

VANGUARD NEWSLETTER

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Contents: To Defeat US Imperialism's War In Indochina	p. 13
Trotsky on Proletarian and Petty-Bourgeois Revolutionists	18
The Labor Party - Part III --Reformist or Revolutionary?	23
✓ Trotskyism Today - Part V --The 1966 IC London Conference and Its Aftermath	26

TO DEFEAT US IMPERIALISM'S WAR IN INDOCHINA

The invasion of--first Cambodia and now--Laos by American armed forces and their South Vietnamese retainers has completely exposed the bankruptcy of liberal pressure politics as a means for "forcing" a ruling class end a predatory and imperialist war.

Spokesmen for the liberal bourgeoisie, such as Sen. Kennedy, have noted the "mild" reaction on campus and in major cities with "dismay and disappointment". Nine months ago, when US-South Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia, an explosion of outrage erupted in marches and demonstrations, in an outpouring of liberals from both capitalist parties and in mounting student protests, which were climaxed by the National Guard and State police killings of students at Kent State University and Jackson State College.

[The Laotian invasion, instead, produced only scattered and barely visible reactions in the US. Only 2,500 responded to the call in NYC, and even fewer elsewhere]

Why the "apathy" this time? Some news commentators have attributed the lack of response to the williness of Pres. Nixon.

It would seem that he timed the invasion of Laos to the lunar flight of the American astronauts. The Laotian action was not identified as an expansion of the Indochinese war--perish the thought--but as a

"limited incursion" which would shorten it. American "ground troops", it was pledged, would not cross the Laotian border, as was the case with Cambodia. The 9,000 US troops involved in the operation were simply "backing up" the 20,000 Vietnamese, who were merely engaged in cutting the Ho Chi Minh trail and destroying the supplies sent and bases established by North Vietnam.

Of course, the might of the US Air Force would be required to deliver and supply the "ARVN", and to continue to bomb the "Vietcong" and their supplies in Laos. Of course, a new attack on Hanoi and continued bombing of North Vietnamese "military" installations might be required in order to allow "our boys" to end their ground combat functions, and in the process of "Vietnamization" of the war. Naturally, if Gen. Ky, Hitler's hero-worshipper, should undertake to invade North Vietnam, in order to force them to "negotiate", the US Air Force would have to expand its role. Furthermore, the role of US airpower cannot be "limited", except perhaps, in the

use of nuclear weapons, in "defense of our boys". And naturally, the US Marines would also have to be deployed at the demilitarized zone, at the North Vietnamese border, to deal with "aggressive" actions.

Of course, none of these activities represent a threat to the Chinese Communists, who should understand that they are only being undertaken to "wind down" the war and "bring our boys home".

"Tricky Dick", it seems, had also "prepared" the American public for Laos, as he had not done for Cambodia. In the first place, the US "precedent" for openly violating the borders of a neutral Asian country had already been established with Cambodia. Also, the news about the mounting offensive against Laos had first been heralded by a "news embargo", and then allowed to trickle out over a 10 day period to cushion the "shock".

Public "apathy" to the Laotian developments has also been attributed to the fact that American casualties in all of Indochina had significantly decreased in the past few months, with few casualties reported from Laos. True, a number of American helicopter pilots are being killed, wounded or captured. Some American soldiers--who were "not there" in the first place--also have turned up among the dead and wounded, as have CIA agents and Army Special Forces personnel--who supposedly also were "not there", and who had been accidentally bombed by the Air Force.

Some commentators have attributed campus "apathy" to student "self-centeredness". After all, a smaller number of student draftees are being called up. The Laos invasion took place at the "wrong time". A new semester had only begun, and students were just not in the mood to strike and demonstrate.

Finally, and cutting through all the surface "explanations" for the absence of demonstrations, some liberal commentators have acknowledged the fundamental reason, namely, public "despair". The popular will, which is overwhelmingly against the continuation of the Indochinese war, let alone its expansion, had

simply not "prevailed".

Despite the split in the ruling class over the continuation of the war--which had encouraged the marches and demonstrations in the first place--the dominant section, which controls the executive machinery of the capitalist state, has not changed its strategy, and had only responded to the popular hue and cry with tactical maneuvers.

American capitalism's basic policy is still fixed on a complete military and political victory over the NLF and North Vietnam. It intends to fulfill its role as gendarme for world capitalism, to secure capitalist property relations in those parts of the world where the masses threaten its overthrow. Moreover, as can be seen by recent pronouncements from Washington, the "hard" wing of American imperialism is circling its loins for an eventual military showdown with China, and even its sometime ally, the Soviet Union, when such an encounter seems likely to achieve more than mutual destruction or a Pyrrhic victory.

During the post-war prosperity, US imperialism could bide its time. Why "rock the boat" when "business" profits were bigger and better than ever before? Now, however, the scramble for a diminishing market has intensified, with the mass and rate of profit also diminishing.

The "third world" is "insolently" nationalizing "its" property and demanding a portion of those super-profits which world imperialism has "historically" extracted. The "hard" wing of US imperialism is determined, not only to halt further inroads on world capitalist relations, not only to protect imperialist property and profits in the under-developed sectors, but sooner or later, to take action against the source of many of its problems, the continuing collective property relations in China, the Soviet bloc and the USSR.

While the Soviet Union and China support the "third world" Bonapartists against their "own" working classes, they also make possible the present defiance of imperialism by these Bonapartists. They provide another point of support which per-

mits them to balance between both imperialism and the degenerate and deformed workers' states

In addition, the developing crisis of world capitalism makes extremely inviting the large portion of Europe and Asia which is presently withheld from or only partially subject to its exploitation.

The "soft" wing of US capitalism has responded to the crisis of imperialism with a different set of tactics. It feels that the "cure" which the "hards" are proposing is worsening the "disease". The war in Indochina has radicalized the youth and has helped produce a roaring inflation. It has galvanized the especially oppressed minorities into greater militancy. The inflation, in turn, has propelled the working class into sharp and increasingly militant strikes against their bosses in industry and government service, and in rank and file actions against its "own" bureaucratic layers.

The "soft" wing believes that the wisest policy under present circumstances is to "make a deal" with the Stalinists to preserve the status quo ante, rather than the "primitive" policies of Johnson-Nixon.

And in fact, just such a deal has been offered to the US by the NLF and North Vietnam. That is why the "soft" wing is now ready to end the war!

The program of the NLF for a coalition government of "national unity" is based on the maintenance of capitalist property relations in South Vietnam. A new version of the 1946 and 1954 betrayals of the Indochinese people is now being offered them. In 1946, in complete subservience to Stalin's "deal" with world imperialism, the Indochinese Stalinists permitted the return of first the British and then the French army to Indochina. In 1954 at Geneva, in fulfillment of the new "bargain" which the Soviet Union and China had struck with imperialism, they returned the southern half of Vietnam to the puppets of French and US imperialism.

The new "deal" in Indochina is to be part of a world-wide agreement

to maintain world "peace", i.e., to maintain the existing class relations throughout the world. The pro-Soviet Stalinist parties, in the under-developed as in the advanced countries, are to continue their counter-revolutionary efforts to disorient the workers, to direct them into "popular front", "anti-monopoly" and "anti-imperialist" coalitions with the liberal bourgeoisie and away from the social revolution.

The enormity of the betrayal of Trotskyism, of revolutionary Marxism, by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its co-thinkers in the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (U Sec) is brought home more forcibly with each expansion of US imperialism's war in Indochina.

For Trotsky and the revolutionary Marxists in general, war, in the words of Clausewitz, is the continuation of politics by other means.

The imperialist and predatory wars of capitalist nations in this epoch, taught Lenin and Trotsky, expressed the sharpened contradictions of a mode of production which had outlived its usefulness. To end war and the threat of war, capitalism had to be overthrown. In predatory wars by one's "own" imperialism against colonial and semi-colonial countries, as in wars between advanced capitalist countries, it is necessary to wage a revolutionary struggle against the class enemy at home.

Meaningful capitalist reforms in the conditions of the working class were the by products of its revolutionary struggles. In war also, taught Lenin and Trotsky, a ruling class could be "forced" to end a predatory war before it had achieved its class purposes, only when it feared its "own" working class more than it feared the "enemy".

But the SWP had junked its working class perspective, save for an occasional liturgical chant, with the Cuban revolution. To the empirical minds of the SWP leadership, the short-cut to socialism, the substitute for an "as yet" passive proletariat in the advanced and under-

developed countries had at last been found. The "essence" of proletarian dictatorship would be presented to the workers by a paternal Bonapartism, which would later on of course, also produce the necessary "forms" to enable the workers to rule.

In the anti-war movement, the SWP-YSA was also able to find a providential substitute for the "as yet" passive working class, a bloc with Stalinists, other social-reformists and bourgeois liberals. The magic talisman which would enable it to feed at the anti-war trough was the "single-issue", the war abstracted from all other social issues. As part of the "broad" movement, it would have access to the radicalized youth, unlike the "sectarians" who kept repeating the "old" Trotskyist "formuli" about war.

So rigidly had the SWP-YSA adhered to "single-issue"-ism, that only under the pressures of its more "radical" allies would its anti-war spokesmen reluctantly agree to slogans attacking racism and other forms of oppression, and then only from a liberal, certainly not from a revolutionary Marxist perspective.

The SWP has been loud in its self-congratulation over the success of its tactic of giving away its revolutionary "birthright" for a mess of liberal "pottage". It can point with pride to new YSA chapters on college campuses.

The SWP-YSA adopted a liberal position on the war to "get with" the youth, but ironically, the youth are now in motion toward the "old" Trotskyism! The failure of liberal pressure politics to "force" Nixon to end the war, which has so demoralized the anti-war movement, has had a similar effect on the YSA's new youth recruits, is also producing a crisis in that organization. The best of its new adherents have had their fill of SWP-style "popular front" politics dished out as "Trotskyism".

The SWP's betrayal of revolutionary Marxism has not only been expressed in the struggle at home against US imperialism's war, but also in the abdication of its responsibility to provide international

revolutionary leadership against the betrayals of Stalinism.

In his introduction to The Revolution Betrayed, Trotsky points out that, in the struggle for socialism, it is the parroted lies of the false "friends of the Soviet Union", and not the truths of the revolutionary Marxists which are to be feared.

Concerned with "winning friends and influencing people" in the anti-war movement at the expense of principle, the SWP's abandonment of Trotskyism is nowhere more evident than in its refusal to criticize the Stalinist program in Indochina.

It has, of course, criticized the inadequate military support given the North Vietnamese and the NLF. It has even given the Soviet Union and China the benefit of its fatherly advice, to lay aside their "differences" and form a "united front" with North Vietnam and the NLF against US imperialism. But it has yet to say one word of criticism about the political program of North Vietnam and the NLF!

Despite the claims of the Workers League (WL) and its co-thinkers in the International Committee (IC) of the Fourth International, that they alone represent the continuity of revolutionary Marxism as against Pabloist revisionism, they also seem to have "forgotten" their elementary revolutionary responsibilities as Trotskyists to expose the Stalinist neo-Menshevik program of the revolution-in stages, in the fight for the Permanent Revolution in Indochina.

It instead attempts to cover up its own flagrant opportunism on this question under the slogan, "Victory to the NLF".

Any revolutionary Marxist organization worthy of the name will, of course, support the struggles of an under-developed country against an imperialist, and especially, its "own" imperialist country.

But its face-saving slogan, "Victory to the NLF", also insinuates that this "victory" will be of a "socialist" character. To that extent, it helps the Stalinists cover up a program of betrayal in Indochina.

In order to defeat American imperialism--not only "victory to the NLF",

but victory for the socialist revolution in Indochina and all of South-east Asia--it is necessary to fight against the policies of Stalinism there and throughout the world. Whoever shrinks from this task, objectively assists in the betrayal of the Indochinese struggle.

It is, first of all, necessary for the revolutionary Marxists throughout the world to expose the Stalinist politics of "socialism in one country", Soviet and Chinese-style.

A minimum of military aid is sent to North Vietnam and the NLF, which barely enables these forces to continue fighting the US and South Vietnamese military machine.

The Stalinists in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia operate separately and from a defensive posture, evidently, in accordance with the Soviet Union's directives to "limit" the war, while it strikes a "deal" with the US.

But to defeat US imperialism, it is necessary for the Indochinese masses to be united in a revolutionary struggle, i.e. against their "own" capitalist and feudal relations. It requires that the "land question" be solved, not by "reforms" which conciliate the landlords, but by the confiscation of their estates and their distribution to the landless peasants. It requires a proletarian leadership of the struggle, a revolutionary Marxist party concentrated in the working class and able to unite the struggles of the peasants to a proletarian revolution. It requires that the neo-Menshevik "popular front" of "national unity" with the landlords and "national" capitalists be destroyed and the revolutionary strength of the masses in the whole of Indochina be coordinated in a united military effort against the US imperialist forces.

The defeat of US imperialism requires the mobilization of the international working class, especially in the advanced countries. This has not been done until now because of the influence of the Stalinists and liberals in the anti-war movement internationally, who have been busily promoting the "deal" with US imperialism.

In exposing the Stalinist-liberal

offensive against the Indochinese revolution, the revolutionary Marxists in the advanced countries carry on an essential struggle to unmask the Stalinists as counter-revolutionaries at home as well.

An international boycott of raw materials and manufactured goods, especially, of those materials which are or can be used in the US war on Indochina must be organized. All ships carrying cargo which can be used by the US in the war against Indochina must be blacklisted--including the petroleum sold to the US by the fake "socialists" of the Middle East and elsewhere!

The defeat of US imperialism requires, above all, that the American working class be mobilized against it, that American workers develop the consciousness that the enemy of the Indochinese masses is their enemy, their "own" capitalist class.

It is not enough to chant abstract slogans about a "political strike" or "general strike". It is necessary to organize them. But this can only be achieved by revolutionists who function in the working class and its organizations, and who can unite the daily struggle in defense of workers standards to the struggle against US imperialism's war on the Indochinese.

The ruling class is increasingly impelled by the economic downturn to place the burden of the "recession" upon the backs of the workers, to eliminate the right to strike, to crack down upon wages and living standards, to curtail services, etc.

This war against the American working class must be related to the war against the Indochinese masses by the revolutionary Marxists.

In essence then, as we have tirelessly repeated, the defeat of US imperialism requires that working class vanguard parties be organized in this country and throughout the world.

The series, "State and Revolution in Latin America", will be concluded in our March issue. At that time, we will also report on a "discussion" which representatives of VANGUARD NEWSLETTER held with Tim Wohlforth of the Workers League.

TROTSKY ON PROLETARIAN AND PETTY-BOURGEOIS REVOLUTIONISTS

by Harold Robins

/Cde. Robins' conversations with and memories of Leon Trotsky are, for the first time, made available in this issue of our newsletter.

/Cde. Robins was a founding member of the Communist League of America (Left Opposition) which was formed in 1928 by the American Trotskyists who had been expelled from the Communist Party.

/As one of Trotsky's bodyguards, he was the first to enter the room in which Ramon Mercader "Jacson" had attacked Trotsky with an ice-axe, to disarm him, and to try to force an admission that the assassination had been ordered by Stalin's NKVD.

/As a member of Trotsky's household, Cde. Robins was a participant at meetings in which questions vital to the future of Trotskyism in the

US were discussed.

/In addition, Cde. Robins was also involved in informal conversations with Trotsky. We believe these conversations to be of great value in further illuminating Trotsky's use of the dialectical method of Marxism, and in providing additional insight into the psychological make-up of petty-bourgeois revolutionists in transition who for the moment, consider themselves his supporters.

/We believe these conversations to be especially useful at this time, when Lilliputian egocentric petty-bourgeois pretenders to the "mantle" of Trotsky are strutting on their diminutive stages in front of tiny coteries, in the absence of a Leninist and Trotskyist working class vanguard party./

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Prior to his death at the hands of a Stalinist assassin in August 1940, Leon Trotsky led the Socialist Workers Party through an epic political discussion, exemplary for its highly conscious employment of Marxist method and political criteria.

Under his leadership, the party majority was won in struggle against the political revisionism of a tendency which had suddenly crystalized under the fiercely mounting pressures of American imperialism dragging the country into World War II.

[Comrade Trotsky characterized the Shachtman-Burnham-Abern political tendency as petty-bourgeois, not because of any name calling pique on his part, but rather because it had abandoned a rationally thought-out political program under the pressure of the class enemy, had replaced rational concepts with emotional ones, which sought and, for a time, found a middle ground between the basic classes of contemporary society.] Since, then, all of the leading people in this petty-bourgeois tendency have either died, or have completely gone over to the class enemy along a road travelled earlier by the Bakunins, Noskes, Kautskys and Stalins.

The repeated emergence of such

petty-bourgeois tendencies in the revolutionary socialist movement must, therefore, be recognized as the workings of social "law", manifesting itself each time with differing concrete causes and results.

It was just such a development in the Bolshevik Party that caused Lenin to "form a bloc" with Trotsky against the new petty-bourgeois Russian bureaucracy led by Stalin & Co. late in 1922. In his letter to the 12th Party Congress, Lenin proposed to overcome bureaucracy in the party by adding to the Central Committee 50 to 100 revolutionary workers. Lenin pointedly noted that he was not referring to the former workers-become-bureaucrats, who were abandoning the Bolshevik criteria and program of the world proletarian revolution for the middle class program of special privilege, which had already begun to characterize the Russian Party bureaucracy in the degenerating Russian workers' state. Luxembourg, Engels and Marx had

earlier called attention to the danger to the proletarian revolutionary struggle from similar unstable weather vane-like social elements. In the later dispute of 1939-40, Cde. Trotsky made it crystal-clear that, years earlier, he had pointed to the method of Shachtman and Burnham--and not of Shachtman and Burnham alone--as being in fundamental conflict with the revolutionary historic tendency of Marxism.

"The man is the method", Comrade Trotsky would say to us during the last year of his life. This maxim expressed a conclusion reached over the years. The objective process of historical development is a resultant of previous interacting objective and subjective factors. It is in this context that the "role of the individual in history" can be appreciated.

The writings and speeches of Leon Trotsky are restricted, in the main, to historically significant factors. Not all of his writings have been published. Some were kept secret for good reasons, others for contrary considerations by literary executors.

There were, in addition, significant matters which came up in discussion and never recorded. These conversations can have a vital importance for revolutionaries. At other times, they dealt with persons or circumstances, which might be described as "events without history". Yet, even these events are often valuable in illustrating Trotsky's use of the adage, "The man is the method". In the former category are two discussions in which I was involved as Trotsky's bodyguard in the last year of his life.

Trotsky asked me, "What do you think of Cde. Dobbs?"

My answer revealed my inadequate political criteria at that time. I replied, that from what I had observed and heard from trustworthy sources, Cde. Dobbs was a worker-comrade who had joined the revolutionary movement during a long drawn out strike struggle of great national significance; a strike which had been fought, not only by the strongest organized regional section of capitalists, but in pitched battles

against the police, sheriff's deputies, and the state militia of Minnesota, and which our comrades led to victory. Since then, I went on, he has become a party and trade-union leader, contributes half his pay to the party and is often at the service of the party. Comrades with such a record, I concluded, do not come to us every day.

To my catalogue of Cde. Dobbs' unquestioned contributions of that period, Cde. Trotsky replied rather testily, "Yes. Yes. This is all very fine. This is what we have a right to expect from any serious comrade. But what are his politics?"

At the time, I did not yet know how to answer such a question. Cde. Trotsky tried to make clear in this discussion that devotion, while, of course, expected from every member of a Bolshevik type of organization, is not an adequate criterion for choosing leadership. "What are his politics" and his methods, Trotsky demanded in judging candidates for leadership?

Years later, I heard Cde. Cannon tell of a discussion in which Cde. Trotsky told him of Lenin's similar criteria for the composition of the central committee of the Bolsheviks during the revolution. Lenin reportedly said, "I do not want a central committee of comrades who think just as I do. We need, instead, members who reflect a wide variety of significant and differing social viewpoints, and who are in basic agreement with the party program." Zinoviev and Kamenev, Lenin pointed out by way of illustration, reflected the social views of left petty-bourgeois radicals. Cde. Trotsky often stated that everyone is specifically receptive to the influences of differing social layers. "The man is the method."

Another instance: I was on guard duty in the patio of the Trotsky residence in Coyoacan, when Cde. Trotsky came out for the noon-time feeding of his rabbits and chickens. An hour earlier, a discussion with a visiting group of Minneapolis party members from the trade-unions, on "union defense guards" and "proletarian military policy", had been

adjourned for lunch. The discussion had brought out some sharp but objectively-presented differences on these questions.

Said Cde. Trotsky, "Cde. Robins, what did you think of the discussion we had?" I replied that it was very illuminating.

"And what did you think of the viewpoint of the Minneapolis comrades who participated", he asked?

"I thought that the short, stout comrade, who so fulsomely agreed with you, is a sycophant, while the husky comrade who stanchly opposed your views, while politically wrong and failing to see the central point as yet, is obviously a man who fights for his point of view", I answered.

Cde. Trotsky laughed, put an arm around my shoulder and said, "Exactly my opinion."

The sycophant soon turned out to be a government rat, while the spirited worker-opponent was one of the Minneapolis comrades sentenced to prison in the government persecution in the Smith Act trial. Always, or almost always, sycophants are not adequately equipped to withstand great social pressures from a rotten, desperate ruling class or caste. "The man is the method."

The following incidents are in the category of "events without history":

E.G. Robins on
I recall a picnic at which Cde. Trotsky informed us of a visit by a very famous Hollywood actor, who had come to Mexico to talk with him. The actor asserted that he was a partisan of Trotsky's political viewpoint. He brought with him a movie projector, a screen and many reels of films in which he had been the "star". Upon his insistence, Cde. Trotsky permitted him to show his films. I recall his laughter as he described the scene. The "political partisan" showed no interest in discussing any political question. Evidently, Trotsky had allowed this unusual "discussion" meeting in the hope that the actor might, perhaps, be of use to our party organization in the US.

As Trotsky humorously observed, the American actor had, "conducted himself throughout the visit as a

small boy might, a self-centered small boy, whose interests were active and focused only on his 'art', his situation as an actor and on related matters".

How is one to understand such conduct--this choice of "discussion" materials by a prominent person meeting with "his" revolutionary, political "leader"?!

One must assume that there really was a degree of political interest of an unknown and unregistered intensity, which made the famous actor desire to meet with Trotsky. Nevertheless, the political impulse was absolutely stifled. It was as if the actor was pulled by two conflicting impulses. He repressed the political one because he could only hold the spotlight as an important personage so long as he talked about his "art". It is clear that a discussion on political matters would have transformed him into a listener, a small person. "The man is the method".

[I must express here my personal gratitude to this famous actor.] He obviously left a great and lasting impression on aspiring thugs and gangsters everywhere for three decades. Almost universally, these gentlemen go through their entire careers patterning their public mannerisms on the screen portrayals by this actor of the Great American Gangster, determined to be considered thugs and "toughs".

Only recently, I was involved in a "political" meeting, in which, in the course of the discussion, a "political leader" responded to a calm, objective criticism of his recent "international report" by cursing me roundly and informing me, at some distance, that "we" would "break your fucking nose, if you ever come back to our headquarters again". Except for Stalinists, fascists and Lovestonites, I had never before seen a political person choose the stage manners of the actor-visitor to Trotsky's home in Mexico, in more than 40 years in the revolutionary movement.

At another meeting, a less narcissistic, more serious "political partisan" of Trotsky's held a discus-

sion with him. Trotsky gave an account of this visit from "a young, British professor of political economy" in his article, "A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition in the Socialist Workers Party", in illustration and defense of dialectical materialism.

As Trotsky relates it, the visitor, "suddenly expressed the tendencies of British utilitarianism in the spirit of Keynes and others". Said Trotsky, "I see that you are an adversary of dialectics." Astonished, the visitor admitted that he, "didn't see any use in it". Trotsky replied, "However, the dialectic enabled me on the basis of a few of your observations upon economic problems to determine what category of philosophical thought you belonged to-- this alone shows that there is an appreciable value in the dialectic."

Picture the situation: the obviously eclectic pattern of this admirer of Keynes, whose theories are embodied in current "statist" capitalist practices by European and American imperialism, who is, at one and the same time, a partisan of the politics of the greatist Marxist revolutionary theoretician of the period! Such confusion!

Cde. Trotsky decided to shift the focus of the discussion away from the deep faith of his visitor in Keynesian economics to the field of philosophical methodology. Had Trotsky tried to explain to his visitor that Marxist politics rests on Marxist economics, his instincts to "defend to the death" his faith in this economic theory would have been aroused. The professional economist was, after all, only an amateurish political, who was under the mistaken impression that he was in political agreement with Trotsky.

I arrived in Mexico some time after this interview, heard Cde. Trotsky discuss it, and then read the printed version published in In Defense of Marxism. I asked one of the secretaries, or it may have been Cde. Trotsky himself, who the professor was. I was informed, in confidence, that the man was a very highly placed leader of the British Labor Party, but not a government official.

This "partisan" of Trotsky found no difficulty in supporting the Tory-Labor Party World War II coalition government which British imperialism had set up to defend it against the military onslaught of German imperialism under Hitler. This politician also supported the Labor government's post war policy of wage-price freeze designed to permit British capitalism rebuild its capital through the most intensive exploitation of British and colonial working people possible.

[Marxists characterize the political instability of people such as this professor as petty-bourgeois or middle class because they seek a political niche somewhere between the two basic classes in modern capitalist society.] In reality, they reject a revolutionary proletarian point of view, which calls for the overthrow of capitalism. They seek, instead, to win reforms and improvements for working people.

The more serious petty-bourgeois revolutionaries, during the political struggle of 1939-40, had a vastly different program than did the petty-bourgeois British professor of political economy. The political course of the revisionists took them from the program of revolutionary Marxism toward the ruling class. But, in 1939-40, this movement was only beginning. Their dominant leader, James Burnham, left them abruptly within days after they had split from us politically. Their other prominent leader, Max Shachtman, took a decade and a half to arrive at his present right-wing socialist posture.

In that sharp factional struggle, Cde. Trotsky still kept the door open to the leaders and followers of the "petty-bourgeois opposition" for a corrective turn back towards Bolshevism. Said Trotsky,

"the following question can be posed: If the opposition is a petty-bourgeois tendency, does that signify further unity is impossible? Then how reconcile the petty-bourgeois tendency with the proletarian? To pose the question like this means to judge one-

sidedly, undialectically and thus falsely. In the present discussion, the opposition has clearly manifested its petty-bourgeois features. But this does not mean that the opposition has no other features. The majority of the members of the opposition are deeply devoted to the cause of the proletariat and are capable of learning. Tied today to a petty-bourgeois milieu, they can tomorrow tie themselves to the proletariat. The inconsistent ones, under the influence of experience, can become more consistent. When the party embraces thousands of workers, even the professional factionalists can re-educate themselves in the spirit of proletarian discipline. It is necessary to give them time for this. That is why Comrade Cannon's proposal to keep the discussion free from any threats of split, expulsions, etc., was absolutely correct and in place." (A Petty-Bourgeois Opposition In the SWP - my emphasis)

The variety of personality types who move onto and off the revolutionary stage is the product of internal conflicts produced by contemporary developments. If one were to measure such personalities on a scale, we would find, at one pole, indomitable figures, a Karl Marx, a Frederick Engels, a Rosa Luxemburg, a Lenin and a Trotsky. They can be counted on the fingers of one hand. At the other pole are found those "free" individuals whose dominant characteristics are self-indulgence and arrogance. These are the poseurs and self-proclaimed geniuses who offer "sure-fire" nostrums for overthrowing imperialist capitalism. Between these poles, the rest of us would fit somehow.

For Marxists, every approach to understanding social phenomena and its laws, lies in a study of the changes which take place in the course of development. The outstanding Marxists, as do the rest of us, begin life as infants who, in order to survive, must of necessity demand all sorts of personal services and considerations. But

what are we to say about adults who demand all sorts of personal services and considerations as "political leaders" of sects?

In his autobiography, Cde. Trotsky says, if memory serves, that it is necessary for a revolutionist to subordinate his own personal interests to that of the movement. Today's political arena is "loused up" by personal sects, with "leaders" whose demands for considerations are of a character and scale which indicate that they have not yet outgrown their infantile patterns.

In ordinary times, as distinct from periods of revolutionary crisis, infantile patterns are found among a majority of the population in highly developed capitalist societies. The alienation of individuals from society has its roots in the "fetishism of commodities", i.e., where the relations between people are expressed as relations between things. It is hardly a secret that the method of thinking and frame of reference of the great Marxists differed markedly from the norm. They were able to liberate themselves from this fetishism because they understood and could employ the dialectical materialist method, could evaluate all developments from the viewpoint of the materialistic conception of history. Taking the long range view of things, they subordinated all episodic "advantages" to the great liberating socio-economic-political outlook of Marxism. "The man is the method" here also.

The question arises, "How does it happen that people who are revolutionaries at one period, sometimes turn into muddle-heads at another, or even worse, become agents of rotten ruling classes or castes?"

(The individual in the revolutionary movement is subject to pressures, not only from his own class and the class enemy but also, from the intermediate social layers who, having no separate historic interests of their own, are torn between support for one or the other polar class.) The consciousness of this petty-bourgeois stratum is focused on episodic situations and can rarely achieve the broad historic perspec-

tive of Marxism.

The actor-would be revolutionary was unable to discuss revolutionary problems with Trotsky or to become a revolutionary, because his dominant trait was an insatiable drive to hold the leading place on the stage. This drive, the instrument of his success as an actor, a distinct carry-over from his infancy became transformed from an instrument of his development to an obstacle, later in life.

The young professor had achieved a certain social status as a very intelligent "radical" Labor Party leader. He too found the instrument of his development too powerful an obstacle to overcome in the historic social conditions. The outstanding Marxists, such as Marx, could stand alone if necessary--and it was necessary--while lesser figures, sooner or later, in whole or in part, conformed to the norms and standards

of a rotting society. It is these exceptional products of social development who are capable of giving revolutionary leadership to the workers who represent future society.

Dependent people--in groupings of dependent individuals, the leaders are dependent upon the followers--are unable to take the required tactical advantage of crisis turns and situations to mobilize the working masses for the seizure of power and the socialist transformation of society. People who have not trained themselves for the historic task of leading a social revolution, either follow others with blind faith, become frightfully disoriented and confused, or even go over to the class enemy, when their dominant personality patterns and methods are unable to cope with rapidly changing crisis conditions. Confusion, hysterics and disorientation appear as manifestations of social law.

THE LABOR PARTY - Part III

Reformist or Revolutionary?

Shachtman's inability to understand Trotsky on the labor party underscored his break with the dialectical materialist method of Marxism.

Although to the "left" of Trotsky on this question, the pragmatism which he then expressed as doubt, foreshadowed his subsequent departure from revolutionary Marxism and his subsequent evolution toward the State Department "socialism" of the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation.

How could Trotsky "reconcile" his positions of not being in favor of the creation of a reformist labor party, of posing the transitional program in the trade unions as the basic program for the labor party, with support for trade union affiliation to Labor's Non-Partisan League (LNPL). The latter organization, while nominally independent, had been created by the CIO leadership in order to channel labor votes to Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.

Why should the Trotskyists, asks Shachtman, lend their support to a labor party--for which little sentiment existed in the trade unions--

which can only be "a reformist, purely parliamentary party."

Cannon also found it difficult to understand how Trotsky could explain "a revolutionary labor party." Did not this position contradict the previous assertions of the American Trotskyists, that "the SWP is the only revolutionary party..."? The capitulation of Cannon, a quarter of a century later, together with the rest of the SWP leadership, to the revisionism of Pablo--to the pragmatic view of the "new" realities of the "third world" and of Castro Bonapartist substitutes for working class revolutions led by vanguard parties--was thus also foreshadowed.

It is indeed difficult to understand the projected labor party as anything other than reformist, if one approaches the objective and subjective factors involved in a metaphysical fashion, as an isolated question in a static situation.

The workers are politically back-

ward and dominated by reactionary labor fakers and opportunists. The revolutionary Marxists, only a handful, influence, as yet, a very few advanced workers. Isn't it obvious, will argue the metaphysically inclined revolutionist, that a labor party organized under these conditions will inevitably become a reformist shield for the ruling class, and an obstacle to the future radicalization of the workers?

Revolutionists who think in this manner disclose their inability to understand development, even though they may identify themselves as dialectical materialists. True, they foresee a social crisis for capitalism, as its economic and political contradictions sharpen, and a resulting qualitative leap in working class consciousness. But, they are unable to understand, and cannot, therefore, play a role in the process by which quantitative accumulations are, at a critical point, transformed into quality. At best, they understand process academically and abstractly. Dialectical laws are "told" as are rosary beads.

In practice also, they tend to declaim revolutionary principles in propagandist fashion from outside on-going struggles. They invite the workers to leave the profane organizations to which they belong, and to join new, inviolate, and often still to be formed organizations.

The National Caucus of Labor Committees' (LC) schema for "cross-union caucuses" as embryonic Soviets is typical of the genre. These "caucuses" are not formed within the unions as a movement of the rank and file under revolutionary leadership. They do not pose an alternative program and leadership in a struggle against the "labor lieutenants of the bourgeoisie". These "caucuses" "will be" new "class-for-itself" organizations of students, members of the "community" and, hopefully, no longer "parochially" inclined trade unionists. The LC also, and understandably, opposes the labor party as no longer "relevant" today.

As we have shown, in 1938, Trotsky did not propose the labor party as a universally applicable tactic.

As did Marx, Engels and Lenin before him, he took into account the concrete objective and subjective conditions which obtained as a result of the preceding historical development. Trotsky considered the nature and political level of the labor movement, the relationship to it of the revolutionary socialists, and, in general, the shifting economic, social and political conjuncture.

True to the dialectical method, he also took into account, not only the immediate political exigencies in the US, but the nature of the historical epoch and the interaction of the US with the rest of the world.

World capitalism in decline in the inter-war years, with the aid of the Stalinist and Social-Democratic counter-revolutionary parties, was again, and on a larger scale, preparing a catastrophe for humanity. Fascism and world slaughter were the "solutions" to which decaying capitalism was driven in defense of its outlived mode of production, against the masses whose struggles threatened its existence.

In the US, the "New Deal" of the Roosevelt Democratic Party was increasingly demonstrating its impotence in dealing with the capitalist crisis. The 1937 "recession" followed the great depression of 1929-33 without an intervening boom. Not until the outbreak of the second World War was "prosperity" to return.

Some sectarians have not been able to understand what Trotsky meant, when he stated in The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International, the "Transitional Program", that even "'minimal' demands", demands for reforms, which "clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism" can have a transitional significance in the hands of the revolutionary Marxists.

The manifestations of the crisis of world capitalism--unemployment, halting production, slashing of the values of invested capital, dumping and destruction of goods, of use values which have lost much of their exchange value; the sharpening struggle between classes and within the capitalist class over the share

of a shrinking national income; intensified repression, the preparation for and the waging of predatory wars--enable the revolutionists to reach the workers with their socialist message. Transitional demands, such as workers' control of production, a sliding scale of wages and hours ("30 for 40") and a program of public works to end unemployment, allow the revolutionists to relate the daily struggle of the workers, "the movement of the present", to the "future of that movement", in the Communist Manifesto's words, enable them to show, more than ever before, that:

"the bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class...because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery."

The agitation of the Trotskyists for a labor party based on the unions has the same rationale. If reformist solutions are no longer possible under present objective conditions, then the revolutionists who fight in the trade unions to make the transitional program the program of the labor party, can succeed--aided by the red-hot poker of history--in raising the consciousness of the workers to the necessary level, not only to defeat the bureaucrats, but to go beyond transitional demands to the program of the revolutionary vanguard party, to the socialist revolution.

A new prosperity, said Trotsky, would "postpone the question of the labor party". While its "whole propagandist importance" would not be lost, its acuteness would be.

The post-war period of world capitalist expansion did indeed cause the labor party proposal to lose its immediate agitational importance. But that expansion is now at an end. The Nixon Administration's embrace of Keynesianism may, perhaps, produce an episodic improvement in the US business cycle. However, world capitalism, and the American capitalism which is its most important single component, is now declining. The "destructive and degrading ten-

dencies" again make the labor party demand acutely relevant in the US.

But, will object the insistent advocates of an immediately revolutionary mass workers' party, even a small revolutionary Marxist party as was the SWP, does not now exist. Without it, would not the business unionists and other reformists be certain to maintain a strangle hold on the labor party?

To the extent that the revolutionists do not function in the "movement of the present", ignore the stage at which the labor movement is at, propagandize for socialism from the outside, but do not provide a "bridge" between present struggles and the socialist future, the revolutionary Marxist party will not be built, and the bureaucrats and reformists will confine the movement to the politics acceptable to the bourgeoisie--in labor party form as well.

The workers instinctively strive to go beyond bourgeois parties, to unite their isolated economic struggles to a political struggle. The increasing apathy of workers toward the Democratic Party, and even the receptivity to the Wallace movement by many "blue collar" workers, are expressions of the increasing need for the working class to enter the political arena as an independent force. To the extent that a political outlet is not provided which can enable it to place its class weight on the scales--in defense of its living standards to start with--the fighting spirit of the organized workers, visible to all today, can only become dissipated, can only be replaced by demoralization.

The ultimatic posing of a mass revolutionary party as against a labor party based on the trade unions, is, in reality, only another "militant inaction slogan", another way of telling the workers not to enter the political arena at this time, to wait for an ideal party to be constructed.

But, in advocating a transitional program for the labor party in the unions, will not the revolutionists be placed in the position of hiding part of their program, will ask our

persistent opponents?

This was really the question which both Shachtman and Cannon were asking, and which Trotsky patiently answered.

The revolutionists do not hide their views. (Assuming, of course, that conditions on the job and in the union permit them to function openly as revolutionists. Obviously, under certain conditions, they might have to work clandestinely.) They make clear, "without any camouflage, without any diplomacy", that they represent a revolutionary vanguard party, which they consider the "only revolutionary party". However, in recognition of the fact that the workers' movement is not at a stage at which a mass workers' party can be organized on their program, they propose, as a beginning and a big step forward, that a mass party be built, based on the unions, with the program of transitional demands as its program. (The transitional

program would, of course, be presented concretely, and as occasion arose to demonstrate the relevance and timeliness of its specific demands.)

It is this program which they are pledged to support, as elected delegates from the unions to the labor party. They refuse to support either the reformist program or the bourgeois candidates which the bureaucrats and reformists will try to fasten onto the party. They also oppose attempts to "broaden" the party's base to include the liberal bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie.

Through a principled struggle of this kind for the labor party, the revolutionary Marxists are able to root themselves in the working class.

This is the way in which the vanguard party can be built, which alone can lead the American workers to the successful accomplishment of the socialist revolution.

TROTSKYISM TODAY - Part V

The 1966 IC London Conference and Its Aftermath

Its participants expected that the April 1966 London Conference of the International Committee (IC) of the Fourth International would record the reconstruction of a center of international revolutionary Marxism.

Instead, its proceedings became a source of malicious glee and heartfelt relief to enemies of Trotskyism, in general, and to the revisionists of Trotskyism in the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, in particular, as Joseph Hansen bears witness in his preface to the pamphlet, Healy "Reconstructs" the Fourth International.

[The bulk of this pamphlet's contents, containing the correspondence of members of Spartacist, the American Committee for the Fourth International (ACFI) and Gerry Healy, the secretary of the IC, had been leaked to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) through a sympathizer by the leader of Spartacist, James Robertson. After its publication, the pamphlet became a "best-seller", not only with the SWP but also, with the Spartacist League. Robertson was indeed, as delighted to follow the

lead of Hansen in treating the Conference as a hilarious farce, as he was in utilizing Hansen's agile pen in defending his behavior at that Conference.]

The pamphlet also contained a letter by this writer and Robert Sherwood dated April 10, 1966, to Gerry Healy in response to one of his.

In it, Robertson's conduct at the Conference was hotly defended and Healy's--in the cases of both Voix Ouvrière and Robertson--attacked. [By January 10, 1969, this writer had concluded that this, "defense of Robertson...was entirely in error".]

Joseph Hansen, Robertson's self-appointed defense counsel, is aghast that an "exhausted" Robertson, who is "near collapse" can be summarily ordered to return to a session of the Conference. What abominable bureaucratic brutality!! [But, a careful examination of all the facts

in the affair Robertson presents an entirely different picture. Robertson, whatever his state of health prior to the Conference, was tired, and with good reason. He had lost a night's sleep in a last minute effort at whipping together a draft document which was to be the basis upon which the Spartacist and ACFI groups were to be united, and which he should have completed months earlier. But that doesn't end the matter.

On the third day of the Conference, Robertson had presented his divergent views, including his position on Cuba, for the first time before a world gathering of co-thinkers. But he, evidently, did not consider it worthwhile to stay for the afternoon session, in which delegates were able to react to the reports and exchange views. No! Robertson decided that this would be the ideal time for a nap! When awakened by another Spartacist delegate with a request to attend the Conference session, he bluntly refused to bestir himself and returned to sleep.

Is it any wonder then, that his demeanor was found to be arrogant and disrespectful to the Conference?

Ah! But there were the other delegates from Spartacist, reported one of its delegates, Rose J. Let us examine them.

In addition to Rose J., the other delegates were Liz G. and Mark T. Liz G. was a young college student, at that time without a responsible position in the organization. Mark T. was a relative new-comer to the organization, who was functioning as an alternative delegate only because he happened to be in England attending graduate school. While Rose J. had been a politically inactive member of Spartacist for some time. She had attended the Conference as a delegate, only because it suited her plans while on a prolonged visit to the European continent.

Gerry Healy's remark in his letter to Turner and Sherwood that the, "relations within the delegation resembled that of a clique", was an apt characterization of the group.

Without Robertson's presence, the delegates from other sections who

wished to respond to Spartacist's positions, would have been, in effect, talking to themselves, and Robertson, who is not burdened with false modesty, was well aware of it. Although "tired", he was certainly in good enough health to have attended the afternoon session, if he had felt it "worthwhile"

We, at home, were dumbfounded by the news of Robertson's expulsion from the Conference. It was the last thing we had expected.

(With the prospects for unity with ACFI gone glimmering, one could have expected that Robertson, on returning home, would have first called a meeting of the Spartacist Regional Editorial Board (REB)--in reality, the political committee of the national organization--to give it an account of his activities, and to plan future strategy. After all, Spartacist prided itself in being a "democratic centralist" organization! But no! Instead, Robertson called a special meeting of the NYC local organization to hear his report.)

In the course of a five-part report, lasting almost 3 hours, the audience was also informed of an incident of which his attorney, Joseph Hansen, had not been told. [It seems that just prior to his expulsion, Robertson and the rest of the Spartacist delegation, had been called to a special meeting with Healy and Mike Banda of the Socialist Labour League (SLL). They had, at that time, offered "to work something out". It was Robertson who refused to consider a rapprochement, who "just wanted to get out of there".] Somewhat amazed, and not quite certain that I had heard him correctly, I cross-questioned him and was again informed that it was, indeed, Robertson who had made the decision to break off relations with the IC. Only after that, did Healy call for his expulsion from the Conference.

Thus, a vitally needed unity of revolutionary Marxists in the US was sacrificed, and a black eye handed to a world conference of Trotskyists, with whom Spartacist was in essential political agreement, all because Robertson had decided

that he would not be comfortable in the same international with Healy or anyone else with authority, who was able to see through his pretensions as a "revolutionary leader".

It was then that I moved the following three part resolution, which was defeated by a vote of 14 to 1:

(1) To criticize Cde. Robertson for withholding a suitable apology for not attending a session of the IC Conference--an apology which would have been of a principled character.

(2) To request the REB to reopen unity negotiations with the SLL and ACFI immediately on the basis of political agreement between the groups and on the basis that a break with the SLL and ACFI would be harmful nationally and internationally.

(3) To request the REB to place account of the conference and differences in "Spartacist" and other published material in the mildest manner possible and indicating confidence that the misunderstanding will be bridged and unity consummated in the spirit of the reopened unity negotiations.

I was convinced, at that time, that Robertson and Healy were equally to blame for the jettisoned unity, which might well have heralded the re-birth of a strong revolutionary Marxist organization in the US, with all that it entailed internationally.

Under the circumstances, I saw no alternative to remaining in Spartacist, and attempting to build that organization into the working class vanguard party which the American and international working class required. It was almost 2½ years later, that it finally became quite clear that Robertson had no intention of building such a vanguard party. Robertson's perspective was limited to the acquisition of a small student personality cult.

But the "form" which Gerry Healy had chosen to disclose Robertson's "essence" had again, as in 1962, given him an organizational cover. Then, it was the unalterable statement, which could not be voted upon,

but only signed. Now, it was an "apology" by Robertson for his arrogant attitude toward the Conference.

In addition, the organizational maneuvering with Voix Ouvrière, who should not have been invited to the Conference, in the first place, given the existing political differences, also tended to provide Robertson with useful organizational camouflage.

Had the unity gone through, would "Robertson have had a charter...with which he could do as he pleased...excluding the politics of the International except those aspects with which he had particular agreement", as Healy believed?

Perhaps, but then the battle would have taken place on clear political issues. In the process of seeing how Robertson worked to carry out the "politics of the International", a great deal more would have been learned about his character and personality by his close associates, some of whom were serious about building a section of an international working class vanguard party in the US.

The founding conference of the Spartacist League (SL), which was held September 1966 in Chicago, was able to record a membership of more than 80. A tiny number, true, when compared with the thousands in the US Communist Party, but not quite so insignificant, even when compared with the SWP of that time.

However, the SL was a basically unhealthy organism, whose decay was inevitable and soon to accelerate. Its self-identification as a not-yet viable "propaganda group" revealed a lack of perspective, which was most "visible" in its erratic press.

From that point onward, the SL began to fall apart as, first individuals, and then groups, became convinced that despite its correct political positions, it had no future as a revolutionary organization.

A year after the founding conference Robertson was to seize eagerly upon the "Memorandum on the Negro Struggle, which had been submitted by this writer in an attempt to shore up the organization.

(to be continued)