Leninist party based on democratic centralism includes the right to form tendencies and factions, the existence of permanent, diverse political tendencies is *not* a virtue in a *revolutionary* workers party, which is based on *agreement on programmatic principles*. WOSA appears to be advocating a South African version of "the party of the whole class," a concept developed by Karl Kautsky in the decades before World War I. Kautsky maintained that there should be only one party based on the working class in every country, embracing *all tendencies* however antagonistic their programs and policies, which supported such a party. Thus the pre-World War I German Social Democracy encompassed the avowed reformist Eduard Bernstein and strident

German chauvinist Gustav Noske on the one side and such outstanding revolutionary internationalists as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht on the other. Kautsky played a centrist role, preaching the "doctrine of the golden mean" as Lenin later described it. A few years later, in the German Revolution of 1918-19, Noske engineered the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht while Kautsky engaged in impotent moralizing against political violence.

From its inception in 1903 the Bolshevik Party was based on a selection of committed revolutionaries, excluding reformists, opportunists and dilettantes who were concentrated in the Mensheviks. And it's worth pointing out that many of the leading Mensheviks were far to the left of Jeremy Cronin, not to speak of the PT's Lula. However, at the theoretical level, before 1914 Lenin accepted or, at any rate, did not challenge the Kautskyan doctrine of "the party of the whole class." He had not yet drawn general programmatic conclusions from the split and subsequent political antagonism between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Russia.

But when at the outbreak of World War I the German Social Democrats voted for war credits, Lenin repudiated the program of a workers party "uniting" reformists and revolutionaries, chauvinists and internationalists:

"In the past, before the war, opportunism was often looked upon as a legitimate, though 'deviationist' and 'extremist,' component of the Social-Democratic Party. The war has shown the impossibility of this in the future. Opportunism has 'matured,' and is now playing to the full its role as emissary of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement.... Today *unity* with the opportunists *actually* means subordinating the working class to their 'own' national bourgeoisie, and an alliance with the latter for the purpose of oppressing other nations and of fighting for dominant-nation privileges; it means *splitting* the revolutionary proletariat of all countries." [emphasis in original]

— V. I. Lenin and G. Zinoviev, *Socialism and War*
(July-August 1915)

The Communist International, founded in 1919, drew the lesson that a separate organization of the revolutionary vanguard is everywhere necessary. We have published a pamphlet, *Lenin & the Vanguard Party* (1978), which traces Lenin's development from a revolutionary social democrat to the founding leader of the modern Communist movement. We are sending you a copy of this pamphlet.

The Bolsheviks were from their inception a workers party, exercising leadership over politically advanced and strategically key sections of the Russian proletariat. However, when the Trotskyist movement emerged in the 1930s the workers movement in almost all countries was dominated by powerful and entrenched social-democratic, Stalinist and bourgeois-nationalist bureaucracies. Thus almost all organizations claiming the Trotskyist tradition have been *propaganda groups* rather than workers parties. How to go from the revolutionary propaganda group to a revolutionary workers party? This is a legitimate and, indeed, decisive question. Such a transformation may well entail various *tactical maneuvers* including, under certain conditions, entry into a reformist party. However, the entry tactic can easily degenerate into an opportunist adaptation to the reformist host.

Here the experience of the so-called "French turn" of the Trotskyist movement in the mid-1930s is instructive. Under the impact of the Great Depression and the victory of fascism in Germany, leftward-moving centrist currents, especially among the youth, emerged in a number of social-

democratic parties (e.g., France, Spain, the United States). In order to more effectively intersect and win over such leftward-moving elements, Trotsky proposed that his small groups of followers go into these social-democratic parties. This tactic was first applied in France, hence the term "French turn." While the Trotskyists made appreciable organizational gains in the SFIO (French Section of the Second International), many of them quickly became comfortable in the role of left opposition in a mass reformist party. Thus a year or so after urging his followers to enter the SFIO, Trotsky was pressuring them *to leave* since they were becoming conciliatory to the social-democratic bureaucrats and their centrist hangers-on. In an article, "Lessons of the SFIO Entry" (December 1935), Trotsky wrote: "Entry into a reformist centrist party in itself does not include a long perspective. It is only a stage which, under certain conditions, can be limited to an episode" (*The Crisis of the French Section 1935-36* [1977]).

WOSA is not proposing to enter an already existing mass reformist party but rather advocating the formation of a broad-based workers party in which it would be a current. For this reason we believe that looking at the discussions between Trotsky and his American followers of the Socialist Workers Party in the late 1930s on a labor party in the U.S. is highly germane. The leftward radicalization of the American working class in the 1930s led to the formation of mass industrial unions for the first time in U.S. history. The greatly strengthened trade-union movement, in which the Stalinists played an important role at that time, acted as a left pressure group on the liberal bourgeois government of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In order to break the organized working class from its political allegiance to the bourgeoisie (i.e., Roosevelt's Democratic Party), Trotsky proposed that the Socialist Workers Party agitate for a labor party based on the trade unions. But he clearly *differentiated* such a party from a reformist, union-based party along the lines of the British Labour Party, advocating that a labor party be formed on the basis of a series of transitional demands (e.g., union-based workers' militias) culminating in a *workers government* (i.e., the dictatorship of the proletariat).

Had a labor party emerged in the U.S. at this time, it would have been an amorphous, undefined movement with the Trotskyists vying against the Stalinists, social democrats and liberal union leaders to determine its program and leadership. Thus Trotsky maintained: "The Stalinists and liberals wish to make of this movement a reformist party but we have our program.... I will not say that the labor party is a revolutionary party, but that we will do everything to make it possible" ("How to Fight for a Labor Party in the U.S." [March 1938]). Moreover, Trotsky emphasized the *transitional* character of such a labor party movement:

"In its very essence the labor party can preserve progressive significance only during a comparatively short transitional period. The further sharpening of the revolutionary situation will inevitably break the shell of the labor party and permit the Socialist Workers Party to rally around the banner of the Fourth International the revolutionary vanguard of the American proletariat."

— "The Problem of the Labor Party" (April 1938)

Clearly, WOSA's agitation for a "mass workers party" in South Africa differs from the Trotskyists' advocacy of a broad-based labor party in the U.S. in the 1930s in two fundamental respects. One, you are calling for such a party to

be based on a left-reformist program as expressed in the WLP's election manifesto and its subsequent propaganda and agitation. And two, you see such a workers party not as a brief transition to a revolutionary vanguard but rather as the highest form of working-class political organization at least in the present period.

Here again let us consider the Brazilian PT, which leftist advocates of a workers party in South Africa usually hold up as a model. When Lula—then a trade-union bureaucrat—first launched the PT in the early 1980s, a revolutionary propaganda group in Brazil could effectively have intervened in it. Lula had not yet built up an effective bureaucratic apparatus in the embryonic PT. The future course of the party was relatively open and fluid, since it did not have a generally accepted program and ideological doctrine. Many members and supporters of the PT were raw workers engaging in political activity and struggle for the first time. The *aim* of an entry tactic by a revolutionary group would have been either to win the leadership of this fledgling workers party through principled political struggle against Lula & Co., or to bring about a left split separating the revolutionary-minded workers from the reformists, opportunists and careerists. But that is not the course chosen by the Brazilian supporters of Mandel, who have become part of the apparatus of the PT, and indeed its hatchet men against the left.

Moreover, there is an important difference between Brazil in the early 1980s and South Africa today which bears directly on strategy and tactics for building a revolutionary workers party in the latter. When the PT was formed, there was no sizable workers party of any kind in Brazil. The pro-Moscow Communist Party was relatively small and unimportant. However, in South Africa there does exist a mass reformist workers party, namely the SACP. Especially since the COSATU "workerists" like Mayekiso joined the party around 1990, the SACP has been the dominant party of the most politically advanced and strategically key sections of the South African proletariat. In major industrial centers the SACP and COSATU offices are often in the same building.

Despite the SACP's decades-long cohabitation with the petty-bourgeois ANC and its present key role in the neo-apartheid capitalist state, many of its cadre still take the party's "Leninist" pretensions as good coin. They believe their party is or should be a communist party. Of course, their concept of Marxism-Leninism and a Leninist party is thoroughly confused, distorted and perverted by Stalinism (e.g., the two-stage revolution). Nonetheless, the fact that Jeremy Cronin, the chief ideologist of the SACP right wing, polemicalizes against Leninist doctrine indicates that leftist elements in the party consider themselves Leninists.

The *African Communist* (4th Quarter 1993) published a resignation statement (since reportedly withdrawn) by the party's Cape Town branch secretary, Theo Molaba, protesting "the abandonment of a PROLETARIAN ATTITUDE towards armed struggle, negotiations, the alliance and the role of the party." "What has happened to the DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT?" he asked rhetorically. The editors of *The African Communist* indicated that they published this statement because Molaba's views were shared by a large section of the Cape Town branch. Key to building a revolutionary workers party in South Africa is winning over those elements of the SACP who want to build a Leninist vanguard party by breaking them from Stalinism. Instead the kind of "mass workers party" you are advocating would be seen and

opposed by many SACP cadre as a *social-democratic liquidation* of the communist vanguard.

Whither the "New" South Africa?

Our differences over a "mass workers party" stem in part from differences over the future course of developments in the "new" South Africa. A clear and cogent statement of your views on this question is found in the 1993 WOSA conference "Resolution on the International and National Situation":

"While we accept that the historic compromise between white and black (more specifically Afrikaner and African) nationalism will be found within the framework of the capitalist system, we do not support the fairy tale that the deracialisation of the system will take place 'peacefully.' Indeed, more blood has flowed in South Africa during this so-called transition to democracy than in almost any other period of our history. Instead, we believe that it is necessary for those on the Left to prepare themselves for a period of authoritarian and repressive rule. The capitalist class will not be able to manage the transition from overtly racist rule to a limited bourgeois democratic order without an interim period of severe repression of both left and right wing rebellion. In particular the rulers may want to ensure the weakening or, if necessary, the destruction of the independent mass organisations of the working class such as the trade unions. The strategy of the Left has to be based on this assumption."

So in the short run, you see a period of violent political turmoil, revolts by right-wing whites and in the black townships, government attacks on the trade unions and civics, etc. But in the *longer run*, you foresee the development of a *multiracial* South African bourgeoisie and consequently also a *multi-racial petty bourgeoisie* which would allow South Africa to have "a limited bourgeois democratic order." Hence, you project a lengthy period of *defensive struggles* by the non-white toilers against, in your view, a racially and nationally united, and therefore strengthened, capitalist class.

The way in which you conceive and motivate the "mass workers party" is as an agency to defend the workers and plebeian masses *within the framework of neo-apartheid capitalism*. Thus a leaflet put out last fall titled "Workers List Party Supports Demands of Residents," concerning the struggles over rents and utility rates in the townships around Johannesburg, concludes: "The struggles of different sections of workers and the unemployed must be co-ordinated so that they are not hijacked or defeated. This can only be accomplished through the formation of a MASS WORKERS' PARTY!!" This leaflet stops short of the necessary demand for a black-centered workers government, which alone could provide decent housing and services for the impoverished non-white populace.

A central tenet of reformism is that it is always possible for the working class to maintain its *existing* economic conditions, democratic rights and organizational strength *within the framework of capitalism*. But that is not true. Conditions of a deep economic depression generating widespread bankruptcies invariably result in mass unemployment. To think otherwise is to maintain that the workers movement can effectively control the capitalist economy. In this regard, "the campaign for the constitutionalisation of the right to work," launched by the National Co-ordinating Committee of the WLP last May, can only sow reformist illusions. Indeed, only the most politically naive and backward workers could believe that such a constitutional amendment would have any real effect in a situation where *half* the black urban labor force is unemployed and, moreover, capital is flowing *out of*, not into, South Africa.

Nor is it always possible for the working class to simply defend the bourgeois-democratic status quo. A right-wing military coup aimed at destroying the workers movement, such as Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973, can be defeated only through a *civil war* which would necessarily pose proletarian revolution.

In the present South African context, the predominantly black working class must either go forward to state power or it will be thrown very far back. The mass struggles against the white-supremacist regime, beginning with the Durban strikes of 1973 and greatly accelerating with the township revolt of 1984-85, have produced conditions *incompatible* with a stable bourgeois order in South Africa. COSATU has developed into one of the most powerful and combative trade-union movements in any Third World country. Partly as a result of this, industrial wages in South Africa are now appreciably higher than in East Asia and Latin America. In the black townships rents and utility rates went unpaid for years while effective control passed into the hands of the civic associations—a partial fragmentation of bourgeois state power. Now the Government of National Unity has launched a campaign to collect rents and regain control over the townships.

We disagree that the Government of National Unity represents a "historic compromise" between Afrikaner and black African nationalism. Such a historic compromise has not occurred and cannot occur. There will be no multiracial or "non-racial" bourgeois order in South Africa. Rather the ANC/SACP/National Party coalition represents an *unstable and momentary* compromise between the white capitalist class and its would-be junior partners, the black bourgeois nationalists and labor reformists. The ANC/SACP cannot deliver on their part of the deal which is to dampen black unrest. Black unrest is bound to grow as economic and social conditions do not get better and in some respects will probably get worse (e.g., downward pressure on unionized, industrial wages).

At the same time, whites will feel increasingly threatened as petty-bourgeois blacks seek to displace them in positions of influence and wealth. While a few thousand ANC/SACP leaders can get on "the gravy train," the South African economy obviously cannot support a large black middle class (e.g., civil servants, corporate bureaucrats, small businessmen) enjoying the same "First World" living standards as the whites. The interests of the different social bases of the ANC/SACP and the National Party are antagonistic.

So the fragile neo-apartheid arrangement is going to break down. From the side of the whites one can expect capital flight and large-scale emigration as well as right-wing terrorism extending into the military/police apparatus of the state. Among the non-white, predominantly African, masses increasing disillusionment with and hostility toward the Government of National Unity can go in one of two basic directions: either toward proletarian revolution leading to a black-centered workers government or toward fratricidal nationalist and tribalist conflict such as we've seen throughout the rest of post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa. And the wave of "ethnic cleansing" sweeping East Europe and the former Soviet Union in the wake of capitalist counterrevolution provides a powerful lesson in the nature of "nation building" in the imperialist epoch.

In determining the outcome in South Africa the difference between a revolutionary and a reformist workers party is crucial and obvious. The black toilers must see the transfor-

mation of South Africa along democratic and egalitarian lines as a prospect for the here and now, not the goal of some remote future. They must see a party that does not simply defend the particular interests of the working class, especially its unionized sector, but is fighting to eradicate *all forms* of national and social oppression—the mass homelessness in the black townships, the hideous conditions of the millions of Africans still trapped on the “tribal homelands,” the degradation of women (e.g., polygamy) in rural villages where tribal traditions remain strong. To unite all of the oppressed, a workers party must staunchly champion the democratic rights of those who have cause to feel threatened by the ANC’s brand of nationalism—e.g., coloureds, Indians, Zulu villagers, immigrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other neighboring African states.

In the absence of a viable proletarian revolutionary alternative, impoverished and desperate black Africans, incited by nationalist demagogues, will turn against the better-off coloured and Indian communities. One will see violent clashes between Zulus and Xhosas on a far greater scale than before. While the ANC currently draws support from all sections of non-white populations as well as liberal and leftist whites, its strongest and most consistent base of support has been among the Xhosas. Some backward Zulu workers and rural villagers view the ANC as basically a Xhosa tribalist movement behind the façade of “non-racialism.”

In a series on the “new” South Africa last summer, we wrote: “As the black African masses find that they continue to live in poverty and degradation despite the promises of ‘non-racial democracy’ and ‘national unity,’ some ANC leaders will doubtless resort to nationalist demagogy and even tribalist appeals” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 605, 2 September 1994). WOSA members who spoke with the ICL comrades in South Africa last September repeatedly denied the possibility of ethnic and tribalist conflict within the South African working class. But we have already seen the ANC leadership join with home secretary Buthelezi in agitating for action against the recent flood of immigrants from neighboring African states looking for work. And we have also seen the ANC premier of the PVW region, Tokyo Sexwale, try to whip up sentiment against the coloured community among Africans over the issue of writing off back unpaid rent in the townships.

The WLP leaflet on the rent struggles mentioned above rightly denounces anti-coloured demagogy by ANC officials and states: “We appeal to our people not to allow those who want to use ethnicity to exploit our problems and divide the working class, to succeed.” But it is not enough to deplore these divisions as false consciousness—they must be actively combatted by more than moralizing appeals for “unity.” Who can do this? Obviously not the ANC and not any type of reformist workers party either, but only those who raise a revolutionary program of transitional demands to unite all the exploited and oppressed in struggle against the capitalist system.

By their very nature reformists base themselves on the momentary and partial interests of sectors of the working class and on the false (i.e., bourgeois) consciousness prevalent among the masses, such as nationalism. Hence a reformist party accepts the limits of what is “possible” under capitalism, seeking only to wrest more crumbs from the rulers’ table. Such a perspective guarantees that different sectors of the oppressed will see their interests as mutually counterposed as each fights to increase its share of the crumbs. This

can only deepen and reinforce the divisions between ethnic groups, between unemployed youth and unionized workers, between native-born workers and immigrants, etc. The struggle to overcome such divisions must be based on the struggle to overthrow the international capitalist system, which necessarily exploits and intensifies national, racial and ethnic divisions among the oppressed classes. Only a Leninist vanguard party, part of a revolutionary international, can effectively mobilize the workers movement against the forces of fratricidal nationalism.

For Complete Independence of the Workers Movement from the Bourgeois State

We also wish to raise a serious criticism of a different nature concerning the Workers List Party election campaign. The South African government provided funds for all duly registered parties in the election, and the WLP accepted these funds. We consider it fundamentally wrong for a workers organization, much less one claiming to stand for the abolition of the capitalist system, to receive money from the bourgeois state or other institutions. Such a practice produces an inner pressure on that organization not to provoke the bourgeois authorities to cut back or cut off its funds. Conversely, the government has a potent weapon of political blackmail by threatening to withhold future funds from any organization which does something it really doesn’t like.

We note that the “Resolution on the International and National Situation” adopted by the 1993 WOSA National Conference states: “WOSA calls on all mass organisations of the workers to ensure their independence from ruling-class influence by maintaining a vigorous culture of workers’ control. For this reason we call on all workers to firmly resist all attempts to entrap the workers’ movement in any social contract with the capitalist class and state.” How can the above principles be squared with accepting funds from the capitalist state, whether on a one-time or an on-going basis?

Furthermore, the mere act of accepting government funds opens up a workers organization to charges of corruptibility. Thus our representatives encountered the view from other leftists in South Africa that the Workers List Party and its campaign were a mere maneuver on WOSA’s part to get the election money. It is unfortunate that the class line which we believe was drawn by the Workers List in the election has been muddied by this accusation.

Also, there is a related point. When our comrades visited South Africa, they were told by other leftists that WOSA had supported a 1993 Supreme Court suit by members of the Witwatersrand regional leadership of SACCWU against the national union. If so, this would constitute another real difference between our two organizations.

It has become common in the United States (where union leaderships are generally very bureaucratic and in many cases corrupt and even criminal) for left oppositional groups to sue the union and its leadership in the capitalist courts. The Spartacist League has vigorously fought against this practice, which is antagonistic to workers democracy, strengthens government control over the labor movement and enhances illusions in bourgeois “justice.” A few years ago, when the U.S. government in effect took over the Teamsters (truckers) union in the name of protecting the membership’s rights, we wrote:

“Workers democracy is not going to come to the American labor movement as a gift from the bourgeoisie. It will be won

by the working class through struggle—struggle which will inevitably, and in the case of the Teamsters immediately, come up against the capitalist state. Opposition to intervention by the bosses' state into the affairs of the workers movement should be elementary for any class-conscious worker."

— *Workers Vanguard* No. 530, 5 July 1991

The leadership which came to power in the Teamsters through government intervention (supported by most of the so-called left in the U.S.) sold out last year's national truckers strike. In South Africa, the bosses and their government are currently engaged in a campaign to destroy the WOSA-supported Turning Wheel Truckers Union—yet another graphic example of why we oppose *all* intervention, whatever the pretext, by the capitalist state in the workers movement.

We hope this letter has clarified some of our important differences with WOSA.

We would also like to bring to your attention the views outlined in the attached letter we wrote a year ago to the New Unity Movement. This letter centers on our differences on the national question in South Africa and Third World countries in general. The published views of Neville Alexander on this question have much in common with those of the New Unity Movement, in both cases deriving from the doctrines of the Non-European Unity Movement of the 1940s-'50s. We intend shortly to publish that letter in our public press in the hope of engaging more discussion on the subject among militants in South Africa. To date the New Unity Movement has not replied to our letter.

Comradely,
Joseph Seymour
For the International Secretariat of the
International Communist League

9 April 1995

Workers Organisation for Socialist Action

Dear comrades,

In subsequent discussion within the International Communist League concerning our letter to your organization of March 9, we felt that it omitted a crucial factor defining a revolutionary perspective for South Africa. While this letter elaborated on the internal dynamics of permanent revolution as concretely applied to South Africa today, there was no discussion of the necessary *extension* of proletarian revolution from backward countries to the imperialist centers of North America, West Europe and Japan.

This is a fundamental element of Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution, which has become much more immediately acute in the present period. For much of the post-World War II period, the existence of the Soviet Union allowed a certain degree of autonomy to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist regimes and movements like the ANC, and made possible deformed social revolutions in countries like Vietnam and Cuba. Now capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe and the destruction of the Soviet Union have greatly strengthened imperialist domination over the so-called Third World. This "New World Order" was signaled by the U.S. military's devastation of Iraq, a former Soviet client

state, in the 1991 Gulf War. A proletarian revolution in South Africa would immediately face the determined efforts of Western, centrally U.S., imperialism to crush it in the egg by all available means, from an economic blockade to direct military intervention. An isolated black-centered workers government in South Africa would not long survive.

To recognize this truth is not to argue, as does the South African Communist Party, that the South African workers movement and oppressed non-white masses must accept and operate within the framework set by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Rather, the victory of a workers government in South Africa would reopen a desperate global struggle in line with that which began when Lenin's Bolsheviks took power in central portions of the Russian tsarist empire in 1917. Such a struggle would range far beyond military confrontations across black Africa. The decisive issue would turn on the confrontation between labor and capital in the key advanced capitalist powers on their own terrain.

We made this point in the conclusion of our four-part article, "South Africa Powder Keg":

"The consolidation, or simply the survival, of a socialist revolution in South Africa *requires* its international extension. This was the core of the Bolsheviks' program. But the world situation today is very different from that facing the Russian October Revolution of 1917—precipitated by the mass slaughter of the first imperialist world war—which set off revolutionary struggles throughout Europe, centrally Germany. A proletarian revolution in South Africa today would confront relatively strengthened and emboldened Western imperialist powers determined to obliterate any obstacles to their proclaimed 'new world order.'

"For the moment South Africa is a weakened link in the chain of the world capitalist system binding the neocolonies of the Third World to the imperialist states of North America, West Europe and Japan. It is necessary to mobilize the forces of the proletariat to *break* that chain at its weakest links, and then fight like hell to take the battle to the imperialist centers, seeking allies against the vicious enemy of all the oppressed—international capital. Thus, the fight to build a South African Bolshevik Party is inseparable from the struggle we in the International Communist League are waging to reforge an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International.

"A socialist revolution in South Africa would find *strategically powerful allies within the imperialist centers*. In particular, it would have an enormously radicalizing impact on blacks in the United States, who have strongly identified with the struggle against white supremacy in the apartheid state. And it would reverberate in particular among the non-white masses throughout the Western Hemisphere (notably the millions of black people in Brazil), West Indians and South Asians in Britain, and North Africans and black Africans in West Europe." [emphasis in original]

— *Workers Vanguard* No. 606, 16 September 1994,
reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12

Precisely because a nationally isolated proletarian revolution in South Africa could not survive, there can be no nationally limited revolutionary workers party in South Africa. The struggle for world socialist revolution, wherever the first breakthrough occurs, is inseparable from the struggle to build an international communist vanguard, i.e., reforging a Trotskyist Fourth International.

Comradely,
Joseph Seymour
for the International Secretariat of the
International Communist League

A Reply to Some South African Leftists Tailing the ANC's Neo-Apartheid Nationalism

Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 622, 5 May 1995

During the 1980s, the explosion of mass black struggle in South Africa, leading to the development of a powerful and combative trade-union movement, shook the apartheid state to its foundations. Decisive sections of the white ruling class and their senior partners in Washington and London became convinced of the need to *co-opt* the leadership of the African National Congress and the closely allied South African Communist Party (SACP) in an attempt to restore social order. At the same time, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, as the Kremlin Stalinist bureaucracy disintegrated under Gorbachev, deprived the ANC of its main international sponsor. Consequently, Mandela & Co. came to terms with the Randlords and Western imperialists in the form of a "power sharing" deal with the National Party, the ruling party of the apartheid state. This led to last spring's elections, whose predetermined outcome was a coalition "Government of National Unity."

While opposing the "power sharing" deal with the National Party, most self-styled leftist groups in South Africa and internationally supported the ANC in the April 1994 elections because not to do so was *unpopular*. An important exception in South Africa was the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA), whose most prominent leader is Neville Alexander. On the eve of the elections, WOSA formed the Workers List Party (WLP) as a vehicle to run against the ANC. Although the WLP program did not go beyond the bounds of left reformism, we gave it critical support on the grounds that "the WLP does draw a crude class line and a vote for it will be seen in South Africa as a vote for a workers party rather than the ANC" (*WV* No. 599, 29 April 1994). The centrist British Workers Power group also equivocally called for a vote to the WLP, "to the extent that it has support amongst sections of the most advanced and determined workers" (*Workers Power*, April 1994). But if the Workers List turned out to be not so popular, Workers Power had an out.

We did not support another small group that ran in the 1994 elections, the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, which is linked to the British-based tendency led by Cliff Slaughter, noting the virulent Stalinophobia of its election manifesto which "essentially accuses the ANC of bringing Stalinist gulags to the veld" (*WV* No. 602, 10 June 1994).

Nationalist Demagoguery and Confusionism

Since coming to office, the ANC-led Government of National Unity has broken black workers' strikes and driven off squatters while wooing foreign investors and seeking the blessings of the International Monetary Fund. Those left

groups which backed the ANC now find themselves in an awkward position. One such group, caught in a particularly compromising posture, was the South African Comrades for a Workers Government (CWG). For months, the CWG had worked together with WOSA in its campaign for a "mass workers party," but on the eve of the April '94 vote it suddenly came out for support to the bourgeois-nationalist ANC!

In the first issue of its paper since the elections, the CWG has now come out with a pained and defensive polemic: "Why We Voted for the ANC—Why We Called for the [Zulu] Hostels To Be Flattened: A Reply to the Spartacist League and Workers' Power" (*Qina Msebenzi*, March/April 1995). The CWG was simply chasing after the workers and township youth who are tied to the ANC, both directly and through COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) and the SACP (which the CWG polemic curiously never mentions). Using the double-talk that is required by a policy of tailism, the CWG argues that the ANC "has a mass proletarian following," and so due to their "tactical orientation to the masses inside the ANC" they called for a vote to this political vehicle of the fledgling black bourgeoisie! The ANC/COSATU/SACP "tripartite alliance" is a *nationalist popular front*, in which the black proletarian and plebeian masses of South Africa are tied to their exploiters.

It is precisely the popular-front character of the "tripartite alliance" that the CWG—which avows a formal Trotskyist orthodoxy—refuses to acknowledge. Does the CWG think it is an accident that Mandela put former COSATU head Jay Naidoo in charge of the Reconstruction and Development Program, made South Africa's grand old man of Communism Joe Slovo housing minister and appointed erstwhile SACP guerrilla chief Ronnie Kasrils as deputy minister of defense? The ANC is using the ex-COSATU and SACP ministers to disorient, demobilize and disarm the organized black working class. In voting for the ANC, the CWG declared itself to be the loyal left critic of this nationalist popular front.

Basically, the CWG polemic consists of variations on the theme of South African nationalism. A major theme is to compare the ANC *favorably* to the British Labour Party:

"The ANC-Cosatu alliance may not have the same historical pattern as that of the Labour Party in Britain.... But the British Labour Party, despite clause 4, is no more radical or socialist than the ANC pretends to be. If anything the LP has [a] much longer tradition of class compromise and has spearheaded attacks on the working class....

"Workers Power routinely votes for the thoroughly imperialist British Labour Party. Similarly Workers Power also calls for electoral support for other social democratic imperialist parties in Western Europe."

The CWG's "anti-imperialist" posture of hostility to British Labourism and West European social democracy is sheer

hypocrisy. This small South African group is part of an international tendency led by the British Workers International League (WIL). And the WIL is just as ensconced in the Labourite left as Workers Power, routinely calling for votes for the Labour Party.

In fact, the CWG's support for the ANC is the transposition to South Africa of the same *opportunist methodology* which leads their British comrades to invariably vote Labour: fear of going against the sentiment of the masses. In its original statement of critical support for the ANC, the CWG argues that this "is the correct tactic for small organisations of militants to get a hearing from the masses" (*Qina Msebenzi*, April 1994). Thus it opposed the formation of the Workers List Party because of "the peril of cutting ties with the masses" who still support the ANC. The CWG's current polemic emphasizes that the "WLP received a derisory 4,000 votes in an election of over 20 million people." The logic of their argument is that a small left-wing propaganda group should *never* run in an election at all. Rather, they should act as pressure groups on the dominant reformist, nationalist and bourgeois liberal parties. Why not vote for the Democratic Party in the United States, then, or the Peronists in Argentina?

While the subjective motivation for centrists tailing the Labour Party in Britain and the ANC in South Africa is the same—tailing after what's popular—there is a *class* line between these different types of political formations. The British Labour Party is a reformist (bourgeois) workers party, based on the organized workers movement but led by a pro-capitalist *bureaucracy*. British workers see Labour as their class party opposed to the bourgeois Conservative (Tory) Party. Therefore it is *sometimes* a correct tactic for revolutionaries to extend critical electoral support to Labour or other reformist workers parties in order to set the proletarian base against the bureaucratic tops. But what for revolutionaries is an occasionally effective tactic is for centrists like the WIL and Workers Power the excuse to be a "Trotskyist" appendage of Labour.

The African National Congress, however, is *not* a reformist workers party. It was a petty-bourgeois nationalist movement claiming to represent all classes of the non-white oppressed. When such movements (e.g., the Algerian National Liberation Front) acquire political power, they can use their control of the government apparatus to engage in the *capitalist exploitation* of their own people while remaining subordinate to world imperialism. Thus cadre from the ANC are now being recruited en masse into the upper echelons of South African corporate management. It has become commonplace for black workers to complain that their former leaders have all jumped onto the "grave train." In their own way, the black masses grasp that the ANC has become a bourgeois party.

And what of the CWG? Simply reading their polemic against our tendency and Workers Power, one would assume they believe the ANC to be a reformist workers party. Actually, in the April 1994 issue of *Qina Msebenzi* they present totally contradictory positions on the class nature of the ANC. In a polemic against the "Militant Workers Tendency," which advocates turning the ANC into a working-class-based socialist party, the CWG states that "the ANC has evolved beyond being a revolutionary petty-bourgeois nationalist movement into becoming (or very close to becoming) a bourgeois nationalist party." But another piece

in that issue ("CWG Statement on the Workers List Party!") argues that it is correct to "temporarily support the electoral victory of a reformist organisation, like the ANC." A third article calls for "the expulsion of the open bourgeois elements in the ANC." So presumably they want the ANC to be a bourgeois nationalist party with only *disguised*, but not open, bourgeois elements.

What is going on here? Is the CWG schizophrenic? Are there internal differences reflecting themselves in counterposed lines in their press? Quite possibly, given their flip-flops over the "mass workers party." Or is this deliberate confusionism? It is certainly notable that when the CWG polemicizes against groups to their right—the Communist Party and Militant Tendency—they emphasize the bourgeois-nationalist character of the ANC. But when they face groups to their left—WOSA (last year) or ourselves—they present the ANC as if it were a reformist workers party.

The CWG contends that "Lenin advocated critical support for national liberation movements as well as a critical vote for the Labour Party (LP) in Britain." Not at all. Lenin gave *military, not political*, support to national liberation movements fighting imperialist armed forces, such as his support for the Irish Easter Rebellion of 1916. Similarly, we defended the ANC guerrillas against the South African army, although the ANC's military actions were largely symbolic in their effect. The Bolsheviks never gave electoral support to the petty-bourgeois nationalist parties in the Russian empire (e.g., Pilsudski's Polish Socialist Party, Armenian Dashnaki) in elections to the tsarist duma or the soviets of 1917. Nor did the Bolsheviks give electoral support to the Russian petty-bourgeois radicals of the Social Revolutionary Party.

In another variation of their capitulation to nationalism, the CWG maintains:

"Another example of the strange method of debate we find among the SL journalists is that they conflate electoral support with liquidationism and entryism. What does the Chinese Communist Party liquidation into the Kuomintang have in common with the tactic of a critical vote?"

One would assume, reading this, that the CWG is opposed in principle to entering the ANC. Not so. A pamphlet by the forerunners of this group states: "At the same time as penetrating the proletarian base of the ANC-SACP alliance in its township structures—and this does not exclude the tactic of entry—we must concentrate forces inside the unions" (*South Africa at the Crossroads* [1991]). Here the confusionism is quite dishonest—not the only example of this in the CWG's polemic.

The CWG is well aware that Lenin not only proposed that the relatively small British Communist Party give critical electoral support to the Labour Party but also suggested the Communists do a tactical entry into it. When the Stalinists cited this as a "precedent" to justify the Chinese CP's entry into the Kuomintang, Trotsky responded:

"The analogy of the British Communist Party's entry into the Labour Party falls apart under its own weight. The British Labour Party is proletarian in composition and political differentiation is proceeding slowly by comparison. The Kuomintang is a 'party' of different classes, and political differentiation among them is proceeding with extreme rapidity because of the revolution."

—"The Communist Party and Kuomintang" (May 1927)

In the course of building the Fourth International Trotsky *never* advocated a vote for, much less entry into, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist parties, even when these exercised political hegemony over the trade-union move-

ment (e.g., Gandhi's Indian National Congress, Lázaro Cárdenas' Party of the Mexican Revolution).

Unlike reformist workers parties, which are organizationally based on the proletariat, bourgeois-nationalist parties can turn on and *destroy* the workers movement which had previously helped them gain and maintain power. Thus the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime in Mexico ruthlessly crushes any attempt to form trade unions independent of state control. And we are beginning to see signs of the same thing in South Africa under the Government of National Unity. Witness the redbaiting campaign against the Turning Wheel Workers Union, a militant breakaway from the pro-ANC truckers union. And now a draconian new Labour Relations Bill will outlaw strikes over sackings, in "essential services" and "maintenance services" as well as the public sector, crack down on other strikes with "a conciliation, mediation and arbitration commission," and allow employers to lock out workers.

CWG Support for Anti-Zulu Pogroms

The CWG not only supported the ANC against the Workers List Party in the elections but also called on the ANC to undertake *bonapartist* measures in the name of fighting the right and Zulu tribalism. The original statement of critical support in *Qina Msebenzi* demanded that the ANC take "decisive action against Buthelezi" (leader of the Zulu tribalist Inkatha movement sponsored by the apartheid regime, who is now a minister in the Government of National Unity) and called for "banning right-wing reactionaries." Who exactly will take such "decisive action," who will carry out a "ban"? The CWG is calling here on the racist South African army and police to do their bidding. This creates dangerous illusions. Moreover, any laws allowing the ANC to ban political parties and suppress its opponents will be used first and foremost *against the left and the trade-union movement*.

The Zulu question is a focal point of the CWG's South African nationalism. And here they more than once falsify our positions. Thus the current *Qina Msebenzi* polemic claims: "The SL line up politically with Bantustan policies; with secession for Natal—presently the main demand of Inkatha." This is a flat-out lie. In Part Four of our series, "South Africa Powder Keg" (WV No. 606, 16 September 1994, reprinted in *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12, February 1995), we stated with utmost clarity: "Our support for the right of regional autonomy in a *future South African workers state* in no way implies support for reactionary Zulu separatism in Natal today. *In the present context*, we would oppose a move to secession by Inkatha, which would undoubtedly be allied with a revolt of right-wing whites to form a bitter-end apartheid *volkstaat*. But things can change, and quickly" (emphasis in original).

The CWG's tendency to support ANC bonapartism is even clearer in their call to demolish the Zulu hostels. In a typical example of imperialist-baiting and falsification, *Qina Msebenzi* claims that our line on the ANC/Inkatha conflict "has echoes of the hoary CIA stereotyping of the ANC as a tribal Xhosa organisation." In fact, the CWG's line on the ANC is *far more compatible* with that of the CIA than ours. The American imperialist government and bourgeois media hailed in ecstatic terms Mandela's election as a triumph of "democracy" and "moderation" in the Third World.

We have always characterized the ANC as a petty-bourgeois nationalist, not a Xhosa tribalist, movement. What we

did say is: "While the ANC currently draws support from all sections of the nonwhite population as well as liberal and leftist whites, its strongest base of support is among the Xhosas" ("Powder Keg," Part Three). And it is precisely this Xhosa tribalist component of the ANC's social base which came to the fore during the course of fighting between the ANC-linked "Self Defence Units" (SDUs) and Inkatha thugs, armed by the apartheid regime and based in the Zulu hostels, which ravaged the black townships on the Witwatersrand. What began as self-defense against Inkatha terror squads often turned into indiscriminate attacks on all Zulu-speaking people.

The CWG contends:

"Any class conscious workers who may have lived in hostels moved out in the late 1980s. Since then criminals and hardcore Inkatha supporters and their families have lived in some of the hostels.... In this context the only response of the workers and youth was to try to isolate the hostels and to flatten those hostels which were identified as disguised SADF [South African Defence Forces] bases."

This piece of anti-Zulu demagoguery has been refuted even by ANC leaders on the spot. According to Louis Sibeko, general secretary of the civic association in Thokoza, the scene of some of the worst communalist bloodletting: "In other areas of the township and in Katlehong, hundreds of Zulu-speaking residents were forced to flee their shacks and seek refuge in the hostel when youths threatened to burn the homes of people who had allowed Zulu-speakers to occupy shacks in their yards" (*Tribune* [Johannesburg], 15 April 1994). Here we have Zulu migrant workers who wanted to live in peace with their non-Zulu neighbors being driven *into* the hostels by the attacks of the Self Defence Units. Peter Mokaba, then chairman of the ANC Youth League, admitted that some SDUs "victimize ordinary members of the community" (*New York Times*, 1 February 1994).

Moderate ANC leaders like Sibeko and Mokaba want to restore social peace in the townships and so preach "tolerance" between supporters of the contending parties. The CWG, however, is playing up to the "militant" plebeian youth who want to drive the Zulus out of the townships. This is the same layer that is appealed to by Winnie Mandela. Among the young "comrades" in the townships, there are certainly many who are angered by the ANC's conciliation of the former masters of apartheid. But there are also plenty of Xhosa chauvinists and lumpenproletarian criminal elements that a *proletarian* vanguard would have to discipline and if necessary fight. (We dealt with this thorny question in our article, "Uproar Over Winnie Mandela Trial, ANC/SWAPO Prisoners," WV No. 532, 2 August 1991.) But the self-styled revolutionary socialists and "internationalists" of the CWG act as lawyers for those who threatened to burn down the homes of anyone giving shelter to Zulu workers.

Criticizing the potential for communalist bloodletting of the CWG's call to "flatten the hostels," we called for union-based defense guards. Already at the outbreak of the "Reef War" between Inkatha and ANC supporters in the townships, we wrote:

"What is needed is the formation of union-based workers defense guards, linking the factory to the townships, and made up of class-conscious workers including Zulus, Xhosas and members of other tribal groupings, as well as coloured, Asian and anti-racist white workers, to suppress both right-wing terrorists and the fomenters of bloody communalist war."

—WV No. 515, 30 November 1990

The CWG links its anti-Zulu demagoguery to anti-“coloured” (mixed-race) demagoguery with the really weird argument that we support or will support independence for the coloureds in the Western Cape: “The next logical step must be support for the racist ‘coloured’ Liberation Movement which is threatening ‘armed resistance’ if the Western Cape is not handed over to the ‘coloureds’.” Wrong. Unlike the Zulus, a pre-national people conquered and subjugated by British imperialism, the coloureds are not a nationality but a racially defined caste who have integrated into the South African political economy for centuries. A revolutionary party must seriously undertake to win a base among the coloureds, and to counter attempts by the white ruling class to use them as a battering ram against the black African majority.

The CWG lumps Zulus and coloureds together because they are the two largest nonwhite groups among which there is considerable distrust of the ANC’s brand of South African nationalism. And not without reason. Last year, Tokyo Sexwale, the ANC premier of the Witwatersrand region, engaged in virulent anti-coloured demagoguery over the issue of writing off unpaid back rent in the coloured townships, as the government had already agreed to do in the black African townships, saying he wanted to “vomit” when “others try to use (our) legitimate grievances” (*Cape Times*, 19 September 1994). The CWG’s anti-Zulu and anti-coloured demagoguery is but a “leftist” reflection of the ANC’s South African nationalism.

The CWG seems to be haunted by the spectre of a breakup of the South African state. There is *nothing progressive* about maintaining the territorial integrity of the South African bourgeois state, which is, moreover, a regional *imperialist* power. Does the CWG believe British imperialism was progressive in its colonial wars against the Zulus and Boer (Afrikaner) republics, which led to the Union of South Africa in 1910? The ANC accepts the legitimacy of this imperialist creation, and indeed Nelson Mandela at his inauguration sternly lectured his followers to learn the words of the old national anthem “Die Stem van Suid Afrika.” Are the Comrades for a Workers Government learning to sing “Die Stem”?

Another aspect of the CWG’s South African nationalism is manifested over the now-hot issue of immigration. As large numbers of impoverished black Africans from neighboring states have poured into South Africa, the ANC-led government is campaigning for tighter border controls and expelling “illegal immigrants.” Inkatha leader Buthelezi, home secretary in the Government of National Unity, is leading the charge. An account of the SACP-dominated “Conference of the Left” last November in the current *Qina Msebenzi* reported that the International Socialists (ISSA) had proposed a demonstration against expelling “illegals” and “they proposed that everybody should be allowed into SA.” The CWG’s only response was to say that “neighbouring countries problems cannot be solved by removing restrictions alone.” Nothing about defending immigrants under attack by the ANC regime, much less the

necessary call for full citizenship rights for everyone in South Africa.

The CWG’s South African nationalism also expresses itself in the baiting of our tendency, the International Communist League, because our largest section is in the United States and we do not presently have an organized group of supporters in South Africa. Scattered through their polemic are snotty lines like “Our ‘revolutionary’ commentators in New York only see South Africa in terms of ‘powder kegs’,” and “the New York sages say we must ‘regroup’ to form a revolutionary workers party (vanguard party).” This is a very old song and dance. In the latter part of the 19th century, opportunists in France, Germany and elsewhere denounced Marx and Engels for seeking to “dictate” the course of the European workers movement from London. Social Democrats castigated the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky as a tool of Moscow. And in the late 1930s, centrists around the world disparaged the Fourth International as a one-man show run from Trotsky’s exile in Coyoacán, Mexico.

Even the CWG’s posture as being sons of the South African soil is in a sense a sham. As we’ve pointed out, they’re part of a self-styled “democratic-centralist Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency,” whose leading section is British. Perhaps in the future, the CWG will complain about dictates from London.

An authentic Trotskyist party in South Africa can only be built as part of the fight to reforge the Fourth International, as the ICL has undertaken. Genuine revolutionary socialists in South Africa should long to be part of an International with strong sections in the United States, West Europe and Japan as well as “Third World” countries. One of the central theses of Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution, going straight back to Marx and Engels, is that it is not possible to build socialism—a classless society of abundance, requiring the highest level of productive forces—in one country, much less a relatively less developed capitalist state like South Africa. The indispensable need for international extension of workers revolution is all the more clear since the destruction of the Soviet Union. We have noted, as any serious South African communist must be vividly aware, that a workers revolution in South Africa would be crushed by the military and economic action of Western, centrally U.S., imperialism unless it sparked revolutionary struggles in the imperialist centers themselves.

A South African revolution centered on the black proletariat would have an especially powerful impact on the United States, with its large black population heavily represented in key sections of the working class. We’re certainly aware of this, if nothing else from the heightened interest in *Workers Vanguard* among blacks, who are our main readership, every time we have an article about South Africa. In the struggle to overthrow world imperialism in its strongest state, the descendants of those black Africans who were enslaved and taken to the New World at the dawn of capitalism will play a decisive role. ■

Letter to the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

31 May 1995

Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International
Salt River, South Africa

Dear Comrades,

Thank you for your warm March 10 statement of support for the campaign to save the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal. It is important and quite heartening that support for Jamal is growing in South Africa, especially since the death penalty is now being debated there. The racist injustice of Jamal's frame-up reverberates strongly in South Africa, just as the struggle against apartheid has always found resonance among the black working class in the United States.

When Comrade Jorge and I visited Cape Town last September your comrades reported that you were reconsidering your views and analysis of Stalinism. I subsequently sent you some Trotsky articles and ICL literature on the question, targeting in particular the grotesquely one-sided contention of Cliff Slaughter's Workers International, with which the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International (WIRFI) is associated, that Stalinism was "counterrevolutionary through and through." We have also recently sent you copies of our *Black History and the Class Struggle* pamphlet No. 12, which lays out the program which the International Communist League stands on in South Africa.

The November-January 1995 *Workers International News* reports that you have recently spoken with Sy Landy of the American League for a Revolutionary Party (LRP), which holds that the former Soviet Union was a variety of "state capitalism." Recognizing that your views are no doubt in flux, in this letter I want to point to a few of the differences between your organization and the International Communist League on the crucial question of Stalinism. I am also sending you under separate cover the Spartacist pamphlet, *Why the USSR Is Not Capitalist* (published in the 1970s), which analyses in some detail the contortions of Marxist theory used by Tony Cliff and others to insist that the former Soviet Union was capitalist. The LRP uses many of the same arguments.

As you know, the ICL gave critical support to the Workers List Party against the popular frontist ANC/SACP/COSATU tripartite alliance in the April 1994 South African elections. Though the WLP's program was left reformist, we wrote, "the WLP does draw a crude class line and a vote for it will be seen in South Africa as a vote for a workers party rather than the ANC" (*Workers Vanguard*, No. 599, 29 April 1994).

We also discussed giving critical support to the Workers International election campaign, but rejected this on the following grounds:

"Their unrepudiated record of blocs with some of the most reactionary forces in the region, in the name of 'fighting Stalinism,' ruled out support for their candidates. In the November 1989 elections in Namibia, they participated in an electoral lash-up called the United Democratic Front (UDF), which included several bantustan parties who were collaborators of South Africa's puppet regime. The UDF received money from the apartheid government, which was anxious to undercut the vote for SWAPO. Today, the Slaughterites' virulently Stalino-

phobic election manifesto essentially accuses the ANC of bringing Stalinist gulags to the veld."

— *Workers Vanguard* No. 602 (10 June 1994)

Concerning the former Soviet Union and East European deformed workers states, although the WIRFI manifesto uses the term "bureaucracy" to describe the ruling stratum, in substance it treats the bureaucratic perversion of workers rule there as if it had been some kind of new class society defined by *exploitation* rather than parasitism: "The source of the wealth of the bureaucracy was nationalized economy, which it exploited and plundered for its own gain." Nowhere in some fifteen manifesto paragraphs devoted to condemning Stalinism do you mention that there was anything for the international proletariat to defend in the collectivized and planned economies. Nowhere do you state that the restoration of capitalism in these countries *represents a world historic defeat for the international working class*. Thus your program was fundamentally a capitulation to bourgeois anti-Communism.

Stalinophobia

Stalinism was the ideology of the unstable, petty-bourgeois caste which usurped power from the Soviet proletariat in 1923-24. The horrible combination of terror and lies by which this caste retained itself in power—the endless purges and show trials, the nationalism which underlies the program of "socialism in one country," the class collaborationism of the popular front and "two-stage revolution,"—are things that any proletarian revolutionary burns in hatred of. But the anti-Stalinism of the revolutionary working class has nothing in common with the anti-Stalinism of the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie.

In the process of fighting the Pabloist liquidationism which destroyed the Fourth International in 1951-53, American Socialist Workers Party leader James P. Cannon defined the phenomenon of Stalinophobia in the Trotskyist movement:

"What is Stalinophobia? Is it hatred of Stalinism; fear of this 'syphilis of the labor movement' and irreconcilable refusal to tolerate any manifestation of it in the party? Not at all. That has been our attitude toward Stalinism from the very beginning; and anybody who feels differently about it is traveling in our party under false passports.

"Is it the opinion that Stalinism is not the leader of the international revolution, but its mortal enemy? No, that is not Stalinophobia; that is what Trotsky taught us, what we learned again from our experience with Stalinism, and what we believe in our bones.

"The sentiment of hatred and fear of Stalinism, with its police state and its slave labor camps, its frame-ups and its murders of working class opponents, is healthy, natural, normal, and progressive. This sentiment goes wrong only when it leads to reconciliation with American imperialism, and to the assignment of the fight against Stalinism to the same imperialism. In the language of Trotskyism, that and nothing else is Stalinophobia."

— "Stalinist Conciliationism and Stalinophobia,"

Letter to Farrell Dobbs (6 April 1953),

Speeches to the Party

Our fight against precisely this kind of pro-imperialist

Stalinophobia has, since the onset of NATO's renewed Cold War II offensive against the USSR in 1979, distinguished the Spartacist tendency/ICL from virtually every other international tendency claiming the mantle of Trotskyism—whether they had a formal “state capitalist,” “bureaucratic collectivist” or “degenerated workers state” position. One of the worst in this regard was the International Committee (IC) of Gerry Healy. *All* the organizations which emerged after Healy's IC imploded in 1985 carried forward this tradition, including Slaughter's Workers International. There was no counterrevolutionary “anti-Stalinist” organization supported by imperialism that Healy/Slaughter didn't support: from the reactionary Islamic fundamentalist mullahs of Afghanistan, to Lech Walesa's priest-infested Solidarność—the only “union” ever beloved by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan—to the anti-democratic nationalist movements in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, whose demand for “independence” was simply a fig leaf for their program of capitalist counterrevolution.

The final coup de grace came in August 1991 when the Soviet supporters of the WIRFI led by Alex Gusev actually *stood side by side with the aspiring capitalists on Boris Yeltsin's barricades* at the Moscow White House, screaming that the Stalinists of the coup committee were the main enemy. This policy was clearly laid out by Gusev in a 31 August 1991 interview in *Workers Press*:

“We called for the crushing of the gang of bandits who had organised the coup; we said we must defend the democratic rights of free speech, of press freedom, of the right to strike, of the right of nations to self-determination.... Outside the ‘White House’, we raised the banner of the Fourth International among the crowds facing the tanks and troops.”

The Workers International's policy of an “anti-Stalinist” *military bloc with the forces of capitalist counterrevolution* would totally discredit you in the eyes of the Soviet masses, who are now reeling from the effects of this same counterrevolution. The Workers International policy was the mirror *opposite* of that anticipated by the founding conference of the Fourth International for such a situation: “a ‘united front’ with the Thermidorian section of the bureaucracy against open attack by capitalist counterrevolution” (*Transitional Program*). If the Stalinist coup committee had in fact mounted a serious opposition to Yeltsin, the ICL would have blocked with it militarily. The ICL issued a statement in Moscow, headlined, “Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!” which called to sweep away the counterrevolutionary rabble mobilized and organized by Yeltsin. Our unique stand was laid out in the pamphlet, *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*, which I sent you in September.

It's not surprising that an organization which sided with Yeltsin in August 1991 also fought alongside the South African secret police against “Stalinism” in Namibia. The Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), Namibian section of Slaughter's Workers International, was part of BOSS's efforts to prevent a big victory for SWAPO in the 1989 Namibian elections. Of course proletarian revolutionaries would not give electoral support to the aspiring capitalist rulers of the petty-bourgeois nationalist SWAPO. But in the name of opposing the “Stalinist” methods with which the Njujoma SWAPO leadership imprisoned and tortured its internal opponents, the Workers Revolutionary Party participated in the United Democratic Front electoral front—a *class-collaborationist alliance with pro-capitalist forces*

which included bantustan parties and tribal chieftains—*funded by the South African apartheid secret police.*

The WRP's participation in this vehicle for BOSS disinformation should have served as a giant warning signal as to the *pro-bourgeois* nature of the ersatz “anti-Stalinism” of the “Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International.” Your comrades told us in September that your Cape Town group had joined this International around the time of the Namibian elections. But your organization has never, to our knowledge, condemned the Namibian WRP for acting as a tool for BOSS. And the November 1994-January 1995 issue of your paper, *Workers International News*, gives this very same WRP—now thoroughly and irrevocably discredited in the eyes of the Namibian masses—uncritical electoral support in the December 1994 local elections. Slaughter's Workers International will never remove this dirty stain from its record. This kind of pro-apartheid “anti-Stalinism” simply serves to *propel* thousands of misguided proletarian militants in South Africa into the arms of the South African Communist Party (SACP).

The Destruction of the Degenerated and Deformed Workers States

The Workers International has been all over the map on the question of what has happened in East Europe and the Soviet Union over the last six years. This is no academic question. These world historic events have played a key role in bringing about the ANC/De Klerk “power-sharing” regime. Any serious Marxist has to seriously analyze them.

Just on an empirical level, the devastation being wrought by the destruction of the collectivized and planned economies is staggering. Industrial production in Russia plummeted 56.7 percent between January 1990 and June 1994. The territory of the ex-USSR is now riven by bloody nationalist conflicts which directly fed the drive to capitalist restoration. The vast industrial plant is in shambles, and the largest working class in the world is being decimated by unemployment, hunger and soaring rates of disease and death. Ethnic cleansing has also swept East Europe as would-be capitalist exploiting classes carve their national fiefdoms out of the bodies of the intermingled peoples of the region. Between 1989 and 1993 industrial employment fell 22 percent in Poland, 28 percent in the Czech Republic and 41 percent in Hungary. Two out of five Polish families now live below the official poverty level.

Just as important as the internal material devastation wrought by capitalist restoration in the former Soviet Union and East Europe has been the consequent strengthening of world imperialism. The ruling classes of West Europe and the United States, no longer constrained by fear of “communism” to provide even the fig leaf of the “welfare state,” are attacking the social gains won by the workers over the last half century, using the poison of anti-immigrant chauvinism and racism to divide the working class. Resurgent fascist movements are gaining ground all over Europe. Growing interimperialist rivalries hang like a pall over the future of humanity.

The horrible consequences of the counterrevolution in the USSR are particularly important to recognize in South Africa, since this was a direct impetus for the “negotiated settlement” which created the current neo-apartheid regime. The existence of the Soviet Union—even ruled by a bureaucratic caste which sought above all else to conciliate

imperialism—had provided a counterweight, allowing petty-bourgeois nationalist “liberation” movements like the African National Congress (ANC) some latitude to manoeuvre between Moscow and the West. All over the world such nationalist movements are now coming to heel beside imperialism, with nothing to show for decades of struggle on the part of the oppressed masses they claim to represent. The destruction wrought on Iraq during the Persian Gulf War stands as a sharp warning to any neo-colonial ruler who gets out of line in the “New World Order.”

Both the fact of the ignominious collapse of the Soviet Union, and its consequences, stand as the most profound negative confirmation of Leon Trotsky’s analysis of the contradictory and brittle bureaucratic caste which usurped political power from the Soviet proletariat in 1923-24. Under intense military and economic pressure from imperialism, this Stalinist bureaucracy in the end simply gave up the ghost and surrendered. Broad layers have avidly embraced capitalism, using their former nomenklatura positions to plunder state resources and place themselves in the front ranks of the competitive struggle for “primitive capitalist accumulation.” But transformation from Stalinist bureaucrat to capitalist exploiter is by no means automatic or assured given the chaos of the capitalist market. The bureaucracy could no more transform itself wholesale into a capitalist class than it could represent the historical interests of the working class by consistently defending the collectivized property forms on which its rule rested. In the end this caste proved to be historically unstable, exactly as Trotsky insisted—a balancing act between the two classes whose struggle will determine the future of humanity: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

The Hungarian workers uprising of 1956 had previously provided powerful empirical confirmation of Trotsky’s analysis of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Your election manifesto wrongly equates this workers *political revolution* which sought to establish the rule of democratically elected workers Soviets in an already established workers state, with the *social revolutions* against capitalism which have been sold out by Stalinist misleadership around the world. I am sending you a copy of a *Workers Vanguard* article which contains a synopsis of the 1956 Hungarian events, “The Hungarian Workers Uprising of 1956” (WV No. 483, 4 August 1989). Faced with a working-class uprising which created armed revolutionary committees and workers councils clearly opposed to capitalist restoration, the Hungarian Stalinist bureaucracy did not act like a historical ruling class and close ranks to defend its rule. Rather, it *shattered*: goodly numbers went over to the side of the insurgent workers, including Army General Pal Maleter and the chief of the Budapest police! If the Stalinist bureaucracy was “counter-revolutionary through and through” as your organization has repeatedly insisted, how do you explain the fact that key sections of it went over to the side of the insurgent workers?

Sy Landy’s LRP now insists that the former East European and Soviet states could not possibly have been workers states because the working class did not defend them against the counterrevolution in 1990-91. Certainly, Trotsky’s prognosis that a civil war would develop in the Soviet Union between capitalist restorationist forces and a revolutionary working class did not materialize. There was no significant working-class pole present at all in the social upheavals which led to the destruction of the Soviet Union and the

deformed workers states in East Europe. In the eyes of Trotskyism no greater condemnation of Stalinism can be found than the fact that it so *discredited the great ideals of communism, so atomized, terrorized and disoriented the working classes of the Soviet Union and East Europe*, that there was no conscious proletarian resistance to capitalist restoration.

But the lack of such resistance no more proves that the states which were destroyed were not workers states than the fact that millions of American workers vote for the Democratic Party “proves” that this capitalist party is some kind of workers party. Class consciousness does not flow automatically from class position. The transformation of the proletariat from a class “in itself” to a class “for itself” (to use Marx’s words) must be historically attained in struggle, embodied in a conscious and organized revolutionary vanguard, as it was in Russia in 1917. The destruction of the Soviet Union proves only that, just as revolutionary working-class consciousness must be historically attained, it can be destroyed—along with its achievements.

It is unclear to me whether the Workers International recognizes that the destruction of the Soviet workers state was a defeat; as of February 1994 the British *Workers Press* still denied that the state apparatus consolidated by Yeltsin in the aftermath of the August 1991 counter-coup is committed to defending the rule of private capital. Of course it is a weak and ersatz kind of capitalism, with private capital in its formative stages and much of it tied to the “mafia” of organized crime. The Russian economy is now subordinate to the demands of the world market—much of what is being plundered from the state enterprises is being exported. But the continued existence of a significant amount of nationalized property in Russia does not now entail *any* ambiguity at all on the part of the current state apparatus as to what kind of property relations they defend. The ICL fights for a new working-class revolution to smash the weak capitalist Russian state and reinstitute the rule of revolutionary workers councils. What is the program of the Workers International for Russia and East Europe?

Landy’s insistence that the Soviet Union was from the late 1930s a “state capitalist” society leaves him totally unable to explain events there. To insist that the Soviet Union and similar Eastern European societies were “capitalist” in 1989 and “capitalist” now, makes a mockery of the political dislocation and massive destruction of productive resources over the last six years—a destruction unprecedented for a modern industrial economy except in wartime. Incredibly, the LRP actually asserts that this transition has occurred “peacefully,” and they *deny* that it has entailed destruction of productive forces. In the process, the LRP accepts some of the very premises with which the Stalinist bureaucracy defended its rule:

“It is now clear beyond all doubt that the Stalinist states were not progressive with respect to capitalism.... They could not advance the productive forces beyond the barriers capitalism erects in its epoch of decay. The Stalinist states were not transitional to socialism. *Therefore they were not workers states.* [emphasis in the original]”

— “WRP vs. LRP, Part 2: Marxism and the Class Nature of the USSR,” *Proletarian Revolution* No. 44, Spring 1993

Removed from the world division of labor created by capitalism, no isolated workers state (or even several states) could “advance the productive forces beyond the barriers capitalism erects in its epoch of decay.” To argue that such is

possible, as the LRP does above, is to accept the possibility of building "socialism in one country." And only the Stalinist bureaucracy ever insisted its rule was "transitional to socialism." Trotsky saw one of two possible outcomes to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, as he wrote in the founding program of the Fourth International: "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 into capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism" (*Transitional Program*).

Now the first variant foreseen by Trotsky has come to pass. But does this negate the *fact* that the collectivized and planned economy of the Soviet Union raised the level of productive resources far beyond the relatively underdeveloped position the tsarist empire occupied in the world market in 1917? What other country, in the epoch of imperialism, transformed itself from an underdeveloped, largely peasant country into a major industrial power—one with, e.g., the technical capacity for space travel? Yes, the industry of the Soviet Union was based on a level of labor productivity and product quality far lower than that demanded by the imperialist world market—the whys and hows of this were brilliantly laid out in Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*. This is why the Soviet and East European industrial base is now being decimated. But anyone who considers himself a Marxist and who insists on labeling the former USSR and East European workers states some form of exploitative class society—"state capitalist," "bureaucratic collectivist" or other—cannot get around the fact that by means of a state monopoly on foreign trade and a planned economy, these states were able to counteract subordination to the world market dominated by the imperialist corporations—thus representing a historically progressive stage.

Class Differentiation Among the Former Stalinists

Your election platform correctly states that it is not communism, but Stalinism which died in the Soviet Union and East Europe. But in September your comrades insisted to us that something monolithic called "Stalinism" continues to exist as *the* mortal danger to the international workers movement—in essence treating Stalinism as an ahistorical ideological phenomenon. It appeared to us that it was in part justified hatred for the class collaborationism of the South African Communist Party—the main means by which the politically conscious black union movement has been tied to its class enemies in the African National Congress—which propelled you into this undialectical approach to "Stalinism."

Already in 1928 Leon Trotsky noted that adoption of the ideology of "socialism in one country" presaged the breakup of the Communist International along national reformist lines:

"If it is at all possible to realize socialism in one country, then one can believe in that theory not only *after* but also *before* the conquest of power. If socialism can be realized within the national boundaries of backward Russia, then there is all the more reason to believe that it can be realized in advanced Germany.... It will be the beginning of the disintegration of the Comintern along the lines of social-patriotism."

— Trotsky, *Third International After Lenin* (1928)

When the Stalinist epigones adopted the explicit class collaborationism of the "Peoples Front" (popular front) at the Comintern's 7th Congress in 1935, Trotsky wrote: "Nothing

now distinguishes the Communists from the Social Democrats except the traditional phraseology, which is not difficult to unlearn" (Trotsky, "The Comintern's Liquidation Congress," 23 August 1935).

Stalinism never held a monopoly on class collaboration. The Spanish Revolution of 1935-36 was strangled by a popular front government of the Communist *and Socialist* parties with a few token bourgeois politicians. Similarly, the Communists *and Socialists* united in a government with the bourgeois Radicals to head off a pre-revolutionary situation in France in 1936-37. While it was loyalty to the Kremlin which motivated Stalinist leaders like Maurice Thorez and Palmiro Togliatti to join popular front governments in France and Italy at the end of WW II, demobilizing and demoralizing the millions of armed workers under their leadership, providing a crucial prop for the stabilization of a *capitalist* Europe—their actions were not fundamentally different from those of the traditional social-democratic reformist leaders.

Over the half century following 1935 the ties binding Communist Parties to Moscow attenuated as some Stalinist leaders put subservience to their own national bourgeoisies ahead of loyalty to Moscow (e.g., the Italian Communist Party opposed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan). Now the Soviet workers state no longer exists. Does the WIRFI believe that the French Communist Party or the Italian Party of Democratic Socialism (successor to the CP) function today as anything but traditional reformist bourgeois workers parties, akin to the British Labour Party or the Social Democratic Party of Germany?

In East Europe and the Soviet Union the situation with the former nomenklatura is somewhat different. There has been the beginnings of a real class differentiation within the petty-bourgeois bureaucratic caste which used to sit atop the planned economies. Many economic and financial apparatchiks have plundered the economic resources under their control, seeking to become capitalists themselves; others have simply transferred their positions as technocrats and managers (some 50 percent of the top managers in the private sector in East Europe today were former directors of state enterprises). The remnants of the Communist Party apparatuses in many East European countries have successfully transformed themselves into real political parties. Playing to the intense backlash *against* the capitalist counterrevolution, the former Stalinist parties have propelled themselves into government again in Lithuania, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria. The LRP is totally unable to explain why these ex-Stalinist parties today enjoy such widespread popular support. The ICL recognizes that they function essentially as *social-democratic* organizations, while noting that their current political appeal is not without contradiction:

"Of course, these parties were never really communist, but rather the political apparatus for the rule of conservative bureaucracies which parasitically rested atop the collectivized economy. Deprived of their sinecures, they have renounced even the label of 'Marxism-Leninism' and present themselves as born-again social democrats. Yet their growing popular support stems in good measure from their association with the economic security working people enjoyed in the Soviet bloc deformed workers states, and their promises to provide a social 'safety net' to counteract the immiseration of the 'free market.' "...The East European ex-Stalinist social democrats wear two faces. To the workers, the unemployed, the aged, they offer 'capitalism with a human face,' as it's called in Poland: tempering the transition to a market economy with 'social justice.' But to the new capitalist entrepreneurs and Western imperialist

agencies, they present themselves as efficient technocrats.... Thus, while the ex-Stalinist parties appeal to the working class, they also represent in a direct way the interests of a large section of the new capitalist exploiters."

— "East Europe: Five Years of Counterrevolution,"
Workers Vanguard No. 614, 13 January 1995

A process of uneven class differentiation can also be expected in those underdeveloped and ex-colonial countries where the Stalinist parties preached "two-stage revolution" and integrated themselves into petty-bourgeois nationalist formations. This is especially the case in South Africa, where the white ruling class has now coopted the African National Congress/SACP at the top. There is a rapid differentiation occurring between those ANC/SACP leaders who have hopped on the "gravy train" and the workers, unemployed and plebeian youth who remain the base of the organization. The ANC is transforming itself into a bourgeois political formation, but it appears that *within* the ANC the SACP is a pole for working-class and subjectively revolutionary elements.

The fact that a layer of formerly workerist COSATU leaders like Moses Mayekiso went over to the SACP in the mid-1980s was a crucial factor allowing the ANC/SACP to coopt COSATU. But this accretion of trade-union leaders also created the basis for the SACP as a mass reformist working-class party. SACP offices are now usually in the same building as COSATU offices and there is significant interpenetration between the SACP and COSATU at the leadership level. Moreover the SACP continues to attract subjectively revolutionary plebeian youth who look to the "Communists" as exponents of radical change. The differentiation between bourgeois nationalist, lumpen plebeian and working-class elements within the ANC/SACP is certainly ragged and incomplete. We have labeled the current tripartite alliance as a "*nationalist* popular front" in an attempt to capture the embryonic class antagonisms within the ANC/SACP/COSATU forces.

It is clear that the SACP is being used by the ANC to police the workers movement and shove the worst atrocities of the "government of national unity" down the throats of the oppressed masses. This is exactly the way reformist workers parties are always used by their bourgeois partners in popular front governments. So Mandela appointed SACP icon Joe Slovo to the most sensitive ministry—housing. It is Deputy Defense Minister and SACP Ronnie Kasrils who has taken on the job of selling the government's plan to spend millions equipping the South African navy with corvettes.

The South African working class needs desperately to be educated as to the treacherous history of the popular front as one of the bourgeoisie's tools to demoralize and disarm the working class so that it lies prostrate before reaction. The lessons of the Spanish Civil War, of the French Popular Front of 1936-37, of Allende's Unidad Popular in Chile from 1970-73, need to be hammered home. Trotsky called the popular front the most important question of proletarian strategy in this epoch. Yet for all the "anti-Stalinism" of the WIRFI, the words "*popular front*" do not appear in the critiques of the SACP which you circulated around the time of the "Conference on Socialism" last November. The same is true of the WIRFI election manifesto. And no wonder: on the central question of fighting for the political independence of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie, your organization's record has a class-collaborationist commonality with the Stalinists.

The ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance represents a mortal

danger to the black working class of South Africa! Unless the working class breaks from this popular-front straitjacket on the road of struggle for a black-centered workers republic, the "tripartite alliance" will be broken by the *bourgeoisie* after it has served its role in demoralizing and demobilizing resistance to neo-apartheid capitalist exploitation.

Breaking the South African working class from the nationalist popular front *must* entail a split *within* the SACP, which currently claims 73,000 members, many of them attracted *because* the party continues to use the name Communist and to claim that it is fighting for socialism. Already disaffected elements within the SACP are asking, "Is the SACP really communist?," complaining about the "Kautskyist-Luxemburgist" positions of its leaders. Yet the 29 October 1994 issue of *Workers Press* reports that at your last conference you raised the blanket call to "remove Stalinists from the trades unions." Comrades, the abject class collaborationism of the SACP leadership must be *politically defeated* within the working-class movement. To call for the removal of all "Stalinists" from COSATU can only feed into bourgeois anti-Communist witchhunting.

Moreover it is wrong and ahistorical to imply, as you do, that Stalinism has been solely responsible for the use of repressive measures and violence within the workers movement. Such methods are universally resorted to by class-collaborationist misleaders when they begin to lose their grip on the working class. It was the *Social Democrats* in Germany who set up the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, part and parcel of the process of beheading a proletarian revolution in Germany in 1918-1919. The Georgian Menshevik (i.e., social-democratic) regime of 1918-21 gunned down worker protests, imprisoned every Bolshevik it could get its hands on and carried out innumerable massacres of national minorities (e.g., Abkhazians, Ossetians). Trotsky exposed these crimes in *Social Democracy and the Wars of Intervention in Russia 1918-1921*. And while the petty-bourgeois nationalist demagogues in the ANC and SWAPO may have learned some of their more unsavory repressive techniques from the Kremlin, they did not need their Stalinist supporters to teach them that such repression *was in their class interests*—necessary to the establishment of neo-colonial, capitalist regimes. The history of petty-bourgeois nationalist liberation struggles is replete with violent suppression of trade union leaders, internal dissidents and rival nationalist movements—even in countries like Algeria where the tiny pro-Moscow Communist Party played only a marginal role in the National Liberation Front.

At bottom, the "anti-Stalinism" of Slaughter & Co. is a direct reflection of the politics of the British Labour Party milieu and has facilitated capitulation to the BLP's treacherous leadership. Slaughter's WRP was born out of the implosion of Healy's International Committee and in the context of the anti-Soviet war drive spearheaded by American imperialism. In Britain, a Stalinophobic "analysis" and program was always a virtual prerequisite for cozying up to the Labour Party and TUC tops, whose "loyal opposition" approach to the "foreign policy" of British imperialism usually differs very little from the naked anti-communism and racism of the Tories. Notwithstanding the WRP's more recent talk about the need for a "new party" to oppose Labour, the whole history of their position on the question of Stalinism throughout the period leading up to and

culminating in counterrevolutions in the former Soviet bloc was typical of those British self-styled "revolutionary" organizations who in fact took their cue from the stridently anti-communist, pro-imperialist Labour leadership.

A Stalking Horse for NATO in Bosnia

In September we briefly discussed the question of the Workers International's "Workers Aid to Bosnia" campaign. We in the ICL do not find it surprising that those who cheered with the imperialists against "Stalinism" as the Soviet workers state was being destroyed, continued to howl alongside the imperialists, demanding "self-determination" for "poor little Bosnia."

But Bosnia is not a nation. Formerly a province in the Ottoman and then Habsburg empires, Bosnia-Herzegovina has always been a purely administrative unit, most recently a constituent republic of the Yugoslavian deformed workers state. The three closely related Slavic peoples who made up the Bosnian population—the Croats, Serbs and Slavic Muslims—were geographically interpenetrated. Muslims, who make up some 50 percent of the population, were an urbanized people concentrated in the cities, while Serbs, who made up some 30 percent, were mainly peasants in the countryside, owning some 65 percent of the land. Within the framework of capitalist counterrevolution—which used national antagonisms as a battering ram—the heavy interpenetration of the various peoples in Bosnia means that national rights for one people can only be realized through savage persecution aimed at driving out the "other" peoples. This explains the orgy of nationalist bloodletting which has been unleashed by the counterrevolution.

The International Communist League opposes *all* sides in this national/communist slaughter. We also oppose all imperialist intervention in the region, calling for withdrawal of the United Nations troops and an end to the imperialist blockade of Serbia. When the United Nations has called in NATO planes to engage in air strikes against Serbia, we have defended Serbia. An end to the intervention of the various capitalist powers—who seek to keep the pot of national antagonisms in the region boiling in the service of their own imperialist designs, as they did in the pre-WWI period—is a precondition to an end to this all-sided nationalist slaughter. The only perspective that offers a way out is for the working class throughout the former Yugoslavia to overthrow their bourgeois-nationalist leaders in an internationalist struggle for a Socialist Federation of the Balkans.

The Workers Aid to Bosnia campaign is nothing but a stalking horse for NATO/imperialist intervention on behalf of the Muslim-nationalist government led by Ali Izetbegovic. The *Workers Press* usually attempts to hide this fact by publicizing only the fact that it sends aid only to the "multi-ethnic," "social democratic" working class in the "free territory of Tuzla." But the real policy is one of military support to the Muslim fundamentalist Izetbegovic regime, as detailed in this statement submitted by the Workers International to a November 1994 conference in Tuzla:

"During the war it has been necessary for the working class and its supporters to build unity against the aggressors

and therefore give support to the Bosnia-Herzegovina government."

— "The future of Bosnia," *Workers Press*,
26 November 1994

This same Workers International statement openly admits that Workers Aid demands United Nations action on behalf of the Bosnian government, in particular to open the northern route to Tuzla:

"When in 1993 the first Workers Aid convoy reached the Croatian capital Zagreb, it took up the demand emanating from Tuzla for the opening of the northern (corridor) route. The mainly young convoy team blockaded the United Nations Protection Force headquarters to make public this demand."

Even more incredible than this open call for United Nations intervention on behalf of Izetbegovic is *Workers Press's* rationale for it. We are told that the Serbian regime is the "attacker," that it is "fascist" and that Bosnia is "the front line against the renewed threat of fascism in Europe." In reality the rabidly nationalist Milosevic regime in Serbia is indistinguishable from the equally reactionary, nationalist regime of Croatian strongman Franco Tudjman. Tudjman openly harkens back to the clerical-fascist Ustasha government which murdered hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews and Roma (Gypsies) during WW II, but *Workers Press* prefers not to dwell on the nature of the Croatian government, since it is currently allied with Izetbegovic. Neither is the Muslim nationalist Bosnian government fundamentally different—in November even the United Nations had to admit that the Izetbegovic military forces had *shelled Sarajevo*, attempting to pawn it off as a Serbian atrocity in order to provoke UN intervention. *Workers Press* has lately been forced to admit that the Bosnian military is dominated by Muslim fundamentalists.

But suppose we take *Workers Press's* claims that the Milosevic government is fascist at face value. The Bosnian and Croatian regimes are bourgeois-nationalist; the United Nations troops are imperialist. So Workers International is really arguing for...a popular front alliance with "democratic" capitalism and imperialism to wage war against fascism! Doesn't this make a mockery of the "anti-Stalinism" of the Workers International?

Comrades, the Workers International's "anti-Stalinism" is nothing but a social-democratic loyalty oath to the imperialist world order. It is a policy of Stalinophobia as James P. Cannon defined it, allying with imperialism and the local capitalists to fight Stalinism or its afterproducts: in Namibia with BOSS and the bantustan parties; in Russia with Yeltsin; in Bosnia with the U.S.-backed Muslim nationalist regime. And in South Africa the WIRFI repeats the same themes. The future of the international working class depends on reorganizing a Fourth International whose hatred of Stalinism is infused with the revolutionary and internationalist program which animated Trotsky's own Fourth International. Representatives of the International Communist League will be visiting Cape Town this month. We hope they can continue this exchange in person.

Yours for the Rebirth of the Fourth International
Emily Turnbull
for the International Secretariat

Greetings to WOSA Conference

A representative of the ICL attended the June 1995 conference of WOSA as an observer. These remarks, presented on 18 June, have been edited for publication.

On behalf of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), I want to thank you for the invitation to address your conference and discuss some key questions facing proletarian revolutionaries in the world today. Only through honest and comradely discussion and debate is it possible to restore the traditions of working-class internationalism represented by the Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky.

For us the importance of program is not determined by short-term perspectives and opportunities, but by whether the taking of power is on the immediate agenda. Only on the basis of a revolutionary program and principles is it possible to build a communist vanguard party capable of taking power when the decisive historic moment arrives. Lenin pointed out that the October Revolution of 1917 was prepared by the previous 15-year history of the Bolshevik Party which went through periods of both revolutionary ferment and deep reaction.

We consider that the present world situation, including and particularly the "power-sharing" coalition between the ANC and National Party in South Africa, is a direct result of capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe leading to the destruction of the Soviet Union, a bureaucratically degenerated workers state. As a result the domination of Western and Japanese imperialism over the so-called Third World has been greatly strengthened. Petty-bourgeois and bourgeois-nationalist forces such as the ANC can no longer maneuver between Washington and Moscow but now act as open agents of finance capital, directly subordinate to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

At the same time, the "power-sharing" arrangement in Pretoria is necessarily fragile and unstable. South Africa with its powerful, combative and well-organized black proletariat has become a weakened link in the chain of the world capitalist system binding the oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America to the imperialist centers. It is necessary to break this chain at its weakest links while fighting to mobilize the international working class to extend the revolution.

A working-class program and perspective for South Africa must be based on Trotsky's concept of permanent revolution. This holds that in the imperialist epoch a simply bourgeois-democratic revolution in the backward capitalist countries is not possible, and that to achieve even democratic tasks such as agrarian revolution and national liberation it is necessary for the proletariat, led by its communist vanguard, to take power, proceeding from democratic to socialist tasks and seeking to take the revolution to the imperialist centers.

The year-long experience of the Government of National Unity graphically underscores the fundamental incapacity of bourgeois nationalism and reformism to overcome the national oppression of the non-white, centrally black African, peoples at the hands of the white capitalist ruling class. The Mandela presidency and "power-sharing" coal-

ition represent not genuine bourgeois democracy but rather the co-optation of the ANC/SACP misleaders as political front men for Anglo-American and the other Randlords.

Yet this coalition—a form of popular front—ranging from black African union bureaucrats to Anglo-American mine owners and Afrikaner bankers is unstable and transitory. At some point the Government of National Unity is going to fracture, and South Africa will be thrown into a period of violent political conflict and turmoil. For these conflicts to be resolved in favor of the working class and oppressed toilers requires that there is *now* built in South Africa a revolutionary vanguard modeled on the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky.

As you know, our tendency extended critical electoral support to the Workers List Party in the April 1994 elections as a working-class alternative opposed to the now bourgeois-nationalist ANC. At the same time, we criticized the Workers List program for not going beyond the bounds of left reformism, a criticism elaborated in our letter to WOSA of last March. What is needed in South Africa is a revolutionary workers party. Such a party would be sharply and clearly counterposed to a reformist labor party such as the Brazilian Workers Party, to which many leftists in South Africa look as a model. Our international tendency has recently established fraternal relations with a group of proletarian revolutionaries in Brazil, Luta Metalúrgica, which has broken with Lula's Workers Party and its many centrist camp followers who falsely claim the mantle of Trotskyism.

A genuinely communist party in South Africa—a Leninist vanguard party—would not simply defend the particular interests of the working class, especially its unionized sector, but would fight to eradicate *all forms* of national and social oppression—the mass homelessness in the black townships, the hideous conditions of the millions of Africans still trapped on the "tribal homelands," the degradation of women (such as the selling of women through the bride price, *lobola*), the plight of immigrants from neighboring African states now facing expulsion. Such a party must be, in Lenin's words, a tribune of the people. The central task today is to cohere the nucleus of a Leninist cadre party, built on Trotsky's program of permanent revolution and on education in the history of the communist movement, and built through intervention in the struggles of the South African working class appropriate to its real weight.

To build a revolutionary party in South Africa on a mass scale we believe it is necessary to effect a left split in the Communist Party which, especially since its legalization in 1990, has achieved political hegemony over the main body of unionized workers organized in COSATU. While its leaders are on the government "grave train," the South African CP still contains leftist elements who take the party's one-time Leninist pretensions as good coin. Only a party openly standing for the principles of Bolshevism can attract those militants now in the Communist Party who are sympathetic to the perspective of proletarian revolution and internationalism.

For South African revolutionaries, internationalism is not a

question of abstract principle or sentiment but a matter of life and death. A proletarian revolution in South Africa would immediately face the determined efforts of Western, centrally American, imperialism to crush it by all available means, from an economic blockade to direct military intervention. An isolated black-centered workers government in South Africa would not long survive.

But a socialist revolution in South Africa would also find strategically powerful allies in the imperialist centers. In particular, it would have an enormously radicalizing impact on blacks in the U.S., who have strongly identified with the struggle against white supremacy in the apartheid state. In the international campaign to save the life of the American black militant and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal

now facing execution, we have found that support from South African unions and other popular organizations has been especially welcomed and appreciated by the American black community. In this way the struggle to save Jamal from the bloodthirsty racism of the U.S. rulers underscores the organic link between the workers movement of South Africa and the Western imperialist countries, between the struggles to overthrow the rule of Anglo-American and its senior partners in Wall Street and the City of London.

But this struggle will not occur spontaneously. It must be *organized* by a revolutionary international based on democratic centralism. Forward to a reforged Fourth International based on the principles of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky! ■

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