

THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY 1960-1988

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**VOLUME 1: THE SIXTIES**  
**A POLITICAL MEMOIR**

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**BARRY SHEPPARD**

 *resistance books*

### DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Farrell Dobbs (1907-83), worker organizer and leader, revolutionary politician, central leader of the Socialist Workers Party. Selfless, incorruptible, fair-minded and warm human being and friend.

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## PREFACE

In the past few years, a new movement has emerged worldwide to challenge capitalist globalization and war, particularly the war on Iraq and the unending “war on terrorism” that Washington unleashed after September 11, 2001. The young activists in this movement are becoming aware that what they are fighting is the drive by the rich capitalist countries to preserve and extend their world domination economically, politically and militarily. It has also become increasingly clear to them that the US government, with bipartisan support, intends to assert unchallenged supremacy among the advanced capitalist countries, to establish, in effect, a new empire encompassing the entire globe.

Those in the active core of this new movement are seeking to increase their understanding of the enemy they face, and are debating the strategies and tactics to use. Many of them are naturally curious about the movements of the last wave of radicalism in the Sixties, especially the anti-Vietnam-War movement, the Black struggle for civil rights and liberation, and the women’s movement. This volume looks back at that time with an eye to the future. Hopefully that past experience, both in the United States and internationally, will be of use to the new generation of fighters.

Among these activists some will come to the conclusion that it is the capitalist system itself that is the fundamental problem hindering progress, and even threatening the survival of humanity. They will want to explore alternatives, to demand that “Another world is possible!” Many will be drawn to socialism and the need for a socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism.

I believed in the Sixties, and I still believe today, that the key to achieving the socialist objective is building a mass-based revolutionary socialist party. Of course conditions are not yet ripe for such a mass revolutionary party to take hold here. However, a basis can be prepared today by socialists joining together in the nucleus of such a party. They can participate as socialist builders of mass movements such as the antiwar movement, or antiracist struggles, or union fights for worker rights. Such movements point the way toward socialism. Socialists can educate themselves about

the history and lessons of the working class movement, and publish and distribute literature about current struggles, connecting them with lessons from past victories and defeats. Their knowledge and experience can be very useful within the mass movements and win others to the ideas of socialism.

This book discusses the struggle to build such a nucleus of a revolutionary socialist party, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s — a period of deep radicalization in the United States and throughout the world.

Most of today's young activists have probably never heard of the SWP or even seen its newspaper, *The Militant*. They do not usually run into the SWP at protest actions because the SWP of today generally abstains or is present only to sell its literature. Of those who have encountered the SWP many probably do not have a positive impression of the party. They may see it as an inconsequential ideological sect, one which cares little about or is even hostile to the struggles that inspire these activists.

Their impression is not wrong; but that is not the whole story. The SWP in the 1960s and 1970s was an important and influential group on the American left, with a great deal to admire and with a proud tradition of working class struggle going back to the 1930s.

I was a national leader of the SWP from the 1960s through the mid-1980s. I intend to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of that history. This volume, covering the 1960s and early 1970s, will relate the mostly positive experiences of that great radicalization. A second volume, covering the years 1973-1988 will take up the decline of the radicalization, which also saw the decline and finally the degeneration of the SWP.

Of course, the situation in the world and in the US today is very different from "The Sixties." The USSR still existed then, which had both positive and negative effects on the struggle for socialism and national liberation. On the positive side, the existence of the Soviet bloc held in check Washington's drive to dominate the world. The USSR also gave material support to national liberation struggles, however miserly and with strings attached. But it also was led by a brutal totalitarian bureaucratic elite that crushed the workers and peasants. Its policies worldwide set back the socialist movement. The struggle against Stalinism in the US and internationally necessarily forms a major part of this book.

Today, Stalinism is discredited, and is no longer the obstacle it was. The existence of a sole superpower intent on dominating the world is the new reality we face. In this new reality, the project of building a nucleus of socialists that have as their objective the eventual formation of a mass revolutionary socialist party cannot be a repeat or



replica of the SWP in “The Sixties,” which was formed by that organization’s previous history and the circumstances it faced in the radicalization of the time.

Nevertheless, there are important lessons for the present and future in the experience of the SWP that are covered in this volume and will be in the next. I hope to convey those lessons to the new generation of today.



I call this book a “political memoir” for two reasons. First is to distinguish it from a personal memoir or autobiography. By necessity, I have included experiences from my personal life in order to give sense to the narrative, but I haven’t tried to tell my whole life history. My personal life was not unique. I was like hundreds of thousands of young people who radicalized in the Sixties. Relating the details wouldn’t add much to understanding this aspect of my generation that hasn’t already been written.

The second reason I use the term “political memoir” is that I have not attempted to write a history of the SWP. Many aspects of that history are left out or abbreviated. However, the fact that I was a central leader of the SWP for most of this time means that telling my own political story also covers much of that history.

The book is also not a history of world and national politics and the movements in which we participated. I do provide a rough sketch of this background; otherwise my story would be unintelligible. I have also left out, in the main, the cultural changes that marked those times, except where they impinged on revolutionary politics. For example, I don’t really take up the drug culture, the attempts to set up communes, what was referred to as the counter-culture, and the changes in popular music that affected so many young people at the time. I do discuss the sexual revolution and some other cultural aspects of the Sixties, but not to the degree that these subjects would deserve in a general history of the period.

In the period I cover, the changes in political and social consciousness also brought about changes in language. In the early 1960s, for example, most Black people called themselves Negroes. But with the development of Black consciousness, the terms Black or Afro-American gained preference, and the term Negro came to be discarded as a symbol of the subservience to whites which Black people were rejecting. Writing today, I use the preferred terms Black and African American in this book, except in quotations from earlier times.

Similarly, with the rise of feminism women challenged the sexist language commonly used in the past, as illustrated in terms such as “chairman” or “mankind.” So, in this book I try to use words like “chairperson” or “humanity” except when quoting from documents or speeches of that earlier time, or when a term such as

“national chairman” was a person’s official title at the time, even if the person was female.

During the anticommunist witch-hunt of the 1950s and early 1960s, it was common for party members to use pseudonyms when they wrote articles or gave speeches. This was a precaution to protect their jobs, or for similar reasons. Later in the 1960s, however, as the witch-hunt was beaten back, most people no longer felt the need to use pseudonyms. In this book I generally use real names. But I do this only for comrades who have died, who were publicly known by their real names, or who have given me permission to do so.

I use two types of notes. Numbered endnotes refer to sources and are found at the back of the volume listed by chapter. Footnotes contain material of an analytical or historical character associated with the text. I hope that the reader will find these useful, but it may be convenient to skip over them at first rather than impede the flow of the narrative.

*October 2004*

# 1. HOW I CAME TO JOIN THE SWP

My first political thoughts were inspired by my parents. My father, B. Ford Sheppard, was from a large clan of Sheppards from England who had settled in southern New Jersey in 1681. Pop had gone to medical school with his identical twin brother, Muse. They both aimed to become doctors like their father. But while his twin did become a doctor, my father was drawn to art. Knowing the difficulty of making a living as an artist in the Great Depression of the 1930s, he moved to northern New Jersey to attend Newark State Teachers College, and became an art teacher at the high school in Millburn, N.J. He continued to draw, paint and sculpt well into his seventies.

Mom, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Hoedemaker, was from Dutch stock. Her father ran a small business delivering meat to delicatessens in the greater Newark area. She had a very sharp mind for numbers, and could calculate faster in her head than anyone I have ever known. But my grandfather was opposed to women going to college. So, Mom went to business school instead. She became a crack secretary in a chemical plant until she met Ford; she remained a housewife after their marriage in 1936.

My parents were Democrats who supported President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal reforms, favored labor unions, opposed racism and the Jim Crow system in the South, and opposed fascism abroad and at home. My father voted Socialist in 1936.

My family was one of the few in our neighborhood that stayed friendly with a German-American family during the Second World War. We lived in a staunchly Republican town. One of my early political memories is of almost getting beaten up in the school playground during the 1948 presidential elections because I supported the Democratic candidate, President Truman. I had just turned eleven.

In our household, I learned about the horrors of the holocaust and other Nazi atrocities. I became ardently opposed to anti-Semitism, and felt a kinship with the Jews. My mother learned from relatives about the anti-Nazi resistance in Holland. She told me about how the Nazis would line up prominent people in a town after a

resistance fighter assassinated an occupier, and begin to shoot them unless someone turned in the guilty party. People who were caught with radios had their eardrums pierced. Many ordinary citizens, including some of my relatives, hid Jews in their homes, which could result in their own deaths.

When I was ten, my mother gave me a slim book that had a profound impact. It was John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. I didn't know it at the time, but this book was the first widely available report on the horrors unleashed by the atomic bombs that Washington dropped on Japan in August 1945. I became fearful of atomic war, and had vivid recurring nightmares of menacing silver bombs in the sky, of atomic bombs exploding over New York City, with the resulting explosion rolling over the Orange Mountains into our town of Livingston, New Jersey, some 20 miles west of New York. As the Cold War deepened and became a hot war in Korea, the danger of atomic war intensified and I remember often talking about it with a boyhood friend in the early 1950s.

The explosion of the first hydrogen bomb by the Soviet Union in 1953 set back Washington's war plans; but the nuclear arms race intensified, and that increased my concern.

I was not only afraid of atomic war, however. I wanted to do something against it. I began to read Bertrand Russell's essays and books warning of the catastrophe that nuclear war would bring. I resisted the pro-atom-bomb chauvinism and anticommunism that was being whipped up. I saw the futility of the campaigns to build bomb shelters, and the stupidity of the atom bomb drills in school, where we were instructed to hide under our desks to protect us in the event of an atomic war.

I became an atheist when I was twelve. One night in bed I was thinking about belief in God, when I suddenly saw that there was no justification for this belief in my experience, that it was just faith unsupported by evidence. The next day I excitedly shared this discovery with a boy I thought might share my view. We talked about it for days. So I became immune to one aspect of the anticommunist crusade, the Bible-thumping denunciations of "atheistic communism."

The term "atheist" doesn't adequately describe what I believed, however. It is a negative term, literally meaning "not a theist," that is, someone who does not believe in a god or gods. I was certainly that. But the term doesn't convey what I did come to believe in, which was the wonderful, intricate, immense and beautiful — and sometimes horrible and terrifying — real universe revealed by our senses and reasoning. I knew that humanity also had both noble and base sides.

My interest in astronomy was first piqued at age seven when my mother gave me a children's book called *The Wonders of the Heavens*. My father reinforced this interest, pointing out the magnificence of the night sky, with all the stars and constellations.

Since that time, I am awed whenever I look up at the stars, or view them through a telescope, or pore over the wonderful pictures provided by the great telescopes. I also spent many hours playing with a chemistry set.

At home, my father painted, and did woodcarving and sculpture. So, I was always around art, and tried my hand at it too. Every year Pop would make a woodcarving on a block of hardwood. My younger brothers and I would ink it and then print our own Christmas cards. Later, we would carve and print our own cards from linoleum. Even when I was quite young, my father would take me to New York City to see the art museums, especially the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan. We would also go to the Museum of Natural History and the Hayden Planetarium.

In my adolescence, these interests widened to include literature and poetry, classical music, mathematics and other sciences. I built my own “High Fidelity” phonograph, a telescope, and a short-wave radio, and I had an interest in tinkering with gadgets of various types.

I began listening to Radio Moscow, which sent out very strong signals on a number of frequencies. I was struck with the almost diametrically opposed news reporting on the nightly network news shows and Radio Moscow. During the Korean War, the networks would claim that the US was winning victory after victory, while Radio Moscow would announce that the US forces were suffering defeats. One occurrence sticks in my mind. The six o’clock news reported that the US had shot down two Soviet-built MIG fighters over Korea, while Radio Moscow reported two American jets were shot down that day.

The anticommunist witch-hunt of the 1950s and early 60s was part of the political environment as I became a teenager. Truman initiated the witch-hunt in 1947 in a secret directive to carry out an investigation of the loyalty to the United States of all federal government employees. In the same year his administration issued the Attorney General’s list of so-called “subversive” organizations. Membership in or even having ever been around any of these groups could lead to being fired from your job, or harassed in other ways. The anticommunist witch-hunting committees in the House and Senate stepped up their activities.

Many people accused of being associated with the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party or any of the nearly 100 other groups on the Attorney General’s list were hauled before these committees where they were pressured to “name names” of other sinners. Some, including prominent people, were sent to jail for contempt of Congress when they refused to cooperate. Others refused to testify on the grounds of the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution. This amendment, which declares that people cannot be forced to testify against themselves, is part of the Bill of Rights that

was won as a consequence of the First American Revolution — the War of Independence from Britain. Those who exercised their Fifth Amendment rights were branded “Fifth Amendment Communists.”

As the witch-hunt deepened it came to be known as McCarthyism, after Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, the head of the Senate’s Internal Security Subcommittee, who became the witch-hunt’s most aggressive advocate and leader. Protected by legislative immunity against charges of slander, he opened fire on the Democratic administration — the very ones who started the anticommunist scare in the first place. He denounced the State Department for having allowed itself to be infiltrated by communists and thus “losing China” to the Chinese revolution which took power in that country in 1949.

The Democratic Party liberals responded in kind, passing draconian anticommunist legislation that severely limited civil liberties. Prominent liberal Democrat Hubert Humphrey co-authored a law that provided for setting up prison camps for subversives in the event of an emergency. The FBI created a list of people they would arrest and intern in those camps without charges or trial. Later I would be honored by being placed on that list.

Several Communist Party leaders were imprisoned under the infamous Smith Act, which made advocacy of so-called subversive ideas a federal crime. The Smith Act had been passed into law in 1940 and was first used against the Socialist Workers Party in 1941 because of the SWP’s antiwar positions. The Communist Party, which had supported use of the Smith Act against the SWP, now bore the brunt of the witch-hunt. But all labor and socialist organizations were affected. The cancer permeated every aspect of society, including churches and Hollywood.

Militant unionists were driven out of the labor movement by the increasingly right-wing labor bureaucracy with the help of the government. J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI infiltrated and tried to disrupt any group considered communist or simply too liberal. Most Black groups were on Hoover’s hit list.

During my junior and senior years of high school we all had to take special Citizenship courses (my friends and I derided them as “Citizenshit”). These courses aimed to indoctrinate us with the belief that capitalism was the best possible system, and socialism and communism were the worst. We were taught that it was natural that rich people should run the country and the world: they had to be the smartest people or they wouldn’t be rich. Unions were suspect and strikes even more so. The American two-party system was the pinnacle of political achievement. Anyone who questioned any of this was taken to be a subversive who deserved to be fired, imprisoned or worse.

Once, my high school teacher took the class period to denounce the Soviet Union for daring to fire on a US plane. This was during the Korean War, and the US fighter had strayed close to the Soviet border. I calculated that the US plane was three minutes from crossing the border, and I stood up and said so. I asked the teacher, "What would happen if a Soviet plane was three minutes away from the US border?" Reacting like one of Pavlov's dogs, he immediately replied, "Why, we'd shoot it down!" Catching himself, he then said, "Three minutes is a long time. If you don't think so, get up here and speak for three minutes."

I did, and chose as my topic "What is wrong with capitalism." I didn't yet know much about the subject, but began talking just the same. I was just getting going when the three minutes were up. Kids were jumping up and down denouncing me, and the teacher blurted, "The little bastard!" He finally told me to sit down after about five minutes.

One day, my friend David and I decided not to rise to salute the flag with the Pledge of Allegiance. We also refused to bow our heads and recite the Lords Prayer, which was still compulsory at the time.

My father felt the impact of the witch-hunt directly. In one of his art classes, he spoke against McCarthy. A student squealed to his mother, who was a member of the school board. She tried to get my father fired. He was called in and asked, "Are you a communist?" My father answered, "I don't know. What's a communist? Tell me that and then I'll tell you if I am or not." He wasn't fired.

This happened when right-wing organizations were forcing the removal from libraries of "communist" books, which included not only Marx and Lenin, but books by liberals. In Indiana, a state law banned Robin Hood, since that fabled character took from the rich and gave to the poor!

The witch-hunt was waged in the name of individual freedom. But this was the most conformist of times. Anyone who dared to be different in any way was suspect. Far from promoting individuality or intellectual curiosity, the dominant spirit of the times generated an oppressive, stultifying atmosphere that glorified the status quo. In the background was the threat of right-wing totalitarianism, seen most clearly in the movement inspired by McCarthy.

However, even though the ruling class and the mainline politicians initiated the witch-hunt and utilized it to cleanse the labor movement of militants of all stripes, the powers that be didn't need or want a full fledged fascist movement to take power. They decided to clip McCarthy's wings.

McCarthy finally went too far, aiming his fire at the US Army high command for being "soft on communism." He even suggested that Republican President Eisenhower

was suspect. The result was the “Army-McCarthy” hearings in the Senate. My mother watched these on TV every day, and she would fill me in on the day’s proceedings when I came home from school. I would watch some of the proceedings before I went out on my paper delivery route. These hearings ultimately resulted in McCarthy’s censure by the Senate, and his standing plummeted until his death in 1957. The anticommunist witch-hunt was a long time dying and aspects of it are still with us today.

The summer of 1955, after I graduated from high school, I subscribed to the *Catholic Worker*, the paper of a group with the same name led by Dorothy Day. Day had been a member of the Communist Party in its early days, but then dropped out and became a radical Catholic pacifist and anarchist. The group ran a soup kitchen near New York’s Bowery that helped the down-and-outs. Every month their paper would feature a very beautiful print of an original woodcut.

That summer, I had a job working in my hometown’s engineering department as an aide to the civil engineers. I showed the paper to one of the engineers, because he was Catholic. He immediately warned me against reading anything that had the word “worker” in its title, fearing that I would be duped by communists in disguise. McCarthy was a broken man but the witch-hunt was still going strong.

In the fall of 1955 I entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a partial scholarship. MIT is in Cambridge, Massachusetts, just across the Charles River from Boston. I soon became friends with a student named Marc, who lived in the same dorm as I. One Sunday evening a group of us were eating in Simone’s Italian restaurant in Cambridge. Marc commented that in order to understand society, one had to read Marx, and in order to understand the individual, Freud. I later found out that Marc’s father had been a socialist.

Marc and I moved out of the dorm and rented an apartment. We had many discussions about politics, music, literature and philosophy. Challenged by Marc, I started reading Marx’s *Capital* and other books by socialists that I found in the MIT library. I started to consider myself a socialist, and my antiwar views led me toward pacifism. Marc and I started going to the Society of Friends (Quakers) meetinghouse in Cambridge on Sunday nights.

The Friends invited college students in the greater Boston area to these gatherings, where we could get a cheap meal and meet others who had some social consciousness. We also got a good dose of radical pacifism in the discussions held there. At the end of our freshman year, Marc decided to quit MIT. He later enrolled in Queens College in New York, and we gradually drifted apart.

During a few weekends, I joined other students from the Quaker group to “camp



out” in a church-provided facility in Roxbury, the center of Boston’s Black community. We would work long hours Saturday and Sunday cleaning, preparing and painting walls in run-down apartment buildings. Then we learned that the tenants in one building we had worked on were angry with us because the landlord raised their rents, on the grounds that we had improved the building! This taught me a lesson about the workings of capitalism, and helped me see the limits of well-intentioned do-good efforts.

During my freshman year, I was in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). All male students at MIT were required to take ROTC. I was in the Air Force section. An incident near the end of the year convinced me I had had enough of ROTC. In addition to polishing our shoes to be like mirrors and learning to march around, we also had ROTC classes. One day, as we entered class in our blue-gray uniforms, the instructor closed the blinds and told us we were to pretend to be a squadron of the Strategic Air Command stationed in North Africa.

He said that Washington had determined that Russia was going to launch an atomic attack on the US, and that we were to attack Russia first in a pre-emptive strike. Three bombers would fly together to each target. Only one would have hydrogen bombs, and we wouldn’t know which one. This would make it more difficult for Russian anti-aircraft weapons to hit the loaded plane. Each group would have a primary target and a list of secondary cities to bomb if the primary attack were successful. The instructor then said, “I know we will kill many innocent civilians but better their innocent civilians than ours!” I almost puked.

When I came back to MIT for my sophomore year, I told the administration that I would not take ROTC. They said I would have to leave the school. We argued, and finally they said I could stay but would have to get a medical deferment from ROTC. As I had no physical problem, I would have to declare that I had a psychological problem. I would have to see one of MIT’s eleven full-time psychiatrists for therapy, since it was obvious that anyone who refused ROTC must be psychologically disturbed.

(MIT had a large psychiatric staff because many students did indeed need help after experiencing the stiff competition and pressure that were part of the MIT experience. In a half-joking and self-deprecating way MIT students called themselves “tools.” In fact, several students committed suicide during the time I attended school there.)

The sessions with the psychiatrist turned out to be fun and useful for me. Not only did I get out of ROTC, my psychiatrist was a very kind and smart Freudian who helped me understand much about myself. We never talked about ROTC.

When my draft board called me to report for my pre-induction physical, I decided to become a conscientious objector. But the board would only accept religious grounds

for conscientious objection. I got help from the Cambridge Friends, the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors and the War Resisters League. I filled out the necessary forms, in which I included a tortured explanation of God as a kind of Hegelian spirit of history that was developing toward a better world. I was granted conscientious objector status.

My subscription to the *Catholic Worker* followed me to MIT. As my thinking became more socialist, I wrote to the *Catholic Worker*, explaining that I was not religious and asked if they could recommend a socialist publication to me. They wrote back and suggested that I look into *Labor Action*, the paper of the Independent Socialist League (ISL).<sup>§</sup>

I found the *Labor Action* analysis of world and domestic events to be on a far higher level than anything I had ever seen. Moreover, it had a page written by members of a youth group affiliated to the ISL, called the Young Socialist League (YSL). The most prominent leader of the ISL was Max Shachtman, who had been a leader of the Communist Party and later the Socialist Workers Party before becoming the central figure in this current. The chairman of the YSL was Michael Harrington, who later became famous as the author of *The Other America*, a book about poverty in the US, a topic that had been out of public consciousness as a result of the witch-hunt.

In *Labor Action* I saw a coupon that could be sent in for more information on the YSL. I clipped it out and sent it in, and thus I became the only member of the YSL in the Boston area.

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<sup>§</sup> The ISL originated out of a split in the Socialist Workers Party in 1940. The major difference between the ISL and the SWP was over the nature of the Soviet Union. Under the impact of the Stalin-Hitler pact on the eve of the Second World War, Shachtman and his supporters decided that the USSR after the rise of Stalinism was a new form of class society that had been unforeseen by Marx and his followers. They called it “bureaucratic collectivism” and held that the ruling bureaucracy in the USSR was a new ruling class.

Politically, the Workers Party (as the ISL was then called) refused to take sides in the war when German imperialism under the Nazis invaded the USSR. Similarly, they refused to take sides in the Cold War or in the Korean War when the US invaded the Korean peninsula, although their arguments began to show more sympathy for the “democratic” imperialists than for the Soviet bloc or China. During the Second World War they also refused to take sides in the struggle of the Chinese people against the Japanese occupation. (In this case, it was because of their opposition to the Chinese government headed by the reactionary butcher of the Chinese working class, Chiang Kai-shek.)

The SWP, on the other hand, agreed with the position of Leon Trotsky that the USSR under Stalin and his heirs remained a “bureaucratically degenerated workers state.” Trotsky’s analysis was that while Stalinism represented a counter-revolution against the Russian

During the summer break, while I was staying with my parents in New Jersey, I attended a YSL meeting in New York City. I was very impressed. I noted that the chairperson was a woman, something new to me. She ran the meeting with confidence and competence. The meeting seemed to me to be serious and reflective of an active group.

The year 1956 saw several dramatic political events that had an important influence on me.

In this country, a struggle had opened that was to transform a whole generation — the rise of the new mass civil rights movement in the South. This began in Montgomery, Alabama, with a bus boycott by Black people, beginning in late 1955 and continuing for over a year throughout 1956. The boycott challenged the Jim Crow system of racial segregation, in this case the segregation of Blacks on the city's public buses. Blacks were forced to ride in the rear, while the front seats were for whites only. (The term "Jim Crow" first came into use before the Civil War, and is believed to have originated in racist mockery of Black people in a minstrel show. The term has been used as a general reference to the entire system of anti-Black racism.)

The struggle began when Rosa Parks, a Black woman, refused to give up her seat to a white man. The boycott was a well-thought-out, well-prepared campaign. The initiators, mostly local Black trade union activists, tried to interest a number of Black preachers to take the leadership of the planned boycott, but these were too frightened to accept the assignment. Finally, they approached a young minister named Martin

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revolution of October 1917, a counter-revolution that had politically expropriated the workers and peasants, it had not succeeded in overthrowing all of the gains of that revolution, such as the nationalized and planned economy. Trotsky called for the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy while defending the remaining social and economic gains of the 1917 revolution against incursions by the bureaucracy or attempts by world capitalism to overthrow the USSR. Trotsky held that the ruling bureaucracy was not a new ruling class, but a "petty bourgeois" layer standing between world capitalism and the Soviet workers and peasants. He predicted that either the workers would overthrow the bureaucracy, reestablish workers democracy and resume the march toward socialism, or the bureaucracy "becoming more and more the organ of world capitalism inside the workers state" would overthrow the remaining conquests of October and go back to capitalism.

Based on this analysis, the SWP politically defended the USSR in the Second World War and in the Cold War, and North Korea and China in the Korean War, against the United States and the rest of the capitalist world. The SWP defended the USSR in spite of its opposition to the murderous and counter-revolutionary regime of Stalin and his heirs. Similarly, it defended the Chinese people against the Japanese imperialists in spite of its opposition to the Chiang regime in World War II.

Luther King, Jr. He accepted, and a new movement was born that would sweep the South and have wide repercussions in the North. The boycott, which won solidarity across the country, overturned the rules that barred Blacks from sitting in the seats reserved for whites in Montgomery.

In late 1956 Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt after Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. Nasser had been part of a group of young officers who led a coup in 1952 against the king that Britain had installed when it granted Egypt its independence after the Second World War. Nasser became president of Egypt in 1954, soon winning widespread sympathy in the Arab world as a voice for Arab nationalism and opposition to the state of Israel, which had come into being in 1948, depriving the Palestinians of their self-determination.

Listening to the debates about the invasion in the United Nations over the radio, I found myself agreeing with the arguments being made against it by the Soviet representative. The invasion also opened my eyes to the role of Zionism and Israel as a beachhead for the Western imperialist powers in the Arab world.

Earlier that year, Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR and later Soviet premier as well, gave a historic speech at the 20th Communist Party Congress, in which he admitted many of the crimes of the Stalin era. His speech undermined many of the long-held beliefs and Stalinist cultism of Communist parties throughout the world.

In the fall, a popular revolution against Soviet occupation and bureaucratic dictatorship broke out in Hungary. A new regime, headed by a reform-minded Communist, Imre Nagy, came to power. He promised to retain the nationalized and planned economy and to retain the social gains of the workers while democratizing the country. The bureaucratic dictatorship in the Kremlin could not tolerate this upheaval or its spread in Eastern Europe. The Soviet army invaded to crush the revolution.

Socialist consciousness was strong among the Hungarian workers, who had suffered under the Nazi occupation during the Second World War and a brutal, reactionary dictatorship for two decades before. The working class was at the center of the revolt. Elected workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils formed throughout the country. These councils established a centralized structure to continue the fight after the Kremlin's invasion, and elected a young steelworker as their leader. The Soviet army gradually defeated and repressed the councils.

The Khrushchev revelations and the Hungarian revolution had a deep impact on the socialist left throughout the world. In the United States, the Communist Party, which since the 1930s had been by far the largest group on the left, felt the impact

deeply. John Gates, the editor of the *Daily Worker*, the newspaper of the Communist Party, and others in the CP opened a discussion in the CP and in the *Daily Worker* itself on what had gone wrong in the USSR under Stalin. He and others questioned many long-held beliefs and policies of the American CP as well. For most of 1956, the CP paper became a real forum for different views. When the Hungarian revolution exploded, the paper expressed sympathy and confidently predicted that Soviet troops would not intervene.

But a diehard Stalinist faction in the Communist Party leadership, committed to preserving the group's unconditional support to the Soviet bureaucracy, was able to retain power. That faction, headed by William Z. Foster, controlled the party's finances, and used that control to strangle the *Daily Worker* and to dissolve the Labor Youth League (LYL), the party's youth group that had been sympathetic to reform. Gates and others quit the party in droves. At the beginning of 1956, the CP had about 20,000 members. Two years later it had shrunk to 5,000, and by some estimates, to 2,000. *The Worker* resumed publication as a weekly.

The decline of the Communist Party opened the door for new, alternative socialist and left-wing groups that emerged in the radicalization of the 1960s.

Khrushchev's admissions and the Hungarian Revolution vastly reinforced the influence of the anti-Stalinist education that I had received from reading *Labor Action*. I became an opponent of Stalinism for the rest of my life. The contrast between the Soviet denunciation of the imperialist attack on Egypt and the Kremlin's own invasion of Hungary was my first initiation into the contradictory nature of the USSR — a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy ruling on the basis of progressive property forms established by a revolution — although I didn't come to a complete understanding of this until after I joined the SWP.

Within the YSL two opposed lines developed in response to the events. The parent organization, the ISL led by Max Shachtman, sought to dissolve and enter the moribund Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation. The SP-SDF was socialist in name only. It supported the witch-hunt (with reservations), the West in the Cold War, the right-wing labor bureaucracy in the unions, and the Democratic Party. The majority of the YSL under Michael Harrington's leadership backed the ISL position.

A minority led by Tim Wohlforth, Shane Mage and James Robertson opposed this course. I remember receiving thick mimeographed discussion bulletins on the issues in dispute. The fight culminated in a split. I wasn't sure who was right, and the resulting inertia left me a member of the SP-SDF and its Young Peoples Socialist League (YPSL), as the ISL and YSL dissolved and joined those two groups. Before the merger the YPSL had 12 members nationally. The infusion of about 120 people

from the YSL gave the YPSL a new lease on life, and it was to play a part on the American left in the early 1960s. But it proved to be bankrupt in the eyes of the new radicals who came to the fore during the anti-Vietnam-War period.

The YSL minority was drawn toward another development, led by the Reverend A.J. Muste. Muste had been a leader in the 1930s of the American Workers Party, which played a central role in the 1934 Toledo Autolite strike. This strike, along with the Trotskyist-led Minneapolis Teamsters battles and the CP-led San Francisco general strike of the same year, signaled a new mood in the industrial working class that would explode shortly in the rise of the CIO.

The AWP and the Trotskyists were drawn towards each other, and a fusion occurred between the two groups in 1936. For a short time Muste was a central leader of the newly formed Workers Party. But he went back to the church soon after and became one of the most prominent pacifists in the US, and later the most prominent figure in the early years of the anti-Vietnam-war movement. Unlike many other radical pacifists, Muste never lost his feel for the mass movement. In the ferment caused by the 1956 events, he sensed that there was an opportunity to reach out to the thousands of disaffected CP members and supporters. He founded the American Forum for Socialist Education. It drew in ex-CP supporters, the SWP and unaffiliated radicals.

The YSL minority, about 30 people, joined in this process of "regroupment." One result was the launching of united independent socialist election campaigns in California and New York, in which the SWP played a major role. The SWP recruited some former CP members in the process. Most of the others fell away from socialist politics, and remained mired in the Democratic Party.

The most important result of regroupment was the formation of the *Young Socialist* newspaper and the Young Socialist Alliance in New York. The leaders of the YSL minority had been won over to the SWP and they became the leadership core of the YSA. The new youth group was called an "alliance" because its members came from the YSL minority, the younger members of the SWP, ex-LYL members, and previously unaffiliated youth. Its early leadership body also included an anarcho-socialist, and two young supporters of the *American Socialist* magazine, which was published by a group that had split from the SWP in 1953. Youth groups supporting the *Young Socialist* were formed in cities across the country.

At the end of my sophomore year, I began to feel constrained by the emphasis on science and mathematics at MIT. My interests, including my interest in politics, widened. I transferred to Boston University for my junior year, 1957-58, and majored in English literature. There I met a group of students interested in discussing literature, and began to interest them in socialism. Since I transferred to BU just before the

school year started, I wasn't in an undergraduate dormitory, but in a graduate school dorm for students at the law school. There were a few others like me, including my roommate, whom I convinced of my socialist ideas.

I also met a fellow in the room next to mine, Bela, who was a refugee from Hungary. Bela had been in the army during the 1956 revolution, and was elected to the soldiers' council at his barracks. He considered himself a Marxist, and before being drafted into the Hungarian army had studied with the great Hungarian Marxist literary critic and philosopher George Lukacs. With this disparate group, I formed a socialist discussion club at BU.

Michael Harrington addressed one of our public meetings. On the way back from the meeting to our dorm, Bela expressed disgust with Harrington: "I know very well what it means, Social Democracy!" About this time, I also got to know Lenny Goodman, a young worker from Lynn, Massachusetts, who was in the SWP, and a friend of his, James Petras, who would later join the YSA and SWP for a time. In the early 1960s Petras was the YSA organizer in Berkeley, California. Petras today is a well-known Marxist academic and author, specializing in Latin America.

A physics professor at BU introduced me to the writings of Herbert Marcuse, especially *Reason and Revolution*, which was a good introduction to Hegel, and *Eros and Civilization*, which tried to combine Freud and Marx. A year later, Marcuse came to Brandeis University in a suburb of Boston and taught a course on Hegel. I would just walk into his class and pretend I was a student at Brandeis. No one bothered me.

During the spring break in 1958, I joined a high school friend of mine, Jerry Haskins, who was at Brown University in Rhode Island, on a march from "New Haven to the UN" for nuclear disarmament. It was on this march, which lasted several days, that I first saw Dave Dellinger, a radical pacifist who later played an important part in the anti-Vietnam-War movement. At the UN, A.J. Muste addressed a rally.

Shortly after, I read a book by Leon Trotsky, *Between Red and White*, which convinced me that the way to end war and the nuclear threat was not pacifism, but the revolutionary overthrow of the war-generating system of capitalism.

After the spring semester, I married Ethel Krassner, whom I had met two years before on a blind date arranged by a friend of mine from MIT. Ethel was Jewish, but not religious. She lived with her father and brother in the Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn in a small house divided into two apartments. Her father was a machinist. I remember Ethel's father listening to me debating socialism with some of her friends. Afterwards, he told Ethel that I was going to "be somebody." He was part of the older generation of Jewish workers, many of whom were sympathetic to socialism. Ethel worked as a clerk in a Manhattan bank. After we were married we moved to an

apartment in Boston, and she got a job as a typist at MIT.

In the summer of 1958, I had decided to go back to MIT because I could get my degree in mathematics there more quickly than I could get a degree in English literature at BU, and I was itching to leave college behind. I had seen enough of the academic life to know that I wanted no part of it. But I did think that getting a degree might help me get jobs later. So in the fall of 1958, I was once again a student at MIT.

There I met Peter Camejo, a member of the YSA, who was a freshman at MIT. Peter was a high school student from Great Neck just outside New York City when the Hungarian revolution occurred. He told me that he had been sympathetic to the Communist Party, and had confidently predicted to his fellow students that the USSR would never send troops to crush the revolution. After they did so, he became interested in the American Forum for Socialist Education, where he heard the Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union for the first time, and became convinced of the contradictory character of the USSR and of the anti-socialist and anti-working-class character of Stalinism and the Stalinist bureaucracy. He joined the YSA in New York before coming to MIT.

Peter and I held many discussions, agreeing and arguing over many topics, usually in his dorm room at MIT. These discussions would intrigue his three roommates, who were soon drawn into arguments about socialism. One of these roommates was Gus Horowitz, who would join the YSA a year later. Peter and I became close friends and political collaborators, a relation that has lasted many decades.

Peter's father was a minor capitalist in Venezuela. His mother and father were divorced, and she lived in Great Neck. Peter spent part of his time growing up going back and forth between Venezuela and New York. As a consequence, he was fluent in both Spanish and English, but his academic skills lay elsewhere. On his college entrance exams (SAT) he was merely OK on the English part, but got the highest possible score of 800 in mathematics (not too unusual a score at MIT, by the way). I was fascinated with his stories about life in the Venezuelan upper crust. It was the contrast he saw between the lives of the rich and those of the common people there that began his radicalization.

Once, at a fancy dinner his father hosted in Venezuela, the guests included top government officials from the dictatorship of Perez Jimenez. Peter said something disparaging about the dictator. The gathering froze. His father made light of the incident, but everyone knew that even a respectable bourgeois could be arrested if suspected of disloyalty. Peter witnessed the 1958 uprising that overthrew the dictator and it had a big impact on him.

I introduced Peter to the game of Go, which was popular in the mathematics



department of MIT. Go is a board game, whose enthusiasts consider it more complex than chess. It originated in China, and was taken up in Japan, where it is a national pastime. Over the next years, Peter and I spent many hours locked in combat over the Go board.

I was a member of YPSL, and Peter was a member of the YSA, but we worked together, seeking out socialists of whatever stripe at MIT, Harvard and other schools in the area. I would sell the YPSL newspaper, *Challenge*, in the halls of MIT. I took a bundle of 50 papers each month, and would just put them on a table with a sign that said "Socialist Newspaper." I always sold out, but later found out that I was practically the only YPSL member in the country who sold the paper on a consistent basis.<sup>§</sup>

By the spring of 1959 Peter and I had gathered enough students who thought of themselves as socialists that we were able to launch a new organization, the United Socialist Students of Greater Boston. This group was a hodge-podge. Besides myself from the YPSL and Peter from the YSA there was a Stalinist student from MIT, who was a member of the Detroit-based Proletarian Party; Michael Walzer, who later became a very well-known academic and social democratic contributor to *Dissent* magazine (he has since developed a more consistently pro-capitalist outlook); Arthur, a supporter of an obscure German group that split from the Trotskyist movement in the 1930s; members of the Harvard socialist club; and others. There were about 50 of us.

We published a discussion bulletin, held meetings to discuss our various views, and participated as a group in a peace demonstration called by the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy. We also attended a large meeting held outdoors in the Harvard Coliseum addressed by a young Fidel Castro, whose July 26 Movement had overthrown the US-backed dictator of Cuba, Fulgencio Batista, early in the year. Castro had come seeking a dialogue with the US government, but Washington gave him the cold shoulder. The local SWP branch was wise enough to allow us to use their hall for

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<sup>§</sup> I was sitting by my table selling *Challenge* early in 1957, when John Nash, a mathematics professor at MIT, stopped and stared at me and my papers. The previous semester I had taken a course he taught on game theory. He looked very disturbed at what I was doing, and his face became red although he said nothing. It was about this time that he was descending into schizophrenia and paranoia. Decades later, as his illness went into remission, he began to teach again and he received the Nobel Prize in economics for his work in game theory that he had done as a young man. His story is told in the book *A Beautiful Mind* by Sylvia Nasar, which was later made into a very popular film of the same name. The film falsely portrays the MIT mathematics department as a pure tool of the Cold War. In fact several prominent persons in the department were sympathetic to left-wing causes.

meetings of the group, and their mimeograph machine for our bulletin.

For a year or so, I had been reading every socialist newspaper I could find. There was one newsstand in Boston that sold them all. I began to be attracted to *The Militant*, the paper of the SWP, because it seemed to have more coverage of working class struggles than the other papers. Peter would provide me with the *Young Socialist*.

I was selected by the YPSL leadership to attend a cadre school in Chicago in late August, which was followed by a YPSL convention in Michigan. The cadre school centered around talks by Max Shachtman on the character of the Soviet Union. I had absorbed his theory, but discussions with Peter and some SWP members had raised doubts in my mind. I remember that after Shachtman had explained in one session that the Soviet bureaucracy was a ruling class of a new type, I raised my hand and asked, "What is a class?" "That's a very good question," Shachtman replied. "We'll take it up tomorrow." But he never did. At the YPSL convention, a sharp difference arose over the Democratic Party. Shachtman had been won over to the SP-SDF position of support to the Democrats, and Harrington argued along the same lines at the YPSL convention.

A minority left wing was formed, led by Sy Landy, Gavin Macfayden, and the folksinger Dave Van Ronk. They supported the traditional ISL position that labor had to break with the Democrats and form its own party independent of the two capitalist parties. I supported this minority. The rightward movement of Shachtman and Harrington disturbed me.

I had to take some makeup courses in the summer of 1959, and didn't get my degree in mathematics until September 1959.<sup>§</sup> After graduation, I started looking for work. The New England Confectionary Company, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was looking for a recent mathematics graduate to become its comptroller. They wanted a young person with a background in mathematics because they were planning to

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<sup>§</sup> During the spring semester of 1959 I took a course in Artificial Intelligence, taught by one of the leaders in the field, Marvin Minsky. It was an interesting course, and paralleled another I took on the logical foundations of mathematics. But there was one aspect of this course that really bothered me — the assumption by Minsky and others, that humans are basically computers. More precisely, they say that we are a computer program run on the "meat computers" of our brains. This view has come to be known as "hard" artificial intelligence (AI).

They were certain, back in 1959, that within a few years they would discover that program or even one superior to it. Once I attended a symposium held by Minsky and other top MIT mathematicians, to which students were invited as observers. They defended this hard AI view, and got around the question of human consciousness by denying its existence! Here were four highly conscious human beings, consciously trying to communicate with hundreds

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overhaul how they organized production and distribution by using a mathematical model called linear programming. I applied for the job. They gave me a battery of tests, which I passed with flying colors, including one that was supposed to create a psychological profile. I also signed a loyalty oath declaring that I was not a subversive.

After the results were evaluated, the president of the company told me that I “had no negative qualities,” and indicated I would be hired and sent back to MIT at company expense to learn linear programming. He escorted me from office to office to meet and shake hands with what seemed quite a few vice-presidents and other top officers of the company, all of whom were much older than I was. I was waiting to find out my start date when they dropped me like a hot potato. My calls were not returned, and I was given no explanation. I figured that they found out that the person who “had no negative qualities” was a red. In October, I was hired as a computer programmer at Western Electric in Andover, an hour’s drive north of Boston. I wrote programs in machine language for a huge computer that used vacuum tubes and big banks of tape recorders.

Meanwhile, Peter Camejo, who had spent the summer in New York, came back to MIT in the fall of 1959, and we got together. We agreed that the United Socialist Students was too diffuse and that we needed to build a revolutionary socialist youth group that had sufficient cohesion to be an active organization. At first, we thought of organizing a group that would support both the YPSL and the *Young Socialist*. Then James Robertson came to Boston, on a tour selling subscriptions to the YS and to the *International Socialist Review*, the theoretical magazine of the SWP. Peter and I helped him sell the magazine, and we had discussions with him. As a result I gave up on the unrealistic idea of being in both the YS supporters group and YPSL. I joined the former.

During this time, Peter and I had been having discussions with SWP members,

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of presumably conscious students, and the content of what they were communicating was that there is no such thing as consciousness! They also implied that the only possible alternative to this view was religion.

At this time I read Lenin’s *Materialism and Emperio-Criticism*, a philosophical work. One of Lenin’s points was that yes, human consciousness and the human mind are rooted in the material brain, but we don’t yet know how. It struck me as better to just say we don’t know the connection between the brain and the human mind and consciousness than to deny that the latter exist.

It is possible to assert that consciousness and mind are part of material reality and spring from that reality, without claiming that spirit or mind exist apart from the body as most religions do, and without adopting Minsky’s mechanical materialism and reductionism either. Thinking about these philosophical issues drew me closer to the dialectical materialism of Marx.

especially Larry Trainor, an older printer who was a long-time member of the SWP National Committee and the leading SWPer in Boston. Larry invited Peter and me to attend a meeting of the Boston SWP in November 1959. But Larry played a little trick on me when he introduced us to the meeting. He said that we had both applied to join the SWP. Peter had discussed joining with Larry, but I hadn't. Peter and I looked at each other, shrugged, and we were both voted in.

## 2. FIRST LESSONS

There were eight members of the Boston branch of the SWP before Peter Camejo and I joined. All were all industrial workers. In addition to Larry Trainor and Lenny Goodman, there were Larry's wife Augusta (Gusty), Dawn and Sally, sisters who were daughters of Italian anarchists, Sally's husband Jim, Ben and Al. Larry Trainor had the greatest influence on us. He took Peter and me under his wing, and we had many discussions with him in the living room of the very modest house that he and Gusty shared with their two children.

Larry imbued us with three aspects of the SWP tradition, above all. First was fierce loyalty to the working class and confidence in its power. Second was recognition of the great importance that the Russian revolution of 1917 held for the future socialist revolution and support for the Leninist ideas that led to the victory of that revolution. Third was support for the ideas of Leon Trotsky and the Trotskyist viewpoint as an alternative to the perversions of socialism that had been brought about during the Stalin era and after. The SWP that we had joined embodied all three aspects of that tradition both in its ideas and in its members, even though we were a small group and we lived at a time during which the working class and the popularity of socialist ideas had suffered great blows as a result of the Cold War witch-hunt period.

The SWP nationally had fewer than 600 members in 1959, organized into a dozen branches. The largest of these were in New York and Los Angeles, each with more than 100 members. The party nationally was composed largely of blue-collar workers, along with some outstanding university-educated intellectuals, such as George Novack, and young people whom we were beginning to recruit from the college campuses. The number of Black members was small, mainly in New York, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, Newark, Philadelphia and Detroit. There were a few Latinos. While the membership was small, it consisted of very dedicated people ("cadres" was the term we used) who gave a great deal of their time and money to the party.

The SWP published *The Militant*, a weekly newspaper, and a quarterly theoretical magazine called the *International Socialist Review*. It also published books and

pamphlets under the imprint of Pioneer Press, and it had a small full-time national staff to administer the party and its press. The national headquarters was in Manhattan, in a four-story building at 116 University Place just off Union Square. The party tried to maintain functioning local headquarters everywhere that it had units. Even in Boston, with our tiny branch, we rented a hall on Huntington Avenue around the corner from the Boston Symphony.

On the first floor of the building at 116 University Place was an antique shop. You entered "116," as we called it, through an adjacent door that opened onto a steep stairway. The second floor was a hall that the New York branch used for its business meetings, weekly public forums called the Militant Labor Forum, and occasional parties where members and friends could socialize.

On the third floor was the office of the National Organization Secretary, a post held by Tom Kerry at the time. Also on this floor was the office of the New York branch organizer, a small office and storage space for Pioneer Publishers, and an office and work area for *The Militant's* business office. The office of the National Secretary, Farrell Dobbs, was on the fourth floor, as was the editorial office of *The Militant*. The founding leader of the SWP was James P. Cannon. When I joined, he was living in Los Angeles. He was the party's National Chairman, although no longer part of the day to day party leadership centered in New York.

Another asset of the SWP was Mountain Spring Camp, situated in rural New Jersey. Mountain Spring was used to hold conventions. It was also the site of a party school where groups of members, a half-dozen or so at a time, would spend six months in concentrated study. The camp had a number of small cabins that were used by the national staff for vacations. For part of the summer the property was rented to a trade union for use as a youth camp for union members' children.

When I joined, in addition to an old farmhouse that had been there originally, party supporters had constructed a dormitory along with a camp-meeting type structure where people could hold large meetings and where meals were served. It had a complete kitchen. There was also a cottage near a pond.

The land for the camp was donated to the SWP by Connie Weissman, who came from a wealthy family. As a youth Connie was adventurous and free spirited. She was the first woman to pilot an airplane solo to Argentina from the US. She had the manners associated with a well-educated woman from the upper class. But she never looked down on anyone and was one of the nicest persons I have ever met. Connie had class in the best sense of the word.

After we joined the YSA in the fall of 1959, Peter and I drove down to the camp from Boston to attend a weekend educational conference of East Coast supporters of

the *Young Socialist*. There I met Mountain Spring's full-time resident, Carl Skoglund. Skoglund had come to the US from Sweden as a young worker in the early part of the century. Here he joined the Socialist Party, and then the Communist Party after the SP split in the wake of the Russian Revolution. Along with James P. Cannon and others who had been expelled from the Communist Party in 1928 for Trotskyism, Skoglund was a founding member of the Communist League of America. The cadres of this group, together with others they won to the cause in the next decade, founded the Socialist Workers Party in 1938.

Skoglund was in Minneapolis when the CLA played the central role in the great Teamster strikes in 1934 that transformed that union and made Minneapolis a union town. Farrell Dobbs and the Dunne brothers — Grant, Vincent (Ray), and Miles — were central leaders of the battle. Carl and other seasoned leaders of the branch also played leading roles. By the time I joined the party, the only living Dunne brother was Ray.

Dobbs was one of the young workers won to the CLA in that fight. His organizational and leadership skills were such that Dan Tobin, the boss of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, put him in charge of organizing the long-haul or "over the road" truck drivers in the Midwest who transported goods between cities, a campaign that transformed the Teamsters into one of the country's most powerful unions.

Many people thought that Farrell Dobbs could have risen to a major national post in the organized trade union movement. But he chose to stay loyal to revolutionary socialism. After the Socialist Workers Party was founded in 1938, Farrell became one of its central leaders. Farrell was to be the most important influence on my political evolution in the years after I joined the party.

The older members of the party, who had gone through the battles of the 1930s and 40s, all had a great impact on the young generation that was recruited in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Like many immigrants to this day, Skoglund didn't have immigration papers. During the witch-hunt, the government tried to deport him. As a result of a defense effort waged by the party, he wasn't deported, but the government did succeed in imposing a kind of house arrest. A court ordered him restricted to Mountain Spring.

Carl had a keen interest in astronomy, and owned a small refracting telescope. Later, when we had to sell Mountain Spring, I rescued Carl's telescope from being carted off by the new owners. Carl Skoglund died in 1960, not too long after I had joined. So, I never got to know him very well.

Shortly after I joined, Larry Trainor talked to me about the step I had taken.

“You’ve joined the communist movement,” he said. I had broken with the social democratic Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation and the Young People’s Socialist League to throw my lot in with Marxism.

At the time, I still held the view, which I had learned from Max Shachtman as a YPSL member, that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a ruling class of a new type, and that in the struggle between the USSR and world capitalism, the correct position was a “plague on both your houses” (with a little more plague on the Soviet house).

Larry suggested that I read two books that documented the basic views of the SWP on the differences with Shachtman’s view. These were *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* by James P. Cannon and *In Defense of Marxism* by Leon Trotsky. While these books won me to the SWP view intellectually, what clinched it for me was the development of the Cuban Revolution in the summer and fall of 1960.

Larry knew that Peter and I had joined the Party primarily because we had been attracted to its ideas. He wanted us to get a better feel for the revolutionary potential of the American working class. In the waning years of the witch-hunt, this potential was not readily apparent. So he urged us to read about the struggles of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the first decades of the twentieth century, including the *Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood*, an IWW leader and the leader of the militant Western Federation of Miners. Another book he had us read was *American City* by Charles Walker, which was at the time the best account of the 1934 Teamsters’ union strikes in Minneapolis. Later, Farrell Dobbs himself wrote several books that are now the definitive history of that struggle and its aftermath.

These lessons were driven home by the example of these eight revolutionary workers in the Boston SWP, especially Larry. Larry had no formal higher education, but he knew more about politics and the world than any professor I had ever known. Soon I would meet other working class leaders of the SWP like him.

Larry was a true worker-intellectual, always reading when he was not explaining or organizing. He had a very strong character. He was our image of a real worker-bolshevik, and we used him as a litmus test for the other young people we began to bring around. Those who were attracted to Larry’s persona and total dedication to the socialist revolution could be counted on as serious potential recruits. Those who were repelled were usually less serious about revolutionary politics, and not particularly drawn to the working class.

Larry laced his conversation with sharp expressions. I told him about the few times I attended meetings of the Boston SP-SDF, which met only once a month and not at all during the summer, and generally did nothing of importance. At these meetings were a union staffer, his brother, and two Episcopalian seminary students. When Larry



heard this, he told me what he thought about “Epissapailfulls.” He didn’t single them out for derision; he was equally sarcastic about all organized religions.

One expression he always used when he lifted his glass of beer (against doctor’s orders) was, “the first one of the day, God bless us!” Or when explaining that something or other wasn’t worth much, he’d say that it “doesn’t amount to a piss-hole in the snow.” He was something of a character, with his Irish “gift for gab.”

Larry also loved literature, particularly Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. He re-read the thick novel nearly every year and felt its emotional impact so much, he told us, that it often moved him to tears.

Another book Larry had us read was *World Revolution* by C.L.R. James, the revolutionary West Indian intellectual, a founding member of the SWP in 1938. He left in the 1940 split and rejoined for a brief time after the Second World War. This book, although somewhat formal in its treatment, documented the betrayal of revolutions of the workers and peasants on a world scale by the Stalinized Communist International in the 1930s. It was from Larry that I first heard Trotsky’s characterization of Stalinism as the “syphilis of the labor movement.”

One of the most important pamphlets we read was *Socialism on Trial*, the transcript of James P. Cannon’s testimony in 1941, when he and 17 other SWP leaders were placed on trial for their beliefs. He, along with many of the revolutionists who had played a leading role in the labor struggles in Minneapolis, were arrested on charges of having violated the Smith Act by conspiring to advocate the overthrow the US government by force and violence. The pamphlet gives a good explanation of the basic ideas of Marxism in straightforward and accessible language.<sup>§</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> The Smith Act had been passed as part of US imperialism’s preparation for the Second World War. It outlawed conspiring (in the present) to advocate (in the future) the violent overthrow of the US government (in the still farther future). This thought-control law could have been used to snag Thomas Jefferson in its net, for having advocated periodic revolutions to keep the US government democratic.

The SWP did not advocate the violent overthrow of the government. It argued that a peaceful transformation was preferable but predicted, based on a lot of historical experience, that when a large majority of the working people became convinced of the need for socialism, the ruling rich would organize to violently put down the workers by backing a fascist movement. This had happened in Italy, Germany and Spain in the 1920s and 30s. In such a case, the SWP advocated self-defense by the workers to defeat the fascists.

The trial was initiated by the Roosevelt administration, acting in collusion with Teamster President Daniel Tobin. Roosevelt wanted to silence a revolutionary voice speaking out against Washington’s imperialist war, especially one that had roots in the union movement, however modest. Tobin wanted to get rid of the potentially threatening left wing that Dobbs, Dunne,

While we were devouring these and other books and pamphlets, our major assignment from the branch was to build a youth organization in Boston that supported the *Young Socialist*. Peter and I started out by contacting those in the United Socialist Students who were not satisfied with a mere discussion group, who wanted a revolutionary and above all an active organization.

One of these was George Shriver, a Harvard student majoring in Russian language and history. At the time George held many views similar to those of the Communist Party. One night I had a long discussion with George and a young Communist Party supporter. It was actually more of a debate, with the CP supporter and me vying for George's political soul. George soon joined our new group, which we named the Boston Young Socialist Alliance.

Another recruit was Bela, my old friend from Boston University. Bela didn't last long in the YSA, as he came to reject Marxism for a kind of anarcho/workers-councilism. He married a woman in the YSA and they left for India. My brother Roger, who moved to Boston in January after leaving Brown University, also joined. We had about a dozen members.

I was still classified as a conscientious objector by the draft board. I asked Larry about the apparent contradiction between this status and membership in the SWP, which was not pacifist. Larry suggested I talk to Tom Kerry in New York. I drove down and spoke with Tom. We agreed that I should write to the draft board, explaining that I was no longer a pacifist. I did so, and was soon called up for the draft. One of the questions the draft board asked was about membership in any organization on the Attorney General's subversive list. I told them that I was a member of the SWP. They classified me 4F, morally unfit for service. So I was not drafted.

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and others led in the Teamsters. Most of the defendants were convicted.

The male defendants spent a year in the federal penitentiary at Sandstone, Minnesota. Grace Carlson, who was the only woman indicted, served her sentence at Alderson, West Virginia.

A sidelight of the case was that the Communist Party, fervently backing the US in the war, supported not only the prosecution of the SWPers (put the SWPers in jail and "throw the key away," they said), but the Smith Act itself. Ironically, the CP was the target of antidemocratic Smith Act prosecutions a few years later during the witch-hunt. In contrast to the CP's earlier stance, the SWP supported the CP defendants, according to the principle that all working class victims of frame-ups by the capitalist government should be defended, regardless of one's political disagreements. This was a reaffirmation of the old slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all," which the Stalinists had abandoned.

### 3. THE SOUTHERN SIT-INS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE YSA

Our new YSA chapter was soon immersed in support actions for the Southern civil rights movement, in this case the fight against discriminatory rules that barred Blacks from eating at public restaurants patronized by whites. In February 1960 Black students in Greensboro, North Carolina, joined by some whites and crowds of supporters, fought for the right to be served at the lunch counters of Woolworth's and Kress variety stores. They came as a group, sat down on the stools and did not leave, despite being refused service. Hence, the term "sit-in." Adding the suffix "in" to describe certain kinds of protests soon caught on and has been widely used in the movement ever since.

Woolworth's and Kress were national chains. So the sit-ins soon multiplied like wildfire across the South and drew support actions all over the North. This student-led mass youth rebellion marked the beginning of the 1960s, with the fight for Black civil rights at the center. State and local authorities in the South, along with white racist organizations, responded with police and vigilante violence, using clubs, tear gas, bombs, guns, mass arrests and trumped-up charges. But the youth were not intimidated. The size of the protests increased, and the eyes of the nation became focused on the injustice of racial oppression.

A significant outpouring of sympathy developed on Northern campuses. In New York, thousands of students joined sympathy picket lines calling for a boycott of Woolworth's. In the North, the chain did not have the same discriminatory policy it had in the South, and Woolworth's management cried "foul." But it was obvious that picketing in the North could put pressure on Woolworth's to change its policy in the South.

On most private northern campuses there were very few Blacks. This was the case at Boston schools like Harvard, MIT, Brandeis, Wellesley and Tufts. Except for token admissions, Blacks were largely absent from these prestigious schools. There were a

few more Blacks at Boston University and Northeastern. There were more Blacks at the more affordable city campuses in cities with large Black populations, such as the City College of New York and Wayne State University in Detroit. But most Blacks who went to college, including those from the North, went to the all-Black schools in the South. Higher education was highly segregated.<sup>§</sup>

As a result the Northern-based student solidarity was largely led by whites, although not exclusively. Of course, there would have been no Northern movement without the Black-led Southern movement, so in this sense it was a Black-led movement across the country.

The YSA in New York played a significant role in the mobilizations to boycott Woolworth's. Fred Mazelis, a leader of the YSA at City College, became head of the coalition that helped organize students to come out each Saturday to the picket lines. The *Young Socialist* carried the banner headline, "BOYCOTT WOOLWORTH'S!", and urged students across the country to join the movement. For many weeks there were demonstrations every Saturday outside the Woolworth's stores.

We in the Boston YSA also galvanized into action. We were outraged by racism and, as socialists, understood that racism served as a pillar of capitalism by dividing the working class. As young people, we were inspired to act by what the young Blacks in the South were doing, putting their bodies and lives on the line. We wanted to act on our hatred of racism and our solidarity with those on the front lines of the battle. Peter and I and the other YSA members went to all the major campuses in the Boston

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<sup>§</sup> The United States remains a very racially divided society to this day — "Two Nations, Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal" as Andrew Hacker put it in the title of his 1992 book. But young people today know the situation as it existed in 1960 only from history books, if at all. Blacks in the South did not have the right to vote. They could drink only from water fountains labeled "colored." They had to sit in separate sections, usually in the balcony, in movie theaters, when they could get in at all. Schools were totally segregated by law from kindergarten through college, with Black schools under-funded. It was against the law for whites and Blacks to marry. Segregation permeated every aspect of life.

Lynching of Blacks occurred all too often, although the number had declined from the early decades of the century when they were a widespread phenomenon. The perpetrators were not punished. Indeed, a lynching was often treated by whites as a spectator sport, something to bring the kids to, and to take home a memento, usually some body part of the murdered man.

In the North, while there weren't the apartheid laws that existed in the South, there were very extensive de facto manifestations of similar, if unwritten, practices. The idea that a Black person could be mayor of a big city in the North, let alone the South, was unthinkable in 1960, when the sit-ins emerged. Public beaches in much of the North were de facto segregated. It was unheard of to have a Black news announcer on national TV. Black actors would never be able to perform in movies or on TV in roles that were not servile.

area, stuffing mailboxes with leaflets calling for campus organizing meetings. At these meetings, after discussing the basic issues, we urged that leadership bodies be elected by the students to organize their campuses for the Saturday picketing. Hundreds of students participated.

At Brandeis University, 85 students showed up at the meeting. After one of us made introductory remarks, Michael Walzer, our erstwhile “comrade” in the United Socialist Students, rose to warn the students against the YSA. “These are soldiers of the class war,” he solemnly intoned. He charged that our views were opposed to those of the Southern students, who practice non-violence. That was a lie. Of course we were not proposing violence of any kind,

Walzer was simply red-baiting the Marxists in order to frighten students from considering our proposals. We had been urging the largest possible demonstrations, with vocal demands to boycott Woolworth’s. Walzer proposed limiting the picket lines to no more than 10 at each store, and insisted on silent protest. He wanted us to show that we weren’t trying to get people to boycott Woolworth’s, but only to examine their consciences. He claimed this was what the Southern Black students were doing.

In fact, however, while the Southern Black students were non-violent, they wanted their protests to be as large as possible. They were putting their bodies on the line in a physical challenge to Jim Crow. They were calling for a boycott. Our position was that our actions had to be likewise massive and vocal, directly appealing to people not to cross the picket lines.

Walzer’s remarks showed that the witch-hunt, although waning, was still very much alive. Here we had red-baiting — a scare and smear tactic aimed at weakening and dividing the movement — by a self-proclaimed socialist. Walzer’s action showed not only that his “socialism” had nothing to do with “class” or “struggle,” but proved to us in real life what we had been reading about in books: the generally treacherous role of social democrats in struggles.

In the discussion we pointed out that small silent vigils would be demoralizing to the student participants. They would not be uplifted by feeling they were part of a mass struggle; instead they would feel isolated and weak. In fact the initial enthusiasm wore off at the stores where the social democratic proposal was implemented, unfortunately.

We helped set up an area-wide coordinating committee, with representatives from the various campuses and other organizations. But the debate went on. Two lines emerged, championed by the two main socialist tendencies — that of Walzer and his fellow social democrats and that of the YSA. The supporters of the Communist Party did not identify themselves as such openly, but they backed Walzer. It wasn’t unusual

that people who came from left traditions were the most vocal and took the lead in debate. They knew the most about politics, had more political experience, and had clear ideas about what they wanted. The newly-active independents were aroused by the immediate issues, but they had not had the opportunity yet to think through strategy and tactics.

The issue in this debate, while seemingly of merely local consequence, did actually reflect the type of conflict that occurs in nearly every social struggle in one form or another — that of independent mass action versus class collaboration. In this sense, our experience in the Boston fight over tactics and strategy was just a precursor to the same type of fights that were to emerge later as the youth movement grew.

We eventually lost the debate. Walzer convinced a majority of the student representatives on the coordinating committee that as “reds,” we were a public relations embarrassment, and should be excluded. We were voted out of the committee. In response, I explained that since we had been excluded, we were no longer bound by decisions of the committee. We would proceed to organize picketing by those who supported our proposals.

We chose to concentrate our effort at the Woolworth’s in Roxbury, the center of Boston’s Black community. We built large, spirited picket lines there each Saturday.

The first time we organized the picket in Roxbury, most of the YSAers came over early to Larry and Gusty’s house for a giant breakfast to fortify us for the day’s activity. Gusty was a very good Italian cook. In fact, she made her living as a cook in the homes of the wealthy in the 1930s, before joining the movement. The first socialist writings she saw were in the library of one of these wealthy families. Her culinary skills were somewhat lost on Larry, whose favorite meal was franks and beans. But the YSA members were happy to be invited over for one of her great dinners.

The *Young Socialist*, with supporters in the major Northern cities, and reporters in the South, had some of the best coverage of the struggle anywhere. The daily press covered the movement, but downplayed it and didn’t give the feel of being inside it. In the course of the battle, meetings were often held in Black churches. In one of these churches in Boston the pastor had tacked up the YS on the wall so that the congregation could get the information.

We were very proud of the YS, and tried to circulate it as much as possible among the activists. But then Jim Robertson from the YS national office paid us a visit that set us back. He demanded that one Saturday, YSAers leave our Woolworth picket line in Roxbury, and go to the other stores whose pickets had dwindled, to sell the YS there. We thought this was not very wise, given the red-baiting we had suffered, but we went along with his proposal. I don’t think we sold a single paper, and we could

see that we were isolating ourselves from the other activists. Robertson thought the experience was positive anyway, teaching us, I suppose, to enjoy isolation — a skill he mastered in later years, as founder and leader of a sect known as the Spartacist League.

We were furious, but we learned a lesson from that experience: tactics cannot be imposed from afar; most of the time you have to defer to the thinking of the people on the spot.

Our YSA chapter was growing. We held well-attended Saturday night parties for the picketers. We now had 25 members, which compared very favorably with YSA chapters in other parts of the country. One new member was Gus Horowitz, a former roommate of Peter Camejo at MIT, who used to listen in on our discussions. He too would go on later to become one of the SWP's national leaders.

We also launched a class series, reading and discussing Trotsky's monumental *History of the Russian Revolution*. As we read about the conflict of socialist tendencies in the Revolution it seemed that they were reflected, if only on a Lilliputian scale, in our experiences in the Woolworth's picketing.

We made a serious effort to glean as much as we could from Trotsky's masterwork, reading and collectively discussing it chapter by chapter. The class was on the level of many college courses, and the text was much better than most. Serious Marxist education became a hallmark of the YSA, and helped us win and hold new members.

Our inspiring experience in Boston was shared by YS chapters all over the country. We all grew. The time that had previously been set to establish the YSA as a national organization, April 1960, turned out to be propitious. Since its founding in 1957, the YS had been seen as part of the regroupment process. A proposal made in January 1959 by the YS to the YPSL, for a fusion of the two groups marked the end of this regroupment. The proposal was publicly debated by Michael Harrington for the YPSL and Tim Wohlforth for the YS. Not only did Harrington reject any such fusion, but he made it clear that YPSL would bar most YS supporters if they attempted to join the YPSL individually.

Regroupment was over. The majority of YS supporters had been won to the basic positions of the SWP. The rest had quit the organization or just drifted away. The YS began to make plans to bring together delegates from its supporting groups across the country to found a new national youth organization. To that end, the YS leaders in New York drafted resolutions defining the YSA's political profile and a proposed constitution. The conference was called for April 15-17 in Philadelphia.

The Boston YSA sent delegates and observers, including my brothers Roger and Roland who were twins. Roland was not allowed in at first, because he was wearing a

Rutgers University blazer. To the comrades guarding the door, Roland looked more like a fraternity boy than a radical. It turned out that Roland was simply wearing his tennis team blazer — he had come directly down to Philadelphia from a tennis match with Lehigh University. Roger and I vouched for our brother and he was allowed in.

David Weiss, an SWP member in Philadelphia, who observed the gathering, reported in *The Militant* that the “atmosphere of the conference was marked by youthful energy and optimism. The delegates tackled the task of deciding their program and mapping a plan of action in dead earnest, yet the deliberations were repeatedly illuminated by brilliant flashes of humor.

“There was sharp controversy; nothing was taken for granted; nothing was cut and dried; and when the conference arrived at fundamental agreement on point after point it was not until everyone had been heard, every difference aired and the issue to be voted on clearly understood. The excitement animating the conference was enhanced by the fact that delegates came [to Philadelphia] directly from picket lines against Woolworth’s and other chain stores in their areas in support of the Southern Negro student sit-ins against segregation.”<sup>1</sup>

Peter Camejo and I were elected to the YSA’s National Committee. Tim Wohlforth was elected National Chairman, and Jim Lambrecht National Secretary. A key aspect of the newly formed YSA was that it declared itself to be “in basic political solidarity, on the principles of revolutionary socialism, with the Socialist Workers Party.” At the same time, it defined itself as an independent organization, with its own democratic structure, decision making process, finances, and newspaper. It was thus conceived as an independent revolutionary youth group.

This made the YSA different from the youth groups of other socialist formations, including the Communist Party’s Labor Youth League and other youth groups that the CP organized later on and the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation’s Young Peoples Socialist League. These youth groups were financed by their adult mentors, and were under the parent organization’s discipline and control. I have already noted how the CP decided to dissolve the LYL after the Hungarian Revolution. A few years after the YSA was founded, the SP-SDF effectively dissolved the YPSL by cutting off its funds, when YPSL refused to support the Democrats in the 1964 elections.



## 4. EARLY BATTLES

The witch-hunt caught up with me shortly before the founding convention of the YSA. I was working as a computer programmer at Western Electric. I was the youngest programmer there, and I was doing well in my job. One day we were all in a class to learn about new computers that used solid state devices. Specifically, we were learning how to program a new IBM computer that was far faster and more versatile than the one we were used to. My boss, who was also in the class, was called out of the room. When he came back he was accompanied by company guards who marched me out of the plant. I had been fired with no explanation.

I tried looking for another programming job. I did well on interviews and tests, but couldn't seem to get hired. Discouraged, I tried to get any kind of a job. My brother Roger and I looked for factory work, but there was a recession. No one was hiring. It was only Ethel's job that kept us going. On some days, after job hunting, I would spend time with Arnie Trachtman. He was a new SWP member and a painter who worked in the style of the German Expressionist Max Beckmann. We would sit in his kitchen, talking and drinking cheap red wine.

Finally, it looked like I had landed a programming job at a small start-up software company. The owner liked my qualifications. But then he called me in to say that he had contacted Western Electric's personnel department during lunch hour. The personnel directors weren't in the office, and his call was taken by a secretary who looked up my file. She said something like, "Oh my God. You're not going to believe this, but Mr. Sheppard was fired at the request of the FBI. He's a member of the Socialist Workers Party, which is on the Attorney General's subversive list." The owner of the company was angry that people could be fired because of their views, and that's why he told me the story. But the major contract he was trying to get was with the government, to write the first programs that would be used to track satellites, and his employees would be required to have security clearances.

I applied for unemployment, but Western Electric fought it. The company claimed I was fired for bad attendance. My only absence had been for a few days when I

developed a high fever at work, and the company sent me home in a taxi, a distance of about 40 miles, which made the taxi bill quite expensive. They had never complained about my attendance before firing me. I was lucky, though, when a reasonable investigator was assigned to my case. I told him about the FBI, and he ruled in my favor. So, I collected a few months' back unemployment payments.

I finally got a job with a software firm where they knew my situation. They paid me cut-rate wages under the table.

In the spring of 1960, some prominent people began to stand up to the witch-hunters. Dr. Willard Uphaus, a pacifist theologian in New England, was hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). The inquisitors demanded that he turn over a list of the names of people who had attended a school at a retreat he organized. This request was phony from the get-go because the FBI closely followed all such gatherings and undoubtedly knew the names of the people who had attended the school.

HUAC wanted to humiliate Uphaus and make the names public, so that those people would face harassment. But Uphaus would not lower himself to cooperate with HUAC. So the self-proclaimed defenders of democracy and the American Way threw Uphaus in jail for contempt.

A defense committee was organized in Boston, led by a young man with a very distinctive name, Norman Thomas Giovanni. (He had been named after Norman Thomas, the most well known US socialist, who had run for President several times on the ticket of the Socialist Party.) The YSA supported this committee, made up mostly of young people, and I was assigned to participate in it. We went up to New Hampshire where Uphaus was imprisoned, and raised his spirits a bit by shouting from the lawn below his cell window. They wouldn't let us visit him. The case attracted enough publicity so that his indeterminate sentence was changed to one year. When he was released he was still proudly in contempt of the contemptible Committee. Uphaus called on others to defy the witch-hunters, and was joined in this call by Nobel Laureate Linus Pauling, who also refused to cooperate with HUAC.

In May, HUAC opened up shop in the San Francisco city hall. This time, hundreds of students from all around the Bay Area flocked to the city in militant protest, trying to get into the hearings. Cops beat and arrested protesters, who passively resisted by going limp; the cops then dragged them down the steps of city hall. A photograph of this spectacle was shown on front pages around the country and the world. The YSA joined in the action, which included many groups and individuals. A new mood of opposition to anticommunism was showing its first sprouts. A film supporting the protests made its rounds throughout the country, inspiring additional support and

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even attracting some people to move to the San Francisco/Berkeley area to be part of the type of action going on there.

The SWP was running a national campaign in the 1960 Presidential elections. Over the years we had been putting forward candidates in elections whenever possible. We did so for several reasons. Since most people in the US usually consider politics to be centered on election contests, it gave us the opportunity to present our program more readily than at other times. It was easy to organize public meetings where our candidates spoke. We could also reach many people with our ideas through the news and broadcast media, even though the space and time we received was meager in comparison with the capitalist parties. Election campaigns also helped our fight against the witch-hunt by asserting our legal existence and showing that we had no secret agenda. Our ideas were out in the open.

By participating in the elections we advanced the idea that working people should build their own party against the Democrats and Republicans. We called on the unions to break with the two capitalist parties and form a labor party. The question of breaking with the Democrats was hotly debated on the left.

In 1960, the SWP nominated Farrell Dobbs as the party's candidate for President and Myra Tanner Weiss for Vice President. Myra toured the South after the YSA convention to express support for the sit-ins. Farrell, together with *Militant* editor Joe Hansen, visited Cuba in the spring of 1960.

We undertook the difficult task of putting the SWP Presidential ticket on the ballot in a few states. Most states have very restrictive qualification rules for parties other than the Republicans and Democrats. While it was possible to get on the ballot in New York State, to do so we had to collect signatures from many thousands of registered voters, including signatures from a certain number of registered voters in each of New York's 65 or so counties. Some of these counties were very rural and conservative and people were still fearful of socialism, under the influence of the witch-hunt.

The Boston branch of the SWP was asked to help collect signatures in three counties just west of Massachusetts. The task was made more difficult by the fact that people who had signed our petitions in previous years had been subsequently visited by the FBI, as we learned from people we approached this time. I was on the team that collected these signatures, and we got the job done. I retain a less than fond memory of our stay in a flea-bag of a hotel, where I made my first acquaintance with bed bugs.

While we were there, the Soviet Union shot down a U2 American spy plane flying high over the USSR. Just before this incident, there had been signs of a lessening of tensions between the US and the USSR. Soviet Premier Khrushchev had scheduled a

trip to meet with US President Eisenhower — a trip that Khrushchev now angrily called off. Another reason for the diplomatic tiff, in my opinion, was Washington's growing displeasure with the USSR for developing closer ties with Cuba.

In the same month, Eisenhower announced he would go to Japan, to renew a military pact that gave the US rights to certain bases on Japanese soil. The pact buttressed Washington's role of world policeman in Asia. The Japanese people had good reason to oppose militarism. They had lived under a military dictatorship until the end of the Second World War, and a US military occupation regime afterwards. They had experienced the fire-bombing of Tokyo, and the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese students, organized by Zengakuren (the All Japan Student Association), demonstrated by the tens of thousands against Eisenhower's visit and the military pact. These were the first of the really massive student actions that were to mark the 1960s throughout the world.

Farrell Dobbs traveled to Japan to witness this struggle first hand and to cover it for *The Militant*. One of the things he reported was a one-day strike by five million workers against the pact. Things became too tumultuous in Japan for Eisenhower's visit — he would have become the focus of the movement. The visit was cancelled. The treaty, however, was rammed through the Diet (Japanese parliament). Farrell joined an anti-nuclear-weapons conference while in Japan, as well as the commemoration to mark the August 6 anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.

The YSA in Boston held a picket line in solidarity with the Japanese students and workers. It was a smaller action than usual because many of our members and others were out-of-town students who had gone home for the summer break. There were eight of us carrying signs outside a building which housed a representative of the Japanese government just across the street from the Boston Common. Our demonstration attracted the attention of some patriotic riff-raff who hung about on that side of the Commons. Soon a mostly hostile crowd had gathered, and a leader emerged, a drunk who began shouting obscenities and making threats. Many in the crowd were just curious, but some backed this guy up.

We were outnumbered. As the situation grew more threatening, I decided to try to defuse it. I was the YSA organizer, and as such, the leader at the action. I confronted the loudmouth, walked up to him and calmly explained that we were within our rights. As he became more belligerent, I offered my jaw, and quietly challenged him to hit me. The bully backed down and the crowd broke up. Looking back, I wonder what would have happened if he hadn't backed down — probably a fight, but that's what would have happened if I hadn't confronted him.

In September my brother Roger moved to Providence, Rhode Island, to attend the

Rhode Island School of Design. He initiated a Fair Play for Cuba Committee at nearby Brown University, and formed a YSA chapter that included Chan from Brown and George Beaseley, Dick McBride and Linda Thompson from RISD. A meeting for Farrell Dobbs' Presidential campaign drew 400 at Brown that fall, and another large meeting was held for Myra Tanner Weiss. We took these large numbers as signs of political change in the air.

Peter Camejo drove the car that took Farrell to Providence from Boston. I was also a passenger. Farrell was known as a courageous man, but his heart was in his throat because of Peter's high-speed driving; he finally demanded that Peter slow down.

During that winter, we were in another skirmish, this time with American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell. He and a handful of his followers were going from city to city to picket theaters showing the film "Exodus," about the role of Jewish refugees from the holocaust in the founding of Israel. Rockwell was scheduled to hit Boston on January 15. Larry Trainor asked me to come over to his house to help draw up a leaflet calling for a counter-demonstration. The leaflet, signed by the Boston SWP and YSA, exhorted: "Nip This Danger in the Bud!" An Italian anarchist printer whom we knew ran off a few thousand copies.

We distributed the flyers at trolley and subway stops, and we pasted them on telephone polls. Carol Lipman, 15 years old at the time, was in a group of ours that was picked up by the cops for posting these leaflets. (Carol later became one of the national leaders of the YSA, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and in various SWP branches.)

The theater where Rockwell was to picket was on a narrow side street not far from the Boston Common. People started arriving early. Soon there were a few thousand, with a group of a few hundred Jewish high school students in the vanguard. The cops were there in force, including a mounted contingent facing the crowd. When Rockwell appeared, the high schoolers attacked, shoving right past the cops. The rest of the crowd surged behind them. Rockwell was pinned against a plate glass window and was taking punches. The police swiftly regrouped around Rockwell and spirited him into the theater. Then they transported him and his little band out of town.

Farrell Dobbs and other national leaders of the party weren't too pleased with our action. The issue was not whether organizing a counter-protest to the Nazis was in order — the SWP and YSA had helped do that around the country. But Rockwell could have been badly hurt or killed, and we, with our provocative leaflet, might have been blamed. Moreover our approach made it look as if we were trying to take away Rockwell's right of free speech. This cut across our battle against the government's

witch-hunt. Rockwell's little band didn't represent a real threat of fascism.

Larry didn't agree with the criticisms of Dobbs and the other national leaders of the SWP. He pointed to the 1939 demonstration called by the SWP against a fascist meeting at Madison Square Garden. That time we had helped mobilize 50,000 people and shut down the meeting.

The matter was taken up later that summer at the 1961 SWP convention. In his political report Farrell pointed out that the political situation was different in 1939, when various American fascists like Father Coughlin were gaining some popular support and even organizing to physically attack unions. During a break, I went up to Farrell, and asked him, "So you think we were a little ultraleft?" "Just a tetch," he said with a smile. I was convinced, but I don't think Larry changed his mind.

I later read something by Lenin to the effect that youth seemed to be ordained "by God himself" to start out their revolutionary careers by being ultraleft. I believe that this was the only time Lenin invoked the Supreme Being in a political argument.

In the fall of 1960, Belgium was fostering a civil war in the newly independent Congo in Africa, formerly the Belgian Congo. Mineral-rich Katanga, headed by a puppet government, was trying to break away from the new government. Elements in the Belgian-trained military were seeking to oust the country's first elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. The US also got in on the action, under cover of the United Nations.

Lumumba was a popular figure, who wanted real independence for Congo, including control over its vast mineral wealth. Belgium wanted to keep ownership of these resources, and the US wanted to get its fingers in the pie as well. Washington and Brussels were also alarmed by Lumumba's neutrality in the Cold War. They backed the military coup that overthrew Lumumba, murdered him, and installed the first in a series of puppets of the West. They presided over a system of utter corruption, murder, terrorism and plunder of the country that continued until 1998 when the last of these dictators, Mobutu, was toppled. This was just one of the many crimes against humanity that Washington has perpetrated. The divisions, weakness, wars and poverty that resulted from imperialist domination still plague the country.

When we heard of Lumumba's arrest, torture and murder, the Boston YSA decided to see if we could gather enough forces to stage a public demonstration against the coup. We were in contact with radical African students at Harvard and other schools in the area, and we put out a joint call with them for a demonstration in Harvard Square in Cambridge. But on the day of the action, March 4, the African students failed to show up. We were never able to find out why, but it is possible they were threatened by the Harvard administration with loss of scholarships or visas.

In any case, the YSA was alone and we decided to go ahead anyway. We carried our signs in a march around Harvard Square. Most students and others in the Square were curious and, not being well informed about events in Congo, took our explanatory leaflets. But then we were attacked by a group throwing eggs. We later learned, through reports in the *Harvard Crimson*, that they included members of the Harvard football team.

One of the eggs hit me in the head. Before I knew what was happening, my wife, Ethel, who had joined the YSA, charged the attackers with her picket sign held up as a club. Seeing this, other picketers spontaneously came running to her defense. It looked like a well-organized flying squadron, with Ethel as the point person. The football heroes turned and scattered into Harvard Yard, with YSA members in pursuit. The next issue of the *Crimson* featured a front page photo of Ethel charging the jocks. We were shown the issue of the paper a few days later by Dr. Fritz Pappenheim, a well-known Marxist scholar visiting Harvard. Some of us, including Ethel, went to see him at his apartment to talk about his book, *The Alienation of Modern Man*. He recognized Ethel from her picture.

## 5. THE CUBAN REVOLUTION CHANGES THE WORLD!

The international context in which the Cuban revolution developed was very different than today's. The USSR and the Soviet bloc still existed. As workers' states, these countries were capable of coming to Cuba's aid as the revolution deepened and the conflict with Washington escalated. But the ruling bureaucratic castes in these workers' states also exerted Stalinist pressure on the revolution — in the distorted model of socialism they provided, and in a readiness to sacrifice the interests of Cuba to the Kremlin's search for accommodation with the imperialist West.

The Chinese revolution was only ten years old in 1959, when the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship in Cuba took place. In 1954 Vietnamese independence fighters had defeated the French colonial rulers at Dien Bien Phu and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north of the country. In the 14 years since the end of World War II, the colonial revolution had swept forward. India had won independence from Britain, and Indonesia from the Netherlands. Algeria was in the midst of a great struggle against France. Independence fighters in sub-Saharan Africa were battling Belgium, France, Britain and Portugal. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, led by former colonies which rejected alignment with Washington in the Cold War, had emerged in its first form at the Bandung, Indonesia conference in 1955. The Cuban revolution was part of this vast uprising of the majority of the world's peoples.

Throughout 1959, the Cuban revolution had radicalized, much to Washington's dismay. When they were fighting in the mountains, Castro and the other leaders of the July 26 Movement championed the cause of the peasantry and the agricultural laborers. They had promised to carry out a radical land reform to give all the peasants land and end desperate poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy in the countryside. The July 26 urban underground fought in the name of winning better conditions for the working people and the youth. Unlike many other Latin American leaders who promised such



changes and then failed to deliver once in power, the July 26 Movement meant what it said. Large estates were broken up. Peasants were given land. Agricultural workers took the lead in establishing nationalized or cooperative sugar plantations on many of the big *latifundia*. This led to a split in the new government between the Castro team and pro-capitalist elements who were for land reform on paper but recoiled from its reality.

Some of the expropriated land belonged to the United Fruit Company, a major US company. Alarm bells sounded in Washington. The SWP had the opposite response. We were heartened by the revolution in the countryside and realized something out of the ordinary was afoot in Cuba. But, as readers of 1959 issues of *The Militant* will readily note, we still had a lot to learn about the revolutionary character and leadership capacities of this new leadership that was emerging on the world scene. Farrell Dobbs, together with *Militant* editor Joe Hansen, visited Cuba in the spring of 1960. They came back highly enthusiastic, not only that a deep-going revolution was taking place but that Fidel and others were genuine revolutionaries seeking to lead the masses in a progressive transformation of their country.

Farrell, the party's candidate for President, toured the US, speaking in defense of the revolution. When he came to Boston, we advertised his talk on campuses and among the many young people we met while picketing Woolworth's. During the worst days of the witch-hunt, the Boston SWP branch held fewer public meetings than before, and saw attendance shrink to a handful. But on the night of Farrell's talk we were pleasantly surprised by the turnout of 80 to 100 young people who packed our small meeting room. As they squeezed in, Larry had us dusting off chairs that were in storage and hadn't been used in years. After the meeting, Larry excitedly said to me, "Barry, we're on the move!"

In July, in retaliation for the expropriation of land owned by US companies, President Eisenhower banned the import of sugar from Cuba. Sugar was Cuba's main export crop, and until then the US had agreed to allow a sizable amount of Cuban sugar to be imported into the US at a subsidized price. Cuba responded by offering the sugar to the Soviet Union. A deal was struck, with sugar bartered for oil. US companies owned the oil refineries in Cuba. Washington barred these companies from refining the Soviet oil. The revolutionary government struck back, taking over the management of the refineries, although at first the ownership (and profits) remained with Texaco and the other oil giants operating in Cuba.

Each US blow to the revolution was met with a counter-blow by the Castro government. The Cuban masses were galvanized by the dawning realization that the US domination of their country and economy was being challenged and could be

ended. Cuba was becoming free!

As happens in every deep-going popular revolution, the mobilization of workers soon went beyond what the government had proposed. I remember seeing a television news broadcast of telephone workers marching through the streets of Havana calling on the government to “intervene” — to take over the telephone company, which was owned by International Telephone and Telegraph, a US firm. The workers, who were smiling and shouting and singing, carried a coffin painted with the letters “ITT” and ceremoniously buried it. Such scenes were typical that summer, as the government “intervened” in more and more foreign-owned (mainly US-owned) enterprises — a step which led to nationalization in the context of the growing hostility of Washington toward the revolution. The revolutionary leadership and the mobilized masses were leading and responding to each other in a profound revolutionary process.

US-organized guerrilla fronts made up of counter-revolutionaries and mercenaries sponsored terrorist bombings and killings in an effort to overthrow the revolutionary government. I remember watching a live television report on a demonstration in Havana. Suddenly there was the sound of gunfire. The camera showed a car speeding past while passengers fired on the gathering. Then it became apparent that many in the crowd were also armed, because they began shooting back. The car sped away.

The Cuban government armed the people in a nationwide militia, using the July 26 Movement’s armed contingents as its core. In every town and city block-by-block Committees for the Defense of the Revolution were formed. These CDRs became the eyes and ears of the revolution and gave the masses a direct hand in improving conditions in their neighborhoods.

Reflecting our own growing confidence in the revolutionary leadership, *The Militant* began to carry speeches by Castro and other Cuban leaders, which were among the best popular explanations of what the revolution was doing. In one of the first speeches we published, Fidel explained that the US-inspired counter-revolutionary fronts would fail because, unlike the guerrillas of the July 26 Movement, they could never build a base in the peasantry with their program of returning the land to the exploiters. Over the next years others on the US left also came to support the Cuban revolution, but *The Militant* was always the best and most consistent US source providing truthful news about Cuba and publishing the ideas of the Cuban revolutionaries in their own words.

In the summer of 1960, a profound debate developed among the leaders of the revolution. Castro, Che Guevara and the rest of the July 26 Movement that had fought the US-backed dictator had to do so initially in opposition to the policies of the Popular Socialist Party of Cuba, a typical Stalinist-type Communist party. Moscow had opposed

fighting for revolutionary change in countries like Cuba. Moscow, seeking to ease Cold War tensions, had accepted the idea that Cuba remain part of the US back yard and didn't want to be seen as making trouble for Washington in the US sphere of influence. The pro-Moscow Communist parties in Latin America followed suit.

The PSP had initially denounced the Fidel's group as ultra-left at the time of the beginning of Castro's struggle with the attack on the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953. But as it became clear that the struggle had a strong popular base, the PSP changed and supported it. In early 1958, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, a top PSP leader, joined the guerrilla movement in the countryside. The July 26 Movement was not sectarian towards the PSP or to other forces in the anti-Batista movement. Instead, it brought them into the leadership.

Blas Roca, another old-time PSP leader, clung to the Stalinist dogma that in backward countries such as Cuba, a revolution had to be exclusively bourgeois-democratic and should not develop into a socialist revolution. This was really another manifestation of Moscow's conservative world view, that in order to build an alliance with the "patriotic bourgeoisie," the revolution had to be limited to what these "patriotic" capitalists could accept. This meant, of course, that capitalist business enterprises should not be expropriated. As late as the summer of 1960, Roca was still speaking and writing to this effect.

But it was becoming difficult to find Cuban capitalists who would be loyal to the revolution and willing to defend it against the colossus to the north. Most were looking to the US to force a halt to the revolution. A growing number were fleeing to the United States, and many more would soon follow.

In August, a Latin American Congress of Youth was held in Havana. Many different tendencies that supported the revolution sent delegates, including Stalinists, Trotskyists and others. The YSA sent a delegation which included Peter Camejo, Eva Chertov, Peter Buch and Suzanne Weiss. A heated debate took place over whether the revolution would have to expropriate the Cuban as well as the foreign capitalists. The Stalinists, preferring not to criticize the Castro government directly, singled out the Trotskyists for attack.

Castro spoke to the Congress, and put to a vote the proposition that all imperialist-owned property would be nationalized. The proposition was approved unanimously in a thundering standing ovation. The revolution was moving rapidly to the left. The Congress, under the influence of the Cubans, ended on a positive note, calling for the unity of all tendencies present in defense of Cuba.

In September a Cuban leadership delegation, including Castro, came to New York to attend a session of the United Nations. The US government put pressure on hotels

not to provide lodging for the Cubans. This petty act of harassment backfired. Castro declared that the delegation would camp out in Central Park. Berta Green, a member of the SWP who was also the Executive Secretary of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), got in touch with the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, which agreed the Cubans could stay there.

The *Daily News* reported that Castro was seen at a dinner at the hotel with a “red haired call girl.” The so-called call girl was actually FPCC activist and SWP member Sylvia Weinstein, who worked in *The Militant’s* circulation department.

Outside the hotel, there were daily demonstrations, of up to 4,000 people, in support of the revolution.

We came to be part of the leadership of the FPCC partly as the result of a crisis in the organization. The original FPCC leadership was somewhat timid, and shied away from forthright defense of the revolution as it radicalized. In response, Cuban members of the July 26 Movement living in the US blocked with the SWP and some other militants, and took over the leadership of the Committee. It was while he was staying at the Theresa that Castro met Malcolm X. A few years later, I would interview Malcolm for the *Young Socialist* in his office at the Theresa. The revolutionary Black nationalist was attracted to the Cuban Revolution from the start and supported it until he was murdered in 1965.

In October, the Cubans smashed a US-sponsored counter-revolutionary guerrilla front. Castro then spoke before a huge crowd of cheering workers and peasants, and said that the revolution would proceed to nationalize the Cuban and foreign capitalists, who had become completely hostile to the revolution. Capitalist properties would be confiscated “down to the nails in their boots!” The debate with Blas Roca on the revolution’s course was over.

When this speech was reported on the nightly TV news, I was so excited that I immediately telephoned Peter Camejo, and told him that I thought by this action Cuba had become a workers’ state. Peter and I had been discussing the revolution’s course since he attended the Youth Congress. I was right. This was a revolutionary workers’ state based on the mobilization of the workers and peasants, not a degenerated one like the Soviet Union, which was characterized by bureaucratic dictatorship over the masses and rejection of the revolutionary program of Marxism.

The July 26 Movement was so named to express its continuity with the unsuccessful attempt by Castro and a band of rebels to take over the army base at Moncada on July 26, 1953 in order to launch an insurrection against the Batista dictatorship. Many of the rebels were summarily shot. Castro managed to avoid that fate, but was arrested, tried and sent to prison with a number of his followers. At his trial he gave a speech

that turned the tables by indicting the dictatorship. In it he outlined the revolutionary program of the movement. This speech is known by its last sentence: "History will absolve me!"

In this remarkable speech, Castro defended the right of revolution against tyranny, quoting many writers and historic documents, including the American Declaration of Independence and the Cuban Constitution itself. The goal of the movement was to overthrow Batista by revolutionary means. Castro listed those he looked to for support: the unemployed, the farm laborers who worked only four months a year, the industrial workers, the small farmers who worked like feudal serfs on land that was not theirs, the teachers, professors and other professionals, and the small business owners burdened with debt and hounded by venal officials. "The future of the country," he said, "and the solution of its problems cannot continue to depend on the cold calculations of profits that ten or twelve magnates draw up in their air-conditioned offices."

Castro outlined six immediate problems that a revolutionary government would have to address: a land reform to give land to those who work it, industrialization, employment, housing, education, and health. Along with these were the restoration of public liberties, political democracy and true independence.

What distinguished Fidel Castro and his team was that they meant what they said. They carried out their program in action, even though it meant breaking with the traditional ruling classes and the powerful imperialist bastion in Washington. As a result, the revolution in power evolved into a socialist revolution as it mobilized the working people and youth to confront their enemies.

The Cuban example was burned into my brain, and it had a profound impact on the entire SWP and YSA memberships. The revolutionary example of the revolution and its leaders came to inspire a generation of youth around the world. The leaders of the Cuban revolution were young! Castro was only ten years older than I was, and many of the other leaders were younger than he. They didn't wear suits and ties, but beards and guerrilla fatigues. Among the revolutionary leaders were young women. Some were Black. They pledged to outlaw official racism against Afro-Cubans; and they did so, while our government had to be *forced* into confronting the Jim Crow bigots of the South. The Cuban Revolution brimmed with spontaneity, honesty, enthusiasm, and a willingness to think new thoughts and defy the powers that be. As we entered the turbulent '60s, the Cuban Revolution's leadership became heroes and role models to radicalizing youth in the US and throughout the world.

## 6. THE FREEDOM RIDES

In May 1961, a new battlefield opened in the fight for Black rights — the Freedom Rides. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized 16 people, Black and white, to board two buses on a trip from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans. Called Freedom Riders, they challenged segregated seating on interstate buses in the South. The month before, a shorter Freedom Ride had been organized from East St. Louis to Sikeston, Missouri, but it was the trip from D.C. to New Orleans that caught the nation’s attention. Other Freedom Rides soon followed.

Federal law prohibited segregation on buses traveling between states, but state laws in the South enforced such segregation. CORE wasn’t the only group to recognize this contradiction between federal law and the Jim Crow laws in the Southern states. The civil rights leadership as a whole saw that this contradiction could be used as a wedge in the struggle. After the victory in Montgomery, it was decided to exploit the contradiction between federal and Southern law on interstate bus transportation to pressure the federal government to act.

CORE had a policy of non-violence, but the Southern racists did not. The racist attacks on the Freedom Riders in Alabama were shown on national TV, and galvanized hundreds of young people to join in the battle, especially young Blacks in the South.

George Weissman, writing in *The Militant*, said of the Freedom Riders: “Alabama’s howling, bloodthirsty, white-supremacist mobs, wielding lead pipes, baseball bats, slugging, kicking and stomping, could not defeat them. The threats of blustering, cowardly Governor Patterson, his openly giving the go-ahead signal to the hoodlums of the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Councils, could not deter them. The unconcealed collaboration of the Birmingham and Montgomery police with the racist gangs waiting at the bus stations and burning with lynch-fever could not turn them back.

“The heroic Negro students of the South and the small band of their white comrades-in-arms in the fight against segregation, now known throughout the world as the Freedom Riders, have won the day. Beaten to the ground, they rose to bind their

wounds and travel on. Those too badly injured have been replaced by hundreds of volunteers streaming now into Montgomery from college campuses all over the South. Their determination ... has left a trail of bloodstains on the highways of Alabama. Nonetheless, the Freedom Riders have bought their tickets and got on buses which will go through Mississippi and Louisiana.”<sup>1</sup>

In Jackson, Mississippi, 306 were arrested. Robert F. Williams, a Black leader from Monroe, North Carolina, went to Jackson to visit the imprisoned Freedom Riders. He was trying to recruit a contingent to come to Monroe, a hotbed of Klan activity. Williams had organized a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Monroe some years before. Founded in 1909, the NAACP was the oldest and largest civil rights organization in the country. It focused much of its work on legal challenges to racism. Unlike most NAACP chapters, which tended to be composed of professionals, the Monroe chapter was made up of and led mostly by working people.

Dr. A.E. Perry was another leader of the group. Perry was sent to prison on the charge of having performed an abortion on a white woman (abortion was illegal in almost all states). His conviction was based solely on her testimony. Perry was a target of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Monroe NAACP had a policy of responding to armed racist violence with organized, armed self-defense. When the NAACP began fighting segregation in Monroe, Klansmen rode through the Black community, shooting at and beating Blacks. Williams, a veteran of the Korean War, organized a chapter of the National Rifle Association to fight back. After that, the Klan lure of flogging people and shooting up the Black neighborhoods diminished considerably among the white racists.

Williams had known of the YSA and SWP before the Freedom Rides. In 1959, he was involved in the defense of two local Black boys, one aged 9, and the other 8, who were committed to reform school for indeterminate sentences because a little white girl had kissed one of them on the cheek. Nora Roberts had covered the story for the *Young Socialist*, and the SWP and YSA supported the defense committee that Williams formed. George Weissman went to Monroe to help the effort. The boys were eventually freed. Williams also worked with the SWP in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

Williams proposed to the jailed Freedom Riders and their supporters that some of them come to Monroe to join the Monroe Non-Violent Action Committee (MNVAC) to stage non-violent anti-segregation protests at the county courthouse. Seventeen people agreed and, together with the MNVAC they organized a peaceful picket line. Although not a pacifist, Williams backed the action and urged the Black community to abide by the decisions of the protesters.

On August 26, 1961, a racist mob of 5,000 attacked the demonstration. The local police joined in. Cops pinned picketers as young as 14 and 15 while the mob beat them. Blacks from the community attempted to rescue the victims, but were set upon by the cops who had armed the white thugs. One white Freedom Rider who was arrested was nearly beaten to death in jail by an inmate. The attack had been egged on by the cops. Carloads of KKKers invaded the Black community and started attacking Blacks. Black defense guards began firing back.

In the melee a Klan-linked white couple was driving through the Black area. They were stopped by the Blacks, disarmed and placed under citizen's arrest — to prevent them from being harmed by the angry Black residents. Williams was home at the time, and the couple was brought to his house. When the crowd cooled down, the couple was allowed to leave. The racist government, however, used the events to attack Williams. In Williams' own words, "I could hear a lot of gunfire in front of my house. I received a telephone call from a voice I identified as that of the Chief of Police. He said that I had caused a lot of race trouble and that state troopers were coming and that in 30 minutes I would be hanging in the courthouse square."<sup>2</sup> Williams fled.

Williams and a white Freedom Rider and two Black youths who were members of the MNVAC were then charged with kidnapping the white couple. Later, Mae Mallory, an older Black woman from Cleveland who had been in Monroe, was also indicted. The FBI, under the jurisdiction of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, issued an inflammatory statement that appeared in newspapers across the country and on wanted posters in every post office. The FBI release said that Williams was an "outspoken advocate of Fidel Castro, he is known to have worked as a freelance writer, janitor, freight handler and machinist. Reported to be heavily armed, and diagnosed as a schizophrenic, Williams is described as 6 feet tall, 240 pounds and of heavy build. He is extremely dangerous."<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Royal Mounted Police joined the manhunt.

Some of those in the North, including SWP members and our Canadian co-thinkers, who knew him from pro-Cuba and other activities formed a modern underground railroad that brought him to Canada and from there to Cuba, where he was given political asylum. We helped set up the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants, which got out the truth about what happened in Monroe, and we began organizing the legal and public defense of the accused. After several years the frame-up was defeated, and Williams eventually returned home, becoming active in Black rights struggles in Detroit.

Three of the Freedom Riders who had gone to Monroe and aided the defense effort in New York joined the YSA and SWP, among them Ken Shilman, who became



a party leader. Shilman had watched television coverage of the assaults on the first three Freedom Rides, and decided then and there to be on the next ride to the South.

Freedom Rides occurred even as far North as Maryland, a border state, where many segregationist policies existed. Fred Feldman, who joined the SWP later and became a leading member of our writing staffs, was arrested seven times on these Maryland Freedom Rides.

For the most part, however, the YSA was derelict in not throwing ourselves into these actions like Shilman did, mostly I think, because we had no chapters in the South, and we tended to look askance at the nonviolent philosophy of CORE. Over time, however, we learned that it is more important to consider the impact of actions than the stated viewpoint of the leadership. Later on, we were able to build many party units in the South.

## 7. RIFTS IN THE SWP

During the 1960 election campaign, in the fall, Peter and I became aware that there were two loosely defined competing groups in the SWP. One group was led by Murry Weiss and his wife Myra Tanner Weiss, who were both party leaders. The other group was less cohesive, and existed primarily in opposition to what they called the “Weiss clique.” The friction between the two groupings took place, for the most part, beneath the surface of party life, although the whole issue had been aired in the party leadership some time before we joined. In the main, there were no serious political differences between the groups, and officially the problem was resolved; but the two groupings continued to exist.

The Weiss group acted like a set of friends who held themselves somewhat apart from the rest of the party. They supported each other in elections for party posts, and considered themselves a little superior politically and theoretically. The counter-grouping to the Weiss group included members of the National Committee, but was a minority among the non-Weiss party members. The counter grouping tried to act in concert to block members of the Weiss group from achieving some of its objectives. Dobbs and Kerry regarded the Weiss group as a clique, but were opposed to organizing a counter-grouping or acting in a vindictive fashion towards Murry and Myra or their supporters. Larry Trainor was part of the anti-Weiss grouping, however, so Peter and I were initially influenced by his views.

The people in the Weiss group tended to believe that they were being held back from rightful leadership roles in the party by a stodgy and somewhat unsophisticated grouping that had come out of the trade unions. This was their assessment of Farrell Dobbs and Tom Kerry, who were the party’s National Secretary and National Organization Secretary respectively. The Weiss grouping sometimes held private meetings of its members to discuss the situation in the party, even though the party’s organizational principles sought to discourage such behind-the-scenes functioning of party groupings in favor of open discussion of differences in the official party bodies.

Personal and group conflicts are pretty typical of all organizations. Revolutionary

socialist movements are no exception to this human frailty. But I think that this unfortunate friction in the SWP was exacerbated by the debilitating years of the witch-hunt. The period of deep isolation and reaction turned members inward, looking for faults in others to explain why the party wasn't doing better. I would learn later that there were other weaknesses in the party that originated in that period of sharp anticommunism in American society.<sup>§</sup> Learning a little about this mostly non-political division in 1960 made clear to me why the SWP candidates in this and previous Presidential contests included both Dobbs and Weiss. Myra's presence on the ticket helped strengthen party unity, and she was a good speaker and an effective candidate.

The people in the Weiss group were important party builders and activists. They were instrumental in forming the YSA and pushing the whole regroupment project. Their role in forming the YSA explains why they had a strong representation on its National Executive Committee.

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<sup>§</sup> The Weiss group originated in part from disputes that arose during a factional fight in the SWP that led to a split in 1953. In this split, the party lost a big chunk of experienced trade unionists. The main spokesperson for this grouping was Bert Cochran, a longtime leader of party work in the United Auto Workers.

The Cochranites, as they were called in the party by the time I joined, argued that Cannon and the party majority didn't understand the depth of the rightward turn in the working class as a result of the anticommunist witch-hunt and the resultant purging of militants from the unions. They tended to look askance at socialist election campaigns, *Militant* subscription campaigns, and other efforts to reach out broadly to as yet unpoliticized working people. They advocated an orientation toward existing left milieus, including the Stalinists. They held that the party was exaggerating its prospects elsewhere.

The Cochran group traced this failure to the optimistic projections that the party had made during the post-war labor upsurge of the 1940s, when the party had recruited many hundreds of workers across the country.

Cannon was convinced that Cochran and his group had given up on the struggle to build a revolutionary workers' party in the US. The term for describing this pessimistic current in the party was "liquidationism" — that is, a tendency that would lead eventually to the party being disbanded, or liquidated. After leaving the SWP, the Cochran group put out a magazine, the *American Socialist*, for some years. It was an intelligent and well-written magazine. By the time I joined, however, the group that had left in 1953 had dissolved, and was not a factor in my political life. The assessment that the Cochranites were giving up on building a revolutionary party certainly appeared to have been confirmed in life.

Cannon thought that Dobbs and others in the leadership were soft on the Cochran minority, and so he turned to Murry and Myra Weiss to lead the fight for his views. Murry and Myra were living in Los Angeles at the time, and they were respected leaders of the party there. Dobbs did not disagree with Cannon fundamentally about the Cochranites, but favored a slower, less aggressive approach to try to save more of their base of support among the party trade

In January 1961, the SWP National Committee (NC) held a plenary meeting to discuss the Cuban revolution. A “plenum” is a gathering of the whole Committee, which had members from all around the country, in contrast to the Political Committee (PC), a subcommittee of the NC usually resident in New York, which met more frequently. This meeting of the National Committee decided that with the sweeping nationalizations of October 1960, Cuba had become a workers’ state. Moreover, many features of the Cuban workers’ state were qualitatively superior to those ruled by Stalinist bureaucracies. This new state was based on the mobilization of the workers and peasants under a leadership that was dedicated to advancing the revolution rather than the interests of a bureaucratic stratum. The position adopted noted that the revolution lacked as yet instruments of popular rule such as the Soviets of the early Russian revolution.

The plenum undertook to defend the revolution and the leadership team headed by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raul Castro against the attempts by Washington to

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unionists. Cannon was genuinely fearful that, in the increasingly unfavorable political situation, delay in opening a political fight against “Cochranism” could result in losing not just the trade unionists in this group, but the party as a whole.

There was an international dimension to this fight. The central leadership of the Fourth International, especially its secretary Michel Pablo, was secretly backing the Cochranites. Pablo advocated that the world movement make a turn towards the Communist parties, and projected the pessimistic view that we faced possibly “centuries” of bureaucratically deformed workers’ states. He felt that the SWP majority was too inflexible toward the American CP and too insistent on the centrality of an independent revolutionary party in the United States. When Cannon learned of Pablo’s shenanigans, he became alarmed. Cannon had learned first-hand, through Stalin’s interference in the American Communist Party, the destructive effects of trying to run a party in another country from an “international center.”

After the split, Cannon sought to maintain a balance between the Weiss group and the Dobbs leadership. Undoubtedly, Cannon was concerned with the unity of the party after the split with Cochran and Pablo. Cannon nominated Dobbs to be National Secretary when he stepped down to go to Los Angeles. But he also saw Weiss as a possible base of support for making sure that his own views got a hearing. For their part, the Weisses always sought Cannon’s approval in their conflicts with the Dobbs leadership, and they tended to see themselves as spokespersons for Cannon.

After the split, the Cochranite’s predictions about the course the SWP would take were proven wrong. The Dobbs team’s political assessments were very sober. I was struck by the resolutions in the early 1960s on the political situation in the US, which stated clearly that the working class remained politically conservative. At the same time, these resolutions pointed to areas of the class struggle, especially the growing fight for Black rights, which were beginning to run counter to this general situation. When there was a real opening in the CP in 1956, the SWP jumped into it, and made a critical turn to the youth.

overthrow them. *Militant* editor Joseph Hansen wrote the resolution that the plenum adopted, and made the report on Cuba to the meeting. The issue of the Cuban revolution was to be put before the party membership for discussion and decision at an SWP convention scheduled to take place that summer.

At the plenum, the Weiss grouping agreed with the basic stance that was adopted, although Bert Deck, one of the Weiss supporters, expressed differences on a secondary aspect of the issue. He thought that the qualitative turning point in the creation of a workers' state came earlier, when militias were established in mid-1959.

The decision was not unanimous, however. Serious opposition to the majority position was expressed by leaders of the YSA: Tim Wohlforth, James Robertson and Shane Mage. They held that Cuba remained a capitalist state, and they viewed the leadership as fundamentally opposed to the rule of the working class.<sup>§</sup>

As a result, discussion over Cuba also began in the day-to-day leadership body of the YSA, the National Executive Committee (NEC). Supporters of Wohlforth, the National Chairman of the YSA, had a majority of one on the NEC. Other members of the NEC, including Jim Lambrecht, the National Secretary, and Nora Roberts, supported the Weiss group. Nora had joined the YSA in her middle teen years when her father Dan Roberts was editor of *The Militant*. (Dan Roberts died at the age of 44,

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<sup>§</sup> Wohlforth, Robertson and Mage came out of the "third camp" Young Socialist League. They had been won over to the SWP majority view that the USSR and other states led by Stalinists were bureaucratically deformed but still workers' states. But when it came to Cuba, they argued that different criteria had to apply in deciding that a revolution in its upswing had become a workers' state, in contrast to the criteria that had been applied to the degenerating Russian revolution. They rejected the majority's view that the decisive turning point in Cuba was the expropriation of the capitalist class and establishment of a nationalized and planned economy. They insisted that there was a fundamental conflict between the leadership headed by Fidel Castro and the worker and peasant masses they had led in a revolution.

They held that because the revolution had not been led by a Trotskyist party and there were no soviets, Cuba was not a workers' state. They made the mistake of deducing the nature of the revolution from our theoretical and programmatic expectations, rather than starting with the facts of the revolution itself and then enriching theory on that basis. They rejected what everyone all over the world could see, whether the observers were for the revolution or against it: a socialist revolution had occurred. Certainly the capitalists and their representatives in Washington understood this fact with great clarity and hatred.

When Wohlforth and Robertson headed rival factions later, Robertson adopted the view that Cuba was a deformed workers' state and advocated a political revolution against Fidel, Raul, and Che. Wohlforth continued to argue that Cuba was capitalist until after his expulsion from the Workers League in the mid-1970s, when he adopted the "deformed workers' state" position.

soon after I joined.) Sherry Finer was an NEC member who belonged to neither group. She, like Lambrecht and Roberts, supported the party's stand on Cuba.

The YSA leadership was also divided over the developing peace movement. The SWP Political Committee adopted a resolution introduced by Murry Weiss affirming the party's general position that capitalism is the root of modern war, and that lasting peace could only be achieved through a socialist revolution. A harsh polemical tone strongly suggested rejection of Wohlforth's view that the YSA should jump into the student peace groups, such as Student SANE and the growing Student Peace Union (SPU) led by the Young Peoples Socialist League. In this debate, Peter and I sided with Wohlforth, and we were already carrying out that policy in Boston. A YSA member was a leader in Student SANE at Brandeis, although there was no SPU in the Boston area.

Peter and I received the NEC minutes, and followed the discussions. My brother Roland was living at our family home in New Jersey, and attended YSA meetings in New York as a guest. He later told me, "The fights between the Wohlforth supporters and the Weiss group made choosing a chair difficult, and so I would chair. Both groups invited me to their own parties. I was not a member of the YSA, but I would be told how bad Farrell Dobbs was at the Weiss parties, and the Wohlforth grouping had their own horror stories to tell." Roland came to Boston in July 1961, where he joined the YSA and the SWP.

Meanwhile, I lost my job again. The company which had hired me under the table let me go because they wanted to get some government work. I got another job working on a small magazine called *Computers and Automation*, at much lower pay. There were only five or six employees, some of them students at Antioch College, which allowed students to alternate quarters of working and school. The man who ran the magazine was an ex-Communist who knew of my politics.

In April 1961 the CIA launched its long-prepared invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. We had formed a chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee together with Cubans living in the Boston area who were members of the July 26 Movement. Upon hearing of the invasion on the radio at work, my boss let me go early so I could help the FPCC plan and organize a demonstration against the invasion.

I was approached by a young member of the Communist Party, the same person I had debated earlier for the benefit of George Shriver. He said the CP wanted to join in building a demonstration. Such united work with the CP was very unusual, and helped produce a protest action of 200 near Boston Common.

The invasion was a fiasco. Washington and the counter-revolutionary Cuban force believed their own propaganda that the Cuban people would greet the invaders as

liberators. Instead, the Cuban people mobilized en masse to defend their revolution. Two days before the invasion, several US B-26's with Cuban insignia had staged a bombing raid against the then very small Cuban air force. Thus forewarned, the Cubans were able to prepare for the imminent military assault, and they smashed it.

The next day, Castro proclaimed the socialist character of the revolution at a rally commemorating victims of the raid. What the imperialists couldn't forgive, he said, was that the Cubans had carried out a socialist revolution under their very noses. The battle at the Bay of Pigs was fought openly for socialism.

On May Day, hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants marched in Havana to celebrate their victory. Castro spoke and developed the theme of socialist revolution. *The Militant* extensively described this speech, which in my mind confirmed that the position that we had adopted had been tested and reaffirmed in life. Most YSA members, whether or not they were also in the SWP, were excited and inspired by the Cuban revolution, and they naturally supported the SWP NC majority position that was later adopted at the party's 1961 convention.

Several months prior to the SWP convention, the party opened up a nationwide pre-convention discussion. Party members were able to debate the issues in a written discussion bulletin that was distributed to the entire membership. Each branch of the party also held discussion and debate on the issues.

Following the pre-convention discussion, I was elected a delegate from the Boston branch to the SWP convention. Gusty Trainor had been nominated, but she was not elected. Afterwards, Larry chewed me out. He told me that I hadn't considered the "woman question." If I hadn't run, Gusty would have been elected, and the branch delegation would have had a better gender balance.

At the time, years before the new women's movement erupted, very few groups on the left paid much attention to women's issues. Although the SWP still had a lot to learn, we were better on this question than society at large and other socialist groups. We studied works like Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, and we kept abreast of new writings such as *The Second Sex* by French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir. We knew that the early Bolsheviks strongly advanced women's rights, advances that the Stalinist counter-revolution reversed. In *The Militant* and in party discussion bulletins, Evelyn Reed and Joseph Hansen took positions on the cosmetics industry and capitalist society's standards of beauty that were far in advance of their time, and that would not come to the fore until the new women's movement emerged in the late 1960s.

But it took some years before the party as a whole made real steps forward regarding women in all aspects of party life. For example, during our frequent get-togethers at

the Trainors', Gusty often expressed her point of view on the various issues we talked about; but she wasn't paid much heed. When she participated in the women's movement later, she began to express her anger over the way she had been treated, as did many other women in the radical movement.

Another important issue arose prior to the convention: whether SWP members who were also YSA members had to be bound by the decisions of the SWP convention in the discussion leading to the YSA convention, scheduled to take place in the winter. Murry Weiss urged that SWP members in the YSA be free to argue for their positions in the YSA discussion. Tim Wohlforth informed me years later that in the Political Committee, Farrell Dobbs and Morris Lewit, a party leader since the 1930s, supported this position. Just before the National Committee plenum, Cannon sent a letter from Los Angeles to the gathering expressing his opinion that all members of the SWP should present the views of the SWP majority in the YSA as in other "outside" organizations. (This was the general policy of the SWP, although the party could make exceptions.)

Tim and his grouping were central leaders of the YSA. But they were in a small minority in the YSA on the Cuban question. They were an important part of the YSA, and most party leaders didn't want to see them removed from the YSA leadership, which would most certainly happen if the party's discussion was repeated in the YSA. (It should be noted that elections to leadership bodies in the YSA, as in the party, were based on proportional representation for opposing political views. So Tim's group would only be entitled to representation in the YSA leadership based upon the percentage of YSA delegates voting for his positions.)

After Cannon's intervention, Murry withdrew his proposal. In an informal meeting at the convention between Cannon and Wohlforth, they agreed to try to defuse the situation. Two leaders from each side on the YSA National Executive Committee would leave the YSA, and two other members of the YSA NC who were not associated with the previous factionalism on that body, would move to New York and become members of the NEC. Those asked by the party to leave the YSA would be two party members over 30, Jim Robertson and Jim Lambrecht, who were, in any case, too old to remain leaders of a youth group. In the years leading up to the founding of the YSA, our numbers were so small that we needed the help of some of the older young adults from the party. But as the YSA grew, we were able to establish a more natural age base for the membership.

A member of the SWP Political Committee would now sit in on meetings of the NEC, without vote. It was already the practice that the YSA NEC appoint one of its members to sit on the party PC. Tim Wohlforth was the YSA representative on the



SWP Political Committee. Carl Feingold was designated to be the SWP representative on the YSA NEC. Carl moved to New York from Minneapolis, and he was also elected the full-time organizer of the New York branch of the SWP.

I was asked to move to New York to be part of the NEC. Ethel and I agreed to make the move. This move was to mark a drastic change in my life in the SWP. Before then, my perspective was to be a branch activist and YSA leader in Boston, as well as a national leader of the YSA in the sense of being on the YSA National Committee. From now on, however, I was to be immersed in the center of party life.

I had lined up a job as a programmer with the Equitable Life Assurance Society, which had a big building in midtown Manhattan. Ethel got a job as a typist. We found a basement apartment in Brooklyn. But in the process of moving, our Volkswagen bug broke down just outside New York City. I called Carl Feingold, my contact in the city, and got directions to his apartment. When we arrived there the room was full, and Carl was giving a report on the latest Political Committee meeting. I had stumbled into a meeting of the Weiss group.

When I attended my first NEC meeting, I expected to be co-opted onto that body, but Tim's group, still holding a majority on the NEC, reneged on the agreement. They defeated the proposal to add me to that body, because that would have deprived them of their majority on the Cuba question. They now found it unacceptable to be in a minority, even though it was clear that a substantial majority of the YSA disagreed with them on Cuba, and they knew that they would become a minority when they agreed to the deal.

The Political Committee decided that if Tim's grouping wanted to challenge the SWP through the YSA, in essence counter-posing the YSA to the SWP, then the best course would be to allow the fight to take place in the YSA pre-convention discussion. Accordingly, the PC voted to free SWP members in the YSA from party discipline in the discussion. They knew that the outcome would almost certainly be the defeat of Tim's position in the YSA.

The practice of freeing party members from SWP discipline in discussions in the YSA became the norm following this YSA convention. We learned that it was far better to operate with this norm than to impose SWP discipline on SWP members in the YSA. This made YSA discussions real debates, helped educate the YSA members, and developed their capacity to stand on their own two feet in politics. Since most YSA members would eventually join the SWP, this policy benefited the party in the long run. In following years, unfortunately, some branches put pressure on party members in the YSA to toe the SWP line in the YSA, contrary to the spirit of the party decisions on this matter.

The work of the YSA national office leading up to the YSA convention — mimeographing the discussion bulletins and much else — fell largely on Sherry Finer. Sherry was the youngest of the three daughters of Farrell Dobbs and Marvel Scholl. All three were in the party. Barbara Dority, who had been with the Weiss group, joined Sherry in this task, but other NEC members did little of this practical work. Barbara and Sherry became friends, and worked to limit the effects of the divisions. I would give them a hand in the evenings, after work. They were beautiful women, older than I, and would sometimes tease me. Peter Camejo moved to New York in the late fall. He was to have been the other YSA National Committee member to join the NEC under the arrangement reached by Wohlforth and Cannon.

The discussion in the YSA, as expected, resulted in a big majority for the pro-Cuba and pro-Castro position. At the convention, Peter gave the majority report on Cuba. I gave the majority report on the political situation facing the YSA and our tasks in the coming year. We were also able to convince a large majority of the delegates that the YSA should get involved in the student peace movement. On the basis of the delegates' votes, a new majority was formed on the NC. This YSA convention marked a political turning point for the organization and a high point in my experience at the time.

In its physical environment, however, the YSA convention was the nadir. It was held in a hotel in Chicago, several blocks west of Canal Street in what was then a skid-row district. Many of the delegates and observers had been frequenting a nearby restaurant, of less than stellar quality, and the night before my report a number of us got violent diarrhea, including me. The hotel rooms had no toilets. There were only bathrooms down the hall for communal use, and those of us suffering from diarrhea had to wait our turn. So it was really a terrible situation to be so sick when I got up to give my report.

The Weiss group had been seeking the position of National Chairman for one of their supporters, Arthur Felberbaum. He had proposed to me in the fall that he be elected to that position, and he campaigned at the convention for the post. But Felberbaum's involvement in factional hostilities on the NEC had alienated some in the YSA, and it turned out in any case that he was too old. He had reached the age limit for SWP members in the YSA.

As a result, Peter and I, who had led the fight in defense of the party's position on Cuba, became the new YSA leaders. I was elected the new National Chairman of the YSA, Peter the National Secretary, and Leroy McRae the National Organization Secretary. Leroy, who was Black, had been a leader of the Woolworth's picketing in Philadelphia. The NC elected a new NEC, with a new majority. The minority was

represented on both bodies, although Tim was no longer in the YSA, having turned 30. I was 24 years old, and Peter was younger. Our ages were now to be typical of the YSA leadership in the 1960s and 1970s.

Peter and I made a good team. He had a very spirited temperament, made many imaginative suggestions for our work, and was always enthusiastic about the need to speedily implement his new ideas — some of which were very good (and others not so good). I was more even tempered, and at that time had a deeper understanding of Marxism. This made for a good balance. Peter was also a great public speaker, the best we had for the two decades that he remained in the party. In fact, he was one of the best speakers on the entire left during the radicalization of the 1960s and 1970s.

When we got back to New York from the convention I visited the one-room apartment on the Lower East Side where Farrell Dobbs and his wife Marvel Scholl lived. I gave them a report on the convention, including the skirmishing over the post of National Chairman. When I suggested fighting harder against the Weiss group, Farrell coldly and quietly said, “Then you’ll have to fight me first.” This sobered me up, and made me think about the need to keep the YSA and party from blowing up when there was broad political agreement.

Nora Roberts was elected the editor of the *Young Socialist* by the National Committee. I tried to work closely with Nora and the other Weiss supporters, and also with Fred Mazelis and other representatives of the minority, who were elected to the YSA leadership. Peter and I were assigned to work full time for the YSA. We received \$35 a week, lower than the minimum wage, much lower given the long hours we actually worked.

I made a national tour of YSA chapters during the spring semester in 1962. The chapters organized public meetings on campuses and in the party meeting halls in each city. I had two prepared speeches, one on the fight against war, and one on the Black struggle. The YSA chapters chose which they wanted me to give.

During my tour stop in Los Angeles, YSA organizer Les Evans and I were arrested. The YSA had not been able to get a room for my talk at Los Angeles City College, so we decided to set up a street corner meeting just outside the campus. We practiced that kind of “soap boxing” from time to time, although in this case I stood on a ladder, not on a soap box. We gathered a small crowd of students, but soon the LA cops showed up. They broke up the meeting by arresting us. The charges were soon dropped, but the cops had achieved their purpose. So much for free speech!

While I was in Los Angeles, I visited Cannon at the small house he shared with Rose Karsner, his lifelong companion and collaborator since the expulsion of the Trotskyists from the CP in 1928. I gave Cannon a report on the YSA convention. It

turned out he was thinking along the same lines as we were on the importance of the fight against war and nuclear destruction. He encouraged us to get into the movement. Whenever I visited Los Angeles, I would make it a point to stop by and talk with Cannon.

My speaking tour had reached Seattle when I got a telephone call from Peter. He and Nora Roberts had disagreed about an article she wanted to publish in the *Young Socialist*, and Nora resigned as editor. After consulting the SWP leadership, Peter asked me to return. I went back by way of Chicago, staying one night at the apartment of Jack Barnes and Betsey Stone. They told me that at the YSA convention, Carl Feingold, the SWP representative to the meeting, had approached Jack with the proposal that Jack run for National Chairman against me after Arthur Felberbaum's campaign fizzled. Feingold had recruited Jack to the movement in Minneapolis, and Feingold probably made his proposal to Jack under the assumption that he and others in the Weiss group would have a strong influence over Jack, had he accepted. Betsey helped convince Jack to decline, avoiding an unnecessary division and potential hard feelings and tensions.

Nora was very talented, and her resignation was a blow to the YSA. Moreover, it began the withdrawal from the movement of most of the Weiss group. I think they were demoralized by not winning the leadership of the YSA. Hostile attitudes towards them also played a role. At the 1961 convention, the anti-Weiss-grouping successfully opposed the re-election of Bert Deck to the party National Committee.

Some Weiss supporters who withdrew from the party claimed that they were being bypassed in favor of younger leaders. Carl Feingold later wrote in an unpublished manuscript, "The real demise of the SWP, in my opinion, began when a small group of young people —led by Jack Barnes, Peter Camejo, and Barry Sheppard — came into the organization and were embraced by the old leadership. They skipped over the next generation, which was mine, and anointed these young students as the new leaders of the organization."

Among those in the Weiss group who stayed in the party were Murry's brother Dave, Allen Taplin, Virginia Garza and her husband, Fred Halstead, who later became the party's most prominent person in the anti-Vietnam-War movement.

Jack Barnes had joined the YSA as leader of a group of pro-Cuba activists at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Feingold, who was the branch organizer of the SWP in nearby Minneapolis, was the first to make contact with them when he was invited to speak at the campus. The YSA that Jack founded at Carleton College remained strong for several years after he and Betsey left the campus. Among those recruited to the YSA were future YSA and party leaders Mary-Alice Waters, Doug

Jenness, Larry Seigle, Caroline Lund, Dan Styron, Barbara Matson, John Benson, Cindy Jaquith, Dave Wulp and Beverly Scott.

Jack Barnes and Betsey Stone graduated from Carleton in the spring of 1961, and moved to the Chicago area to attend graduate school at Northwestern University in Evanston, just north of the city. She was a teaching assistant in history. He had a Woodrow Wilson fellowship to study economics. There they again built a strong YSA, winning, among others, Joel and Jon Britton, Herman Porter, and Lew Jones to the YSA.

My YSA tour also had an organizational aspect, in which I discussed ideas for YSA activities with each of the chapters. I stressed implementing the convention decision to join the student peace movement and work with the Student Peace Union. The SPU's primary activity was campaigning against atomic testing. SPU was to the left of the adult Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), and a large section of the SPU called for the unilateral disarmament of both the US and Soviet Union.

The SPU was launched by pacifists in 1959. Many in the SPU were attracted to the "third camp" position of the Young People's Socialist League. Mike Parker, who became SPU National Secretary in 1960, told me later that he and others became members of YPSL, but were more loyal to the SPU than to YPSL. The YPSL held the "third camp" view that blamed the US and USSR equally for the atomic arms race. The YSA, in contrast, held that Washington and its allies had started the Cold War. More fundamentally, we defended the Soviet Union as a workers' state against imperialism. YPSL favored the slogan "No Tests, East or West" while we aimed our fire at US militarism.

We paid a price for not getting into SPU on a national scale from the start. It was now an organization of thousands, and the YPSL leadership of the SPU won the support of many SPU members. The YPSL leadership also sought to keep out any "Stalinists" and "Stalinoids" (as they labeled us) and in 1962 the SPU adopted the YPSL's line on the Cold War explicitly, effectively ending any national role in the organization for those who disagreed. Because of the prevailing anticommunism, our views would probably have been in the minority even if we had joined SPU earlier, but we would have attracted some students whom we missed because of our delay.

In February, 1962, the SPU and other groups organized a demonstration in Washington against nuclear testing. It was a big success. About 5,000 students and other young people participated, much more than the SPU leaders had expected. The YSA supported the action and we had a contingent there.

In 1970, Peter Camejo wrote about the YPSL's role in this march. By then, the YPSL had been expelled by its adult sponsor, the SP-SDF, and a section of YPSL had

gone on to establish the International Socialists. By 1970, the IS criticized the YSA and SWP's role in the movement against the Vietnam War as too conservative. "You should have seen what their march was like when they controlled it," Peter wrote. "No tendency was allowed to sell papers! We couldn't sell the *Young Socialist*. On top of that, everyone had to march without making a sound — silent. You would just march to some war monument and stand there looking at it, then everyone would turn and walk away. Meanwhile, Kennedy was offering coffee for everyone in the White House."<sup>1</sup> YSAers sold our literature anyway.

Many years later Mike Parker informed me that some of the more conservative forces that joined in building the march had influenced decisions about the character of the demonstration. Mike Parker didn't even go to the march.

The international Helsinki Youth Festival was held in the summer of 1962, organized primarily by the Communist parties and their youth groups. But as a result of the weakening of Stalinism and the victory of the Cuban revolution, the YSA was permitted to send representatives. George Shriver and Dan Rosenshine from the Detroit YSA, were our representatives. They traveled for a couple of weeks in the USSR, and met the Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who wrote in favor of the Cuban revolution and whose work was sharply critical of Stalinism and bureaucratism. When they returned, George and his wife Ellen moved to New York, where George joined the *YS* editorial board. We published an English translation by George of a poem by Yevtushenko that praised the Cuban leaders and was a thinly-disguised attack on the Soviet bureaucrats.

At about this time, we suffered a self-inflicted blow, one that, to my shame, I played a role in delivering. Ted Mellor, who had been recruited in Boston, came to New York to be part of the *Young Socialist* editorial board. When Nora Roberts resigned as editor, Ted took her place. In November, Chan, who was recruited while at Brown University by my brother Roger, was also added to the editorial board.

Ted and Chan were gay and they became a couple. At that time, under the impact of the witch-hunt, the SWP had come to frown on having members who were openly homosexual. The official reason was that known homosexuals could be blackmailed by the political police and pressured to become informers. But the real reason, in my opinion, was simply prejudice against gay people, symptomatic of the general prejudice in society as a whole, which had intensified during the witch-hunt. (Why open homosexuals would be more subject to police blackmail than "closeted" ones had not been thought through by any of us.) I had the impression that there were gay men and lesbians in the party. Lesbians were more tolerated. As was true in society at large, homosexuality in men was more feared.

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In my college years, I had become friends with some gay men, several of them on the political left. But I was 100 percent ready to do what the party thought best. I talked the situation over with Farrell Dobbs, and we came to the conclusion that Ted and Chan could remain members, but only if they were discreet.

I explained the policy to Ted and Chan. They said they could be discreet about their relationship. But in the spring of 1963, Ted and Chan were “necking” at a YSA party. I met with them and told them they would have to leave the YSA and SWP, and they did so without protest. We lost two good comrades, who were also my friends.

But these two were not the only casualties. As a result of this incident, the YSA and SWP moved towards officially adopting the position that homosexuals could not be members. This did not stop us from continuing to recruit gays and lesbians who agreed with our politics. But they stayed in the closet, in the movement as well as in society. This fostered deception and resentment as well as legitimizing prejudice, damaging these comrades and the integrity of the movement. This state of affairs continued until the gay liberation movement exploded on the scene in the late 1960s with the battle gay men and lesbians put up against a police raid of the Stonewall bar in Manhattan. This inspired a number of gay men and lesbians in the party, some of whom were playing leadership roles, to “come out,” and sparked a discussion in the party, with the result that we jettisoned the ban on membership by open homosexuals and embraced the fight for gay rights in society.

## 8. THE SINO-SOVIET SPLIT

Tensions between China and the USSR reached a breaking point in 1960. The SWP placed major blame for the division on the Soviet Union. The Kremlin stopped sharing information about nuclear weapons with China, indicated that China would no longer be covered by the Soviet atomic shield, withdrew technicians helping China's economy, and took other steps that made China more vulnerable to US imperialist attacks or pressure. This breakdown in relations was fundamentally caused by the Soviet bureaucracy's course of using struggles and revolutions in other countries as bargaining chips in attempting to improve economic and diplomatic relations with the US and other imperialist powers.

Bitter polemics broke out between the leaderships of the two Communist parties in 1961. The Maoist leaders made telling points against the Soviet party, charging that, under Khrushchev, the Kremlin had adopted a line of seeking to appease world imperialism by imposing a non-revolutionary course on the world's Communist parties. This charge was similar to Trotsky's view of the course of the Soviet bureaucracy from the time of Stalin's rise to power. The Chinese also criticized the Soviet insistence that revolutions in backward countries had to be limited to democratic reforms in the framework of capitalism, saying that such revolutions could go further and become socialist in an "uninterrupted" process. This also bore a clear resemblance to the theses of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution concerning the colonial revolution.

At the same time, the Maoists upheld Stalin, and claimed that Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of Stalin was the turning point in the Soviet party's degeneration.

The Maoist stand caused ferment in Communist parties throughout the world, including in the US. Splits occurred, and pro-Chinese groups formed. The heretofore monolithic stance of the "world Communist movement" was broken, enabling some people in the CP or its orbit to assert their independence and think things through for themselves.

When I was in Boston, we took advantage of this stirring to organize a discussion group with some young people around the CP whose minds were now open to



considering our ideas. These discussions were organized around reading some of Lenin's writings that implicitly attacked the Stalinist approach to politics (although they were of course written before the rise of Stalinism).

One of these youth who joined the YSA was Steve Chase. Steve's father and uncle had been leaders of the CP in New England, until they were expelled for backing the Maoists. While these two brothers remained supporters of Stalin, Steve came over to our positions all the way. Steve's father and uncle were part of what became the Maoist Progressive Labor Party. Before PL's founding convention in 1965, we sought to reach out to them.

In 1964, youth around this current formed the "May 2nd Committee," so named because of a demonstration they held on that day against the steadily growing Vietnam War. Peter Camejo became our representative on this committee (soon, however, the committee became a narrow PL front). When one of their Black members, Bill Epton, ran for office in New York against the Democrats and Republicans, we urged a vote for him because he was a socialist running independent of the capitalist parties. We also defended PL against police attempts to victimize the group.

By its 1965 founding convention, however, it was becoming clear that PL would cling to its Stalinist origins and was, in fact, hardening its Stalinist positions. The PL convention attacked the "revisionists" (the Communist Party) and the Trotskyists as "objectively counter-revolutionary." They adopted Stalinist organizational methods, banning internal tendencies, factions and groupings as "Trotskyite notions." In addition, every member was required to participate in organized sessions of "criticism and self-criticism on a regular basis."

Tom Kerry, writing in *The Militant* noted, "What this latter exercise in individual and group therapy means, was spelled out by [PLP leader] Mike Rosen in an article in the Jan.-Feb. 1965 issue of *Progressive Labor*. 'Some of our cadre receive criticism, accept it in words, and don't change one iota,' Rosen complains. 'They continue their harmful ways. They in fact act in such a way as to undermine the movement, unintentionally. No matter how persuasive, patient or correct the criticism is, the comrade shows no change; perhaps he gets sicker. This requires a different approach. One must actually become a little rougher. Actually, the patient is not sick enough to recognize his illness. Make him "sicker." Yell at him; "knock" him in the head. When he is sick enough maybe he will respond to loving care. If not he needs a leave of absence to reflect more on his attitudes, his political development ...'

"That's how leaders are to treat 'sick' members, who are presumed 'well' when they self-criticize themselves to conform to the leader's criticism. The leaders may throw in a 'self-criticism' of their own every so often to demonstrate their humility."<sup>1</sup>

This pernicious practice, which erodes membership self-confidence and promotes docility, later became a hallmark of much of the New Left in the course of the youth radicalization. In subsequent years, PL also engaged in physical attacks on other radicals and the antiwar movement.

PL followed the Chinese lead in declaring that the Soviet Union had become “state capitalist.” We challenged their view and I wrote articles about this subject in *The Militant*. I also spoke before a fairly large public forum, where a young person from the Soviet Embassy attended and spoke up during the discussion. I talked with him afterwards. He tried to be friendly by pointing out that “Trotsky was a Russian, too.”

Another group that came out of the CP in this period was the Labor-Negro Vanguard Conference, a largely working class group based mainly in New Jersey. For a time we had a working relation with them. The LNVC was headed by Clarence Coggins, a Black man from Newark.

One day in 1962, Farrell Dobbs asked me and Leroy McRae to participate in a meeting at the SWP headquarters with Coggins and two young people in his group. I was surprised when Farrell produced a bottle of Scotch to lubricate the discussion. It didn’t take much to lubricate Leroy and me, since we weren’t used to hard liquor.

We agreed to collaborate on defense of Robert Williams and the other victims of the Monroe frame-up. The Black people of Monroe were suffering an economic attack by the white establishment, including denial of jobs. The Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants collected clothes and other goods to bring to Monroe. Nat Weinstein, a leader of the SWP in New York; Lynn Henderson, a recent SWP recruit; and I, together with the two young people from the LNVC, drove the van with these goods down from New York to Monroe.

It was an all-white delegation rather than an integrated one, chosen as such for security reasons — the sight of whites and Blacks riding together could infuriate the Klan types in Monroe. When we got to the county line, we picked up a tail, the sheriff’s car. We were careful to obey all speed limits and other traffic laws. The cop car followed us until we entered the Black community. Evidently, the sheriff’s men considered it a “no go” area for themselves.

We were dog tired from the long drive, and we appreciated how well we were received. We were fed and put up for the night. In the house where I stayed there were guns in each room, including a rifle in the bathroom, just in case. The next day we headed back, and a police tail picked us up again. We were relieved when he left off as we crossed the county line. These were still very violent times in and around Monroe.

In another common action with the LNVC we organized a demonstration against

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a meeting of the ultra-right Young Americans for Freedom at Madison Square Garden in March, 1961. The YSA and LNVC young people set up a Youth Organizing Committee, and we passed out flyers inviting all who were against the YAF to participate. Another leaflet appeared, signed by Americans for Democratic Action and the College Young Democrats “supported by Students for a Democratic Society,” which claimed the ADA-CYD were the “sole sponsors” of the demonstration. Their leaflet said that no slogans, posters or literature other than of those two groups would be permitted. “Anyone who feels he cannot comply with the above is asked NOT to participate.”

When picketing began, the Youth Organizing Committee people and others brought their own signs. The ADA-Young Democrat officials called on the cops to remove us. I was one of our picket captains and, backed up by a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union whom we had asked to attend, convinced the cops that any orderly person had the right to picket.

The ADA-Young Democrats then set up a separate tiny silent demonstration of their own, while 2,000 others, mostly youth, continued the demonstration carrying a wide variety of signs and shouting slogans.

The LNVC people were good people, and we liked them as individuals. But we weren’t able to come together because of one basic idea they brought with them from the CP — the orientation to supporting and working within the Democratic Party. They wanted to do their political work through the Democratic Party, whereas we thought that work in the Democratic Party was a dead end for socialists.

## 9. THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE

In 1962 massive protests for Black rights spread in cities and towns across the South. The Southern Black students who led the sit-ins and Freedom Rides organized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). At first SNCC was viewed as just the youth wing of Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, but it soon became an independent and very militant organization to the left of the SCLC.

SNCC's actions and militant stance inspired young people, both Black and white, throughout the country. The majority of the YSA, myself included, wanted to get more involved with SNCC even though we didn't have many Black members and we had no chapters or members in the South.

A minority of the YSA, especially the followers of James Robertson, placed their emphasis on criticism of SNCC. They criticized SNCC's non-violent tactics and counterposed our socialist program to SNCC's program of fighting for democratic rights for Blacks in the South.

In August, we sent a team composed of Melissa Singler and Ken Shilman to Augusta, Georgia, which was the focal point of the struggle at the time, to help us decide whether we should try to build a YSA unit in the South and join the student struggle there through SNCC. Ken had put out some issues of a mimeographed magazine written by Freedom Riders, and he and Melissa took copies with them to distribute.

While there Ken and Melissa participated in local civil rights activities organised by SNCC, including voter registration.

When they came back, they told us that they thought that it would be a mistake to send YSAers into SNCC. It might hurt our relations with SNCC and other fighters. We decided that the best thing we could do was to continue to organize support work for the Southern struggle in the North, where we had forces.

Later on in the 1960s and 1970s we would build SWP branches and YSA units in the South. But it was still very hard in the early 1960s to maintain a socialist organization in the deep South. That part of the country had for a long time been a bastion of racism and reaction, which had been strengthened by the witch-hunt. The Communist Party did have some units in the South, which for the most part had to operate in a quasi-underground fashion. The CP units were holdovers from their union and antiracist work of the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the Steelworkers. But the SWP did not have any branches there.

Shortly after Melissa and Ken came back, we held a plenum of the YSA National Committee. We concluded we were still too weak organizationally to try to build a YSA unit in the South. The minority opposed this decision, because they thought we should be on the spot to counterpose ourselves to what they called the “reformist” SNCC leadership. The minority accused the majority of abstaining from the struggle, although the year before, when they had been the main leaders of the YSA, they failed to orient the organization to the Freedom Rides.

In retrospect, I think our decision not to try to establish a YSA unit in the South was correct at that time. But I think we were remiss in not having YSAers take a more active role in the campaigns organized by SNCC in the next years, such as the voter registration drives in Mississippi and other places. These campaigns were very positive and attracted many students and young people from the North to participate as well, and some of our members could have done so too.

The debate with the minority over this issue was really about the sectarian notion that the duty of revolutionists is always to oppose, from the left, whoever is leading a mass struggle at the moment. Trotskyist groups have been particularly susceptible to this sectarian disease. This probably stems from the fight we had to put up in the wake of Stalin’s crushing victory in the Soviet Union. For decades we were a tiny minority, arguing for authentic Marxism against the devastating onslaught of lies and slanders of the large Stalinist organizations. An ideological rigidity and narrowness can develop in a small group living under such circumstances.

The notion can develop that every difference within an organization and with other groups is a make-or-break issue. If there are differences, one side must be 100 percent right and the other 100 percent wrong. As a result differences within the organization tend to lead to splits, with each side believing it has saved the one true program.

In relation to groups like SNCC that arise out of the mass movement, the same sectarian mentality tends to focus on the differences one may have with these groups rather than on the good work that they do. The only alternatives that sectarians see are

sideline criticisms or adaptation. Underlying this sectarian view is really a lack of confidence in the mass struggles and in Marxism, and the foolish notion there is nothing to be learned from others in the struggle.

We rejected this sectarian course and came out with a banner headline in the *Young Socialist* saying "Support SNCC!" Leroy McRae and I soon attended a SNCC conference at Fiske University in Nashville, Tennessee. What a spirited gathering!

Real social movements spawn artistic and musical expressions, and the Southern Black student movement was no exception. There was a lot of singing, not only of traditional Black protest songs, but of new songs that were created in the heat of the struggle. Ken Shilman told me how this was done, from his experience with the jailed Freedom Riders in Jackson, Mississippi. One person would start things off with the beginnings of a melody. Someone else would add a few words. Another would take it a step further. Corrections would be made. And so it went, until a song was created by the whole group.

During the SNCC conference, the attendees took time off to stage sit-ins at eateries that refused to serve Blacks. Leroy and I consulted with SNCC leader James Foreman, as to whether we should participate in these actions. He thought that as public spokespersons for the YSA, we shouldn't, to reduce the chances of further red-baiting of SNCC.

At one place, the counter attendant, a young white man, took relish in swishing a wet mop on the heads of the demonstrators, who were pledged to non-violence. A protester was beaten at another place. The violence and disrespect directed towards the demonstrators angered some of the young Blacks, and when we got back to our meeting place, a discussion broke out about the tactic of non-violence. Fred Zellner, a white SNCC leader who was a very courageous believer and practitioner of non-violence, gave an impassioned speech defending the tactic as a principle. The angry young Blacks backed down, but the confrontation would later resurface as SNCC became more militant and Black nationalist.

My brother Roger and Linda Thompson, who had recently married, moved from Providence to Baltimore, Maryland in March 1962, where they helped shore up a weak YSA chapter. Maryland, a border state, had many features in common with the southern Jim Crow states, so the civil rights movement was very active in Maryland. Roger and Linda became involved in the Civic Interest Group, a SNCC affiliate at largely Black Morgan State College. This group organized sit-ins and other protests in Baltimore, along Route 40, and in various towns along the strongly Jim Crow Eastern Shore. The Baltimore YSA also became involved in protests defying racist violence in the Eastern Shore town of Cambridge, where sharp conflict went on over

a two-year period.

In the summer of 1962, a new union, Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Employees, was fighting to establish itself in the New York City area hospitals. The union had called a strike at two hospitals, and the police were herding scabs across the picket lines to try and break the strike.

Because the union workforce was largely Black and Puerto Rican the strike was seen as part of the civil rights struggle. Malcolm X spoke at a strike meeting. Broader public opinion was being won over to the union's fight. Local 1199 leaders wanted to escalate the battle to gain wider publicity and force a showdown. They wanted to break through the police lines to disrupt the scab-herding, but thought that doing so would pose too great a risk to the jobs of the workers involved. So they turned to socialist youth groups. They asked the YSA, the YPSL and the Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF) to provide troops. I was among them.

When the scabs showed up, we charged at them at a signal from the union leadership. I didn't get very far when a cop threw me onto the ground, put his knees on my chest, and raising his billy club said, "make one move and I'll brain ya." I was arrested along with many others. The cops protected the scabs and won the skirmish, but the incident publicized the union's fight and drew more sympathy to it.

I shared a cell with Fred Goldstein, a leading member of YAWF who was also a member of its parent organization, Workers World. We were wary of each other, of course, since we were members of competing groups. But we had to spend many hours in a cell together, so we began discussing politics to relieve the boredom. Workers World had split from the SWP in 1959, about half a year before I joined. I asked Fred whether they still considered themselves Trotskyists, and he told me that publicly they didn't identify themselves as such, but that they still held classes on Trotsky's writings internally.

Soon a young white man was put in the cell with us. He had nothing to do with the strike, and we never learned why he was arrested. His clothing was torn, and he had bruises and a fat lip. He was shaking like a leaf, and didn't speak. Obviously, the cops had worked him over, which they did not do to us since they knew we had substantial outside support.

We got out later that evening after the union posted bail. Within a few weeks, a deal was brokered by Governor Nelson Rockefeller that recognized the union (his banks had holdings in the two struck hospitals). From that time on, Local 1199 remained a significant force among hospital workers. As part of the deal, all charges against us were dropped.

## 10. THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

I made a trip back to Boston in the late Spring of 1962. While I was there, the YSA held a meeting on Cuba at a Unitarian church in Cambridge. The meeting featured a film on Cuba and a talk by Tony Camejo, Peter's younger brother. Violent Cuban counter-revolutionaries had been trying to break up pro-revolution events like this in other cities, so we formed a defense guard. The meeting was in the church basement, with the entrance down a flight of stairs.

Sure enough, the *gusanos* ("worms," as the Cubans call the counter-revolutionaries) tried to force their way into the meeting. They had gravity on their side, since the struggle was on the stairs. We put our strongest people as the front line against the *gusanos*, with the rest of us arrayed behind the front line to push the attackers back. My brother Roland was in the front line. After the meeting, he pointed out that with the force of most of the YSA at their backs, the front line had little choice but to fight if attacked.

Someone, probably a church official, called the cops. They came and situated themselves between the two forces. We explained that these people were trying to break up our meeting. The *gusanos* denounced us as communists. The argument went on back and forth for a few minutes, with the cops trying to make up their minds. But then one of the counter-revolutionaries hit a cop in the face. In two seconds the cops had cleared them out, and we went on with our meeting.

In the spring of 1962 there was a confrontation in Cuba between the forces around Castro and some of the leaders of the old Stalinist party, the People's Socialist Party (PSP). The three main political groups that supported the revolution — the July 26 Movement, the PSP and the student-based Revolutionary Directorate — had agreed to fuse the previous summer. The Integrated Revolutionary Organization had been formed to carry out this process.

Aníbal Escalante, a leader of the PSP, was the organizational secretary of the IRO in charge of bringing the three groups together. Escalante abused his position to almost exclusively promote former PSP people to leadership positions in the new organization.



Throughout the country, revolutionists from the July 26 Movement and Revolutionary Directorate were pushed aside. It was a crude attempt at a Stalinist takeover of the revolution. Most of the old PSP leaders did not participate in this plot and some strongly opposed Escalante's actions. Most members had gone over to the revolution and recognized the fighters around Castro as the leadership.

The conflict became public on March 13, at a commemoration of the fifth anniversary of a failed attack on Batista's palace by the Revolutionary Directorate. Student leader José Echevarría had been killed in that attack, but he had left a testament in the event that he did not survive. At the commemoration the chairperson read the testament. Fidel noticed that three lines of the testament which referred to God were left out by the chair. Before Castro spoke, he turned to the chairperson to ask why he had omitted the passages. The chair said lamely that he was "told" to leave the lines out. Castro then devoted the major portion of his speech to explaining why such rewriting of history was completely unacceptable and against the interests of the revolution. Impassioned, he asked, "Could such cowardice be called a dialectical concept of history? Could such a manner of thinking be called Marxism? Could such a fraud be called socialism? Could such a deception be called communism? No!"<sup>1</sup>

He went on to explain that Marxists stood on the shoulders of previous revolutionists who were not Marxists, such as the great Cuban independence fighters like José Martí. He pointed to revolutionists who represented the rising capitalist class in the great French and American democratic revolutions. It was ahistorical and anti-Marxist to rewrite history to fit some preconceived goal or pattern. The "revolution must be a school of unfettered thought" he said. We ran the whole speech in *The Militant* and put it out as a pamphlet under that title.

Just as that issue of *The Militant* was coming off the press, Castro made a public denunciation on March 26 of the attempted takeover of the new revolutionary organization by Escalante and his cohorts. The Stalinist plot was smashed with the same forthrightness and honesty that marked the revolution's confrontation with imperialism, with the lessons publicly drawn for all the Cuban people.

Castro noted that in every province, in every town, the general secretary of the local PSP group was made the general secretary of the IRO. The July 26 Movement people were shunted aside — the people who were the central leaders of the revolution! The basic program of the July 26 Movement, the speech "History Will Absolve Me" was being surreptitiously criticized. Escalante, Castro declared, "was creating conditions and giving instructions which tended to convert the [IRO] apparatus not into the apparatus of the workers' vanguard, but rather into a nest of privilege." The result would not be "furthering a free association of revolutionists" but "an army of

timid and submissive revolutionists,” which would be “not a party but rather a tyranny, a straitjacket.”<sup>2</sup>

We printed this speech, too. A powerful revolutionary movement was putting forward views similar to ours!

Cuba won a new ally in 1962 — the victorious Algerian revolution. After carrying out a bloody and dirty war for seven years, France finally agreed to grant Algeria its independence. A Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic was set up, but it was short-lived. It was toppled by the left wing of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN, the National Liberation Front) which had organized the struggle against the French. In the summer a popular mobilization put Ahmed Ben Bella at the head of the government.

Before its victory, the FLN had adopted a revolutionary and socialist document, the Tripoli Program. The regime headed by Ben Bella sought to build socialism through a process of workers’ self-management of the economy. Steps were taken in this direction after the liberation, following a mass exodus of the former French colonists. Industries that had been owned by the French colonists were nationalized, and workers’ self-management committees were elected to run these enterprises. The most important included vineyards and wineries.

The Cubans established close ties with Algeria. They were seeking to extend the revolution not only to Latin America, where the Cuban revolution had a big impact, but also to Africa, where many struggles for freedom were taking place in Europe’s colonies.

After a time, we concluded that the Ben Bella regime had become a workers’ and farmers’ government. By this designation, we meant it had the potential to become a full-fledged socialist revolution but was not there yet. I made a national tour for the YSA, speaking in defense of the Algerian revolution.

Alas, the revolution’s potential was not realized. It was overthrown in a military coup in 1965. I will say more on that subject in a later chapter.

Tensions between Washington and Havana heated up in 1962, culminating in the Cuban missile crisis in October. In the months preceding the crisis, war drums were beating louder and louder in Congress and the daily press. We organized demonstrations against this escalation through the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. When President Kennedy announced his decision October 22 to blockade the island, preventing ships from entering Cuban waters on the grounds that the USSR was installing nuclear missiles in Cuba, Farrell called an immediate meeting of the SWP Political Committee.

I was a member of the PC, elected to that position by the National Executive Committee of the YSA. I was at home in the evening when I got Farrell’s call, and I

quickly made my way over to 116 University Place. The atmosphere in New York City was tense. I passed a group of Puerto Rican teenagers who were clearly very frightened, talking in hushed tones about what would happen to the city if there were an atomic war.

The capitalist news media went into an anti-Cuba and anticommunist frenzy. We stood up to it. The PC discussed and approved the thrust of a statement to appear in the next issue of *The Militant*. It ran under the headline, "Stop the Crime Against Cuba!" We alerted SWP branches and YSA chapters that night to mobilize to support the broadest possible actions against the threat.

In New York, there were two major demonstrations. One was called by Women Strike for Peace and other peace groups. We joined some 20,000 protesters at the United Nations on this demonstration. Then the Fair Play for Cuba Committee held its own action, more specifically pro-Cuba in tone, of over 1,000 people, also near the UN. Leroy McRae joined a contingent from Harlem that marched down to join the FPCC demonstration. Leroy was the SWP's candidate for Attorney General in the November elections.

Leroy and the other SWP candidates used every opportunity to denounce the threats against Cuba and the USSR. Carl Feingold, who was the SWP's candidate for US senator, had been scheduled a half-hour slot on TV during the crisis. He made good use of his time. While most Americans were lining up behind Kennedy, a good number were against Washington's dangerous confrontation. Many in the New York region wrote or called the SWP, praising Feingold's denunciation of Kennedy's nuclear brinkmanship.

Rank and file members of the Communist Party were among them. The CP usually tried to ignore us, but not this time. To counter the favorable reaction among their members, the CP's *Worker* ran an article attacking the SWP election campaign. The gist of their argument was that the SWP would take votes away from the Democrats. This would hurt the cause of peace and the defense of Cuba, they suggested, because the Democrats were more peaceful than the Republicans — in spite of the fact that the crisis was created by Kennedy's Democratic administration with support from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

The Young Peoples Socialist League participated in the demonstrations, under the auspices of the Student Peace Union. Their line, as usual, was to blame both the United States and the Soviet Union for the crisis. But they also opposed Cuba.

I thought it was grotesque to equate Havana with Washington in this crisis. On one side was the most powerful country in the world and on the other a small island nation, long suffering from imperialist exploitation, which has never been a military

threat to the US. It was Washington, not Havana, which had created the hostile relations between the two countries. Cuba had already been victim of a recent military expedition the year before, and it now faced real and growing military threats from the colossus to the north. Cuba's acceptance of the placing of Soviet nuclear missiles on Cuban soil was defensive.

The "third camp" position of SPU in relation to the US-Cuba conflict was so patently contrary to the facts and so paralyzing to real opposition to the blockade that the SPU was not able to play a leading role in the ongoing need to mobilize opposition to the crime against Cuba. This crisis registered SPU's incapacity to contribute to uniting all who were against Washington's warmongering, regardless of their views on the Cuban revolution. I wrote an article for the *Young Socialist*, "SPU Faces Crisis," in which I developed this point.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev ended the crisis by agreeing to pull the missiles out of Cuba, in return for a promise by the US not to invade the island. Khrushchev did so without consulting the Cuban leadership. Castro was properly outraged at this high-handed and arrogant action by an ally. *The Militant* published Castro's scathing speech on the question.

More information about the crisis came to light in later years. The Cuban leadership at the time thought that the installation of the Soviet missiles should be done openly and publicly, with an explanation to the world. The Kremlin overrode the Cubans, installed the missiles, and denied their existence at first. This confused many throughout the world, undermining the Cubans' credibility and creating the false impression of a secret aggression.

At a New York YSA meeting, I addressed the membership on how we did as a group during the crisis. YSA members and many supporters packed the meeting, and we all felt quite proud of what we had done to oppose the imperialist war threat. Even the minority, which disagreed with us on the nature of the Cuban revolution but opposed Washington's attempts to crush Cuba, joined the celebration that day.

James Cannon, in Los Angeles, feared we might get carried away and denounce the Soviet decision to pull back its missiles. He wrote a letter to the Political Committee, pointing out that the masses of people in the US and the world looked favorably on the USSR's decision, which helped block the threat of World War Three. Kennedy had been ready to push the button. (Years later, Robert McNamara, Kennedy's Defense Minister, conceded that Kennedy was "this close" — holding up his thumb and forefinger about a half inch apart — to launching the hydrogen bombs.) There was general agreement with Cannon's position.

We continued to point out that the US was the aggressor against the USSR. It was

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the US which had the Soviet Union, East Europe, China, Vietnam and North Korea ringed with nuclear missiles, not the other way around. Washington had missiles in Turkey, just as close to the USSR as the Soviet missiles in Cuba would have been to the US.

Having gone through the missile crisis, we felt as comrades-in-arms with the revolutionary people of Cuba, who mobilized by the millions to resist any invasion. They and their revolutionary leadership did not flinch, even knowing they would be destroyed in an atomic war. They did not panic. They were serene and principled in defense of their freedom and independence. They stood up to the monster to the north, whom the great Cuban patriot José Martí had called “the beast.”

## 11. "SUBVERSION" IN INDIANA

In the fall of 1960, George Shriver and his wife Ellen moved from Boston to Bloomington, Indiana, where George enrolled as a graduate student in the Russian and East European Institute of Indiana University. George and Ellen initiated a Fair Play for Cuba Committee on the campus. The university newspaper went wild, denouncing "Mr. and Mrs. Fair Play" on the front page and charging they had been "trained in Moscow."

When the Fair Play for Cuba Committee publicly protested the Bay of Pigs invasion, ultra-rightist Tom Huston, the leader of the campus conservatives who controlled the student senate, warned that if the FPCC was allowed to defend Cuba on campus, there would soon be an organization opposing the US intervention in Vietnam. Since President Kennedy had only sent a small military force to Vietnam — the so-called "advisors" — Huston was prescient. He later became an aide to President Nixon and was associated with preparing Nixon's infamous "enemies list."

After establishing the FPCC, George and Ellen began winning people to the YSA. In the fall of 1961, they established a YSA chapter on campus, with the help of Dave Wulp and Beverly Scott, who had come to Indiana U from Carleton College. Among those who joined the YSA were Ralph Levitt, Jim Bingham, Tom Morgan and Gerry Foley. Gerry, who was fluent in many languages and could read many more, has played a leading role in the movement as a journalist and translator. George, Ellen, Dave and Bev left Indiana U in the summer of 1962, but they left behind a strong YSA and FPCC.

In the spring of 1962, the YSA brought Joe Hansen, *The Militant* editor, to Indiana U to speak about the Cuban revolution. Several hundred people attended, quite a big turnout in the Jim Crow boondocks of southern Indiana, where groups like the ultra-right John Birch Society found support.

In October, during the Cuban missile crisis, the Fair Play for Cuba Committee organized an antiwar demonstration. A mob of right-wing students, joined by John Birch Society supporters from town, attacked the 22 demonstrators. Some were kicked,

slugged, struck by rocks and knocked to the ground. Their placards were destroyed.

Two members of the mob were arrested, one for striking a cop and another for hitting a demonstrator. Their cases were scheduled for a City Court hearing in Bloomington in February 1963. But in January, newly-elected Prosecutor Thomas Hoadley dropped the charges against the two in order, he explained, to "clear the way for a full investigation." Hoadley went on to say: "I am not convinced that the total blame of this near-riot should be placed on the shoulders of these anti-demonstrators, as certain professors, committees and other people would suggest." This last remark was a slap at the American Association of University Professors for holding a hearing on the mob's attack on a faculty member.

Instead, Hoadley said, he was opening a grand jury investigation of the FPCC and YSA to determine if these organizations "were deliberately inciting riot and if it was done as a provocation." A few weeks later, Hoadley downplayed the "inciting to riot" charge and opened a direct political attack. He said he would now seek indictments under the Indiana Communism Act, a McCarthyite law passed in 1951. "The central issue," he said, "remains that this organization [the YSA], like its parent organization, the Socialist Workers Party, states that it is a revolutionary socialist organization."<sup>1</sup>

I went to Bloomington to discuss the situation with the YSA chapter. We had to take this attack very seriously. It was a grave attack on the very right of a socialist organization to exist. The witch-hunt was still strong in Indiana, but, on the other hand, there were signs of radicalization among students. The formation of the YSA and its recognition as a student organization reflected a changing atmosphere. We could find support and fight back.

We formed the Bloomington Defense Committee to reach out to everyone who wanted to oppose Hoadley's witch-hunt. They needed only to agree on basic democratic rights: that the YSA had a right to exist, and had a right to free speech and assembly. We were convinced that many people would agree with these democratic principles, regardless of their opinions about the YSA's socialist views.

On February 18, Hoadley demanded that before the grand jury investigation began, the university should withdraw recognition of the YSA as a campus group. The Bloomington Defense Committee organized support locally, and the YSA began a national campaign. Hoadley complained to the press that he was being abused in letters, press releases of the Defense Committee, and even by members of the state legislature. A state Senator characterized Hoadley's campaign as "ridiculous." "I don't know what Hoadley is trying to do," he said, "but it appears he is trying to run for president through all this publicity."<sup>2</sup>

The YSA sent Leroy McRae, the YSA National Organization Secretary, on a

nationwide speaking tour. On March 25, he spoke at Indiana University, under the auspices of the YSA, on the subject, "The Black Revolt in America." McRae defended the right of Black people to armed self-defense against the racist violence that was sweeping the South in response to the battle for civil rights.

Based on what McRae had said, the grand jury issued indictments of James Bingham, Ralph Levitt and Tom Morgan, three leaders of the Bloomington YSA, under the state Communism Act. The YSAers faced three years in prison if convicted.

Hoadley announced the indictment on May 1, May Day. The indictment charged that the three students had assembled on March 25 "for the purpose of advocating or teaching that the government of the United States, or of the State of Indiana, should be overthrown by force, violence or any unlawful means, voluntarily participating therein by their presence, aid or instigation, and as officers of a Trotskyite communist organization called the Young Socialist Alliance, the youth group of the Socialist Workers Party." Hoadley said to the press, "We are not out to bring disfavor to Indiana U., or to gain a lasting name for ourself. We only want to stamp out Communism and what it stands for before it gets a foothold here."<sup>3</sup>

As YSA National Chairman, I issued a news release that refuted the charges. We also obtained agreement from the Chicago YSA and SWP to free up Jack Barnes from some of his responsibilities there so that he could help organize the defense effort in Indiana. The Bloomington Defense Committee retained local attorney James Cotner to defend the trio, and raised \$1,000 bail for each of the accused. The Defense Committee became a national organization and adopted the name Committee to Aid the Bloomington Students. Paulann Groninger of the Bloomington YSA became National Secretary of CABS.

A delegation from the Indiana Civil Liberties Union met with the defendants on May 4 and filed a "friend of the court" brief on their behalf. The American Civil Liberties Union and the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee also announced their support. I visited the national office of the ECLC in New York and asked Edith Tiger, a leader of the group, to help us find a Constitutional lawyer. She referred me to Leonard Boudin, the general counsel for the ECLC. Boudin was probably the best civil liberties lawyer in the country, and an authority on Constitutional law. He agreed to take the case, and the ECLC agreed to pay the costs. But we were also required to have a lawyer who was a member of the Indiana bar. So, we had to make sure that Boudin and local attorney James Cotner would be compatible.

Cotner came to New York to meet Boudin. I was present when they met in Boudin's office in a skyscraper on 42nd Street. Cotner, who had never been to New York, seemed dazzled by the Big Apple, by a Broadway show that he had seen the night



before, and by the illustrious attorney Boudin. But Boudin treated the small-town attorney suavely and respectfully. While we were talking Boudin received a telephone call from the famous folk-singer Joan Baez for whom he was handling a legal matter. “Joan Baez!” Cotner exclaimed (he pronounced her name BAYS), “Joan Baez! Wait ’til I tell my daughter that I was sitting here when Joan Baez called!”

We agreed to challenge the constitutionality of the Communism Act. Similar laws in other states had been thrown out on these grounds. Boudin would make the main arguments in briefs and oral arguments, in the state courts, federal courts and if necessary the US Supreme Court. Cotner would file the necessary briefs locally, and would serve as defense lawyer if a local trial was held.

Defending the Bloomington students became a top priority for the YSA. We prepared an eight-page special issue of the *Young Socialist* devoted to the case, to enable the YSA to get out the facts to each city and campus where we had members. George Shriver edited it, and I also did a lot of work. I worked straight through and finished the mock-up of the paper at 4:30 a.m. I had been bent over the layout table for hours, and when I finished, I couldn’t straighten up. I walked home with my elbows on my knees, for over a mile.

The Indiana press was largely pro-Hoadley, but some newspapers did speak out and oppose his witch-hunt. Hoadley fed the press lurid charges about the YSA: that there was a “communist apparatus” operating on campus, complete with “cell meetings” and “speakers imported from Moscow”; that YSA members were “switching cars to hinder surveillance”; “jockeying a mimeograph to grind out propaganda from auto to auto” and “using narcotics to recruit members.”<sup>4</sup>

The most widely read paper in the state, the *Indianapolis Star*, published a smear story with names, addresses and other details about YSA members, even including their parents’ names. The *Star* singled out Paulann Groninger and her husband William, and ran a photo of the apartment building where they lived. The landlord evicted them, and the *Star* triumphantly headlined on the front page, “Landlord Tells Two YSA Members to Leave.”

The three defendants toured campuses in the East and Midwest, speaking out and gathering support. An Indiana U professor blasted Hoadley in an article in *The Nation*. *The New York Times* reported that IU President Stahr publicly opposed the witch-hunt.

The *Bloomington Star-Courier* reported, “The president of Indiana University has felt compelled to speak out before a national forum on the issues at stake. Some 150 IU professors have purchased newspaper space to take a stand. A newspaper in Hong Kong banner-lined the YSA story on Page One. On and on, around the world,

the focus is on Bloomington's 'bout' with the YSA." A bit of an exaggeration, but word was definitely getting out.

On June 28 a judge threw out the indictment on a technicality, but Hoadley immediately asked the grand jury for a new one. The new indictment was handed down July 18, and added another meeting to the March 25 one that McRae had addressed. This was a private discussion in the apartment of a YSA supporter on May 2, the day after the first indictment was issued. The landlord had secretly taped-recorded a discussion among YSA activists of how to fight the attack on their rights.

Technically, the new indictment meant that this was now a new case. Cotner, who wanted to get off the hot seat, declined to be the local defense lawyer for the new case.

We had to find another member of the Indiana bar. Jack Barnes, Ralph Levitt, and I began to scour the state to find one. Jim Bingham's father was a lawyer, but he said that he would take the case only if he could argue that the defendants weren't really serious about socialism. He rejected our insistence that the defendants run the defense, that Boudin be the Constitutional lawyer, that we fight to have the Communism Act declared unconstitutional, and that there be a public defense campaign. So he was out.

Another lawyer, who had an office in the back room of a nightclub, agreed to our conditions. He said he didn't care if we were communists and thought he could do well by us. He boasted of getting a client off on an insanity plea. (The client was known in the press as the "womb eater" for his grisly murders.) But he wanted \$4,000 which, fortunately, we could not afford.

Aside from this joker, we could not find an Indiana lawyer who was willing to take the case in partnership with Boudin. Jack and the CABS activists finally found Daniel T. Taylor III, who was located just over the Indiana border in Kentucky. Taylor was also a member of the Indiana bar and agreed to take the case on our terms.

Hoadley changed his tune somewhat. He now told the press that he would not concentrate on the charge that the three students advocated the overthrow of the US government, in order to focus on their alleged advocacy of the overthrow of the state government of Indiana. Trying to prove that the US government was the students' target would have looked strange since the federal government brought no charges. But the charge that the three defendants sought to overthrow the state of Indiana was even more ridiculous. Socialism in one state? Whenever I spoke on the case to students, the absurdity of this allegation never failed to produce laughter.

The defendants were being charged because of their beliefs. So, in order to explain the case, we had to explain the ideas of the defendants. We published Leroy McRae's

speech on the Black struggle as a pamphlet. The defendants and other CABS spokespeople naturally got into discussions about socialism with those who came to hear them. We were gaining new YSA members through this fight.

We were unfailingly scrupulous in managing the money collected for the defense, and we never attempted to identify supporters of the defense effort or the committee with the political views of the defendants. The SWP had a long tradition of building defense committees for victims of capitalist police, courts and prosecutors. We always sought broad support for the democratic rights of those under attack. This policy was well-known and respected on the left and among civil libertarians. Because academic freedom was involved, many professors and faculty at Indiana University and around the country became sponsors.

Finally, in March 1964, a state judge agreed with Boudin that the Indiana Communism Act was unconstitutional. This ruling not only invalidated that thought-control statute and quashed the indictments. It set the precedent that such laws in other states were also unconstitutional. Similar laws were being used to prosecute civil rights fighters in the South.

*The Indianapolis Times* urged Hoadley to appeal the decision to the Indiana Supreme Court. He did so, with the support of the Indiana Attorney General. In January, 1965, the state Supreme Court upheld the witch-hunting law and reinstated the indictments. However, we had in fact already defeated the prosecution. It would take a few years for the case to wind its way through the federal courts, but the law was finally struck down as unconstitutional.

Our work in fighting this case was greatly helped by the tradition and example of the leaders of the SWP. James P. Cannon, the SWP’s main founder, had long experience in this kind of activity, dating back to his time in the early Communist Party in the 1920s, where he built the International Labor Defense. The ILD defended victims of political frame-ups, regardless of their views. The most famous case taken up by the ILD was defense of the principled anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. After a long campaign, the two unbowed workers were executed on trumped up murder charges; but the huge defense effort made the ruling class pay dearly for the blood that they took.

The SWP had frequent need for defense efforts of various kinds. Among the major cases were the defense of Leon Trotsky against Stalin’s infamous Moscow Trials in the 1930s; defense of the SWP and Minneapolis Teamsters leaders in the 1941 Smith Act trial; and the “Case of the Legless Veteran,” an attempt by the government in the 1950s to deprive SWP member James Kutcher of his livelihood in a federal job, to which he was entitled as a veteran maimed in the Second World War. It was well known that the SWP conducted such efforts openly and honestly. This reputation for

integrity served us well in the Bloomington fight.

We also learned from this and previous experiences that effective defense campaigns do more than help push back witch-hunt attacks. The defendants are able to turn the tables on the prosecutors and the cops by exposing their contempt for democratic rights and the Constitution.

Around this time I had another personal experience that showed how closely the police monitored us. In the spring of 1963, Ethel and I broke up. The very next day following our decision, an FBI agent was waiting for Ethel outside our apartment building. He wanted to know if Ethel would now be willing to talk to the political police agency. She told him to go to hell, and went to work.

## 12. THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

In 1963 the Black struggle deepened in the South and expanded into the North. Leroy McRae and I attended the Third Annual Conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Atlanta over the April 13 weekend. “The heroes of the conference were the embattled delegates from Greenwood, Miss.,” I wrote in *The Militant*, “where SNCC’s voter registration project has been met by shootings, arrests and other forms of intimidation. Robert Moses, field secretary leading the voter-registration drive in Greenwood, said that SNCC intends to go ahead with plans to register the Negroes in Leflore County where Greenwood is situated.”

Historian Howard Zinn addressed the conference. “Dr. Zinn said that it is a myth that Southern racism is a mere distortion on a basically sound, democratic America. Racism is a national problem integral to the whole social structure and characteristic of the entire history of the United States, he said. While the Negro is most blatantly suppressed in the South, Dr. Zinn pointed out; anti-Negro discrimination exists everywhere in the country where there are Negroes. ‘You only need to look at Harlem to know this is true’ he said.”

I summed up: “The general impression an observer received of the outlook of most SNCC workers is that their movement seeks a fundamental change in the social structure of the United States. The conference theme was ‘Emancipation Then: Freedom Now!’”<sup>1</sup>

Demonstrations were spreading across the South, organized by Dr. King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, SNCC, local chapters of the NAACP, and others.

The Battle of Birmingham began in April. The nation and the world saw and read about vicious police attacks against peaceful demonstrators. The cops used clubs, rifle butts, dogs and water cannon. Extra-legal racist groups also attacked the movement. Among the casualties were six murdered Black children, four of whom (young girls) were killed by a bomb planted at a Black church. There was a growing response in the North, demanding that the federal government do something. The Kennedy administration, however, dragged its heels. Not only that, it sought to cajole

Black leaders into giving up demonstrations, calling for the movement to shift from the streets to the courts.

The SWP demanded that Washington send federal troops to the South to protect the embattled African American demonstrators and communities. We demanded that Washington deputize and arm Blacks to defend themselves against racist mobs and the racist local and state police and national guardsmen. When Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Jackson, Mississippi, was assassinated on June 12, *The Militant's* front page headline was, "Armed Defense Groups Needed in South to Put an End to Attacks by Racist Killers." *The Militant* pointed out that no new civil rights legislation was needed to do this; all that was needed was the enforcement of Constitutional provisions and legislation that had been on the books since the aftermath of the Civil War.

Over the years the SWP has been criticized by some people on the left for demanding that federal troops be sent to protect the civil rights demonstrators and enforce civil rights legislation and court rulings. The issue first came up when President Eisenhower sent troops in 1957 to prevent violent mobs and local authorities from stopping integration of the Arkansas high schools. Many of these critics, including some of the oppositionists in the Socialist Workers Party, opposed this move. Their stance would have weakened the Black struggle and allowed the racists to win, all in the name of working class independence of the capitalist government.

Our leftist critics tended to hold that the overturn of Jim Crow could or should be accomplished only by a proletarian revolution. In effect, they presented the perspective of a socialist revolution in the future as an excuse for not pursuing the fight for Black rights by any means necessary now.

In contrast, we held that Black freedom fighters had every right to take advantage of divisions between the federal government, representing the capitalist class as a whole, and the Southern state governments, representing local or regional interests. The federal government was no longer committed, as it had been in the past, to the defense of segregation, which violated the US Constitution, embarrassed the United States before the world, and was no longer as vital to the capitalist social order as it had been in the early years of the century. Washington now recognized the need to modify or even abolish segregation, although the government wanted to do so with the fewest concessions to the Black masses.

We argued that it was correct for the SWP to join Blacks demanding federal action to enforce the constitutional provisions, court decisions and laws that upheld Black rights. This approach inspired further fights and demands, and increased the self-confidence and organization of Blacks, and Black workers in particular, including

in the field of self-defense.

In Detroit a local coalition led by Rev. Albert Cleage called for a June 23 demonstration. Dr. Martin Luther King called for a national march on Washington. Dr. King sharply criticized Kennedy for failing to take a “moral stand” on desegregation. King declared that both the Democratic and Republican parties “have betrayed the cause of justice” by collaborating with Dixiecrats. (This was a play on words commonly used at that time. “Dixie” was a nickname for the South, so “Dixiecrats” became a label for the Southern Jim Crow Democrats.)

The Rev. James Bevel, also of the SCLC, was sharper: “Some punk who calls himself the President has the audacity to tell people to go slow. I’m not prepared to be humiliated by white trash the rest of my life, including Mr. Kennedy.”<sup>2</sup> Kennedy urged calling off the March on Washington, but King and the other leaders said “No.”

The June 23 march in Detroit was the biggest civil rights action in the nation’s history up until that time. *The Detroit News* described it: “As if a huge dam had burst, thousands of Negroes swept down Woodward [Ave.] in waves yesterday in their ‘walk to freedom.’”<sup>3</sup> A few thousand whites joined 200,000 Blacks in the action.

A formal call for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was issued by the SCLC, the national NAACP, SNCC and four other civil rights groups. The date set was for August 28. A. Philip Randolph, who had helped organize and lead the all-Black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Black pacifist and social democrat Bayard Rustin played important roles in organizing the march. Their presence helped convince the United Auto Workers and some other labor unions to back the march.

The SWP and YSA did everything we could to build the March on Washington. We publicized the march in our press and we spoke about it everywhere we were able to. We urged trade unions, civil rights organizations and other groups to make the trip to Washington. On the great day itself, we marched with our fellow demonstrators, and we also sold thousands of copies of *The Militant* with the headline “FREEDOM NOW PARTY”. I was quite proud of myself for selling more than 100 copies.

The idea of creating a new political party based on the Black fight for equal rights was gaining ground in the face of the two capitalist parties’ opposition to the freedom fight. Advocates included Black newsman William Worthy; Daniel Watts, chairman of the Liberation Committee for Africa; civil rights attorney Conrad Lynn and Rev. Cleage. Worthy, who had initiated the call for a Freedom Now Party, undertook a nationwide speaking tour to promote the idea. Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad, declared, “There will be no real freedom for the so-called Negro in America until he elects his own political leaders and his own candidates.”<sup>4</sup> A news conference in the capital on the day of the march called for the formation of the

Freedom Now Party.

The march was enormous, about a quarter of a million people in size. The turnout emboldened Black people and white fighters for equal rights, too. It was the largest action I had ever participated in, and I could feel the power of ordinary people when we unite and organize for our rights and needs. It was exhilarating. However, the event was tightly controlled from the top to minimize conflict with the Kennedy administration. John Lewis, the national chairman of SNCC, was barred from giving the speech he prepared and had to give a watered-down version. Everyone remembers Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, a powerful and eloquent expression of democratic aspirations, but the speech with the best politics was the one not given.

Catholic Archbishop O'Boyle of Washington, who was to give the convocation, read an advance copy of Lewis' speech and threatened to walk off the platform if it was delivered. Walter Reuther, head of the United Auto Workers union, demanded that certain parts be censored and others rewritten. The leaders of the march gave in. What the liberals didn't like was the fact that Lewis denounced both the Democratic and Republican parties, and the timid civil rights bill that Kennedy was backing.

My brother Roger Sheppard took a room at the Statler Hotel, where many members of SNCC were also staying. Malcolm X visited the hotel and held an impromptu discussion in the lobby with the people staying there. They discussed the significance of the march and considered what a Black revolution would entail. After the march, Roger went to John Lewis' room and asked for a copy of his speech for *The Militant*. Lewis gave it to him.

Here are excerpts from John Lewis' speech as it appeared in the next issue of *The Militant*:

"In good conscience, we cannot support the administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little and too late. There's not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality.... The voting section of this bill will not help thousands of Black citizens who want to vote.... This nation is still a place of cheap political leaders who build their careers on immoral compromises and ally themselves with open forms of political, economic and social exploitation. What political leader here can stand up and say 'My party is the party of principles'? The party of Kennedy is also the party of [racist Democrat Mississippi Senator] Eastland. The party of [liberal Republican] Javits is also the party of [right-winger] Goldwater. Where is our party? ... The revolution is a serious one. Mr. Kennedy is trying to take the revolution out of the streets and put it in the courts. Listen, Mr. Kennedy. Listen, Mr. Congressman. Listen, fellow citizens, the Black masses are on the march for jobs and freedom, and we must say to the politicians that there won't be a 'cooling off' period.... The time will come



when we will not confine our marching to Washington. We will march through the South, through the Heart of Dixie, the way [Union Civil War General] Sherman did. We shall pursue our own 'scorched earth' policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground — nonviolently.”<sup>5</sup>

The White House and liberals routed the march not to the Capitol building, where it would be seen as a protest against the government, but to the Lincoln Memorial. As Malcolm X put it a few months later to the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, the white power structure “told you when to arrive, what route to march, what signs to carry, even told the leaders what speeches they could make. And then they told you: ‘All you niggers out of town by sundown.’”<sup>6</sup>

The restrictions on the march imposed by the government also showed the ruling class fear of Black and working-class mass action in the streets. At this time, Malcolm himself, in the face of the Nation of Islam’s abstention, was searching for a road into this growing mass struggle.

By its size and visibility, the march on Washington strengthened the resolve of Black people to continue the fight. Struggles intensified throughout the country, and were met with official and unofficial violence.

Rev. Cleage and other militant leaders called a Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, held in Detroit in November. The windup rally heard William Worthy, Cleage and Malcolm X. The conference also voted to put a Freedom Now Party on the ballot in Michigan for the 1964 elections. It was here also that Malcolm delivered his famous “Message to the Grass Roots,” cited above.

In that speech, Malcolm explained that the “Black revolution is worldwide in scope and in nature. The Black revolution is sweeping Asia, is sweeping Africa, is rearing its head in Latin America. The Cuban revolution — that’s a revolution. They overturned the system. Revolution is in Asia, revolution is in Africa, and the white man is screaming because he sees revolution in Africa....

“A revolutionary is a Black nationalist. He wants a nation. I was reading some beautiful words by Reverend Cleage, pointing out why he couldn’t get together with someone else in the city because all of them were afraid of being identified with Black nationalism. If you’re afraid of Black nationalism, you’re afraid of revolution. And if you love revolution, you love Black nationalism.”<sup>7</sup>

## 13. THE 1963 CONVENTION OF THE SWP

The discussion leading up to the Twentieth National Convention of the SWP, held in July, 1963 centered on the new stage of the Black struggle and the sharp rise in Black nationalist ideas and attitudes, especially in the North. The growth of the Nation of Islam; the receptiveness among Blacks to the ideas of the Nation's most prominent spokesman, Malcolm X; and the evolution of Malcolm's thinking in a revolutionary direction (which was noticeable before his break with the Nation of Islam and its leader, Elijah Muhammad) were part of the debate.

Malcolm not only blasted white racism and oppression, he roused the masses with his open advocacy of armed self-defense against racist attacks. His wit and sarcasm in exposing the white power structure, his ability to out-debate white liberals no matter how educated, his arguments designed to instill courage, optimism and self-confidence in the Black masses, his denunciations of the government, the liberals, and the capitalist parties, and his espousal of revolution were finding resonance. So was the message that Blacks should unite under their own leadership freed from any subordination to whites, a key aspect of Black nationalism.

George Breitman, a party activist since the late 1930s, and a leader since the Second World War, drafted the resolutions for the SWP National Committee meetings and conventions on the Black struggle. Breitman was the main author of "Freedom Now," the resolution on the Black struggle adopted by the convention. At the time George was living in Detroit, a center of rising Black consciousness and Black nationalist activities. Although he was white, he gained a deep appreciation of the Black movement, and he went on to write widely respected and popular books and pamphlets about Malcolm X and Black nationalism. Over the years, many Black militants, who appreciated George's writings, were surprised to learn that George was white.

Like the earlier discussion on Cuba, this discussion on socialism and Black

nationalism was exhilarating and educational, and I learned a lot.

To aid our understanding of these issues, we republished the discussions SWP leaders had with Leon Trotsky on the question in 1932 and 1939, as well as the resolutions that were adopted by the SWP subsequently. Trotsky, starting from what he had experienced and learned from Lenin and the experience of the Russian revolution about the importance of the struggles of oppressed nations for self-determination, helped educate the early leaders of the SWP on the revolutionary potential of the fight of American Blacks for their rights as an oppressed nationality within US society. One of those leaders was C.L.R. James, the prominent West Indian Black revolutionary intellectual. C.L.R. James helped draft the SWP's first resolutions on the Black struggle.

A rank and file member, Robert DesVerney, played a leading role in the 1963 discussion and was elected to a place in the national leadership, in part because of his contributions. He submitted an article to the party's pre-convention discussion bulletin entitled, "Why White Radicals Can't Understand Black Nationalism." In his witty and clear style, he skewered sectarian and narrowly trade unionist ideas, semi-patriotic and assimilationist preconceptions, and other baggage which — in addition to lack of experience with the Black struggle — tended to cause white radicals to reject or feel threatened by Black nationalism.

DesVerney was a Black intellectual who was making his living as a translator of Russian and other languages. I visited him once in his apartment in 1963, and found him reading the score of a Schoenberg string quartet, humming to himself. Another time, at a restaurant, he explained several advanced mathematical concepts that I, a mathematics graduate from MIT, had not known about. But while DesVerney could sail happily in these esoteric atmospheres, he had a good practical feel for the Black struggle. He understood why Blacks were becoming more nationalistic and he could explain this clearly and convincingly. His articles about meetings in Harlem captured the language and expressed the new mood among Blacks who were becoming more angry and combative.

During the discussion, we came to understand that the suspicions and hostility felt by Blacks toward whites could not be equated to the racism that most whites felt towards Blacks. The Nation of Islam, whom the media dubbed the Black Muslims, held whites to be devils. Was this the same as white racist theories about the nature of Blacks? No, we said. Prejudice is wrong, whoever espouses it. But the prejudice of some Blacks toward whites is a distorted expression of opposition to the oppression of Blacks by white society. The prejudices of Blacks do not lead to or reinforce oppression of whites. White racism towards Blacks, however, is both a false justification for and a form of the oppression of Blacks.

The nationalism of the oppressed is different from and counterposed to the nationalism of the oppressor. “White nationalism” is the expression of white supremacy. Black nationalism is the expression of opposition to that oppression. American nationalism against Third World countries is a reactionary expression of the drive by US imperialism to dominate and plunder those countries. The nationalist fight of those oppressed countries against imperialism, often including expressions of anti-Americanism, is progressive and can lead to socialist and internationalist conclusions, as the Cuban revolution demonstrated.

We understood that Black nationalism was a progressive force in the Freedom Now movement. As Malcolm X put it, “If you love revolution, you love Black nationalism.” The convention reaffirmed and strengthened our support to the right of Black people to self-determination, including the right to an independent Black state. Black liberation, in whatever form, would be a central part of a revolution by the entire working class to overthrow capitalism.

We were in a minority on the socialist left on this question. The Communist Party sided with the more conservative Black leaders who presented Black nationalism as divisive or worse. James Jackson, the editor of *The Worker*, wrote in the July 7, 1963 issue: “The Muslim organization in general and Malcolm X in particular, are ultra-reactionary forces operating in the orbit of the Negro people’s movement with the strategic assignment to sow ideological confusion ...” Jackson accused Malcolm X of being “an agent of their [the Blacks’] enemies and consequently an opponent of their progress.”<sup>1</sup>

A minority view at the SWP convention, presented by Richard Fraser (Kirk) of the Seattle branch, held that the Black struggle was decisively integrationist and that Black nationalism diverted the struggle from the revolutionary road. He called his position “revolutionary integration.” Fraser had been debating George Breitman about these issues in party discussion bulletins since the mid-1950s. He also opposed the call for US troops to enforce school desegregation and other constitutional rights of Blacks in the South.

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The convention voted to support the recent reunification of the Fourth International, healing a ten-year split that occurred in 1953 over political, tactical and organizational issues. The split led to the formation of two public factions of the Fourth International, led by the International Secretariat (IS) and the International Committee (IC).

The SWP had always been a strong and active supporter of the Fourth

International, even though repressive legislation had barred us from belonging to the FI since 1940. In the split, the SWP supported the International Committee, along with groups in Britain, France, Peru, Argentina and several other countries. The International Secretariat had a stronger presence in most of the other countries.

The main political issue behind the split concerned the stance and tactics to adopt toward the Communist parties and the regime in the Soviet Union.

The IC thought that the IS was adapting to Stalinism, toning down criticism and demanding a general tactic of joining the Communist parties. The IS expected that the Soviet Union and the Communist parties would evolve to the left under the impact of a coming war with the imperialists. The IS supporters argued that the SWP and the IC were sectarian toward the opportunities they saw in the CPs and the divisions in the Soviet bureaucracy after Stalin's death.

The SWP, and the IC generally, also felt that the IS side held an over-centralized concept of the role of the international center. Above all, the IC objected to the high-handed organizational methods exercised by the IS under its main leader, Michel Pablo, who promoted splits in a number of sections of the FI, including in the SWP.

These differences began to narrow soon after the split. Both groups voiced strong support to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Similarly, the main groups on both sides had positive reactions to the Cuban revolution and to the Algerian revolution. Tentative discussions indicated that the organizational questions could be overcome. It was agreed that Pablo could not be the central leader of the reunified International. Both sides began to work toward reunification, and this was accomplished shortly before the SWP convention. In fact, the central document adopted at the reunification congress, "For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement," had been drafted by the SWP leadership.

One of the common activities that brought the movement together was defense of the Peruvian peasant leader Hugo Blanco. Blanco had been recruited to Trotskyism while a student in Argentina. When he returned to Peru, he became active in the organization of mass peasant unions near Cuzco. Most of these peasants were Indians or *mestizo* (mixed race), and many spoke Quechua, an Indian language that Blanco knew.

These peasant unions waged militant struggles against the landowners. The landless peasants faced conditions resembling serfdom supported by private landlord armies and the Peruvian military. The peasant unions formed armed self-defense units. The peasants' rallying cry became "*Tierra o Muerte!*" (Land or Death!) Blanco became an organizer and public spokesperson for the peasant unions, and his fame spread in the region and throughout Peru.

Despite the upheaval in the countryside, no comparable battles by the working class and poor took place in the cities. A government offensive against the peasant unions led the fighters to adopt guerrilla tactics. The government proclaimed martial law in the Cuzco area. For months, the guerrilla fighters eluded capture under the protection of the peasantry in a large swath of the countryside. Blanco's name became known internationally. Finally, he was captured by the army and narrowly escaped being executed on the spot.

Commenting on this in an interview in Algiers, Che Guevara said, "Hugo Blanco has set an example, a good example, and he struggled as much as he could. But he suffered a defeat; the popular forces suffered a defeat. It's only a passing stage. Afterward will come another stage."<sup>2</sup>

After his arrest, Blanco's life was in grave danger. An international defense effort was launched. In this country, we sparked the creation of the US Committee for Justice for Latin American Political Prisoners (USLA) that took up Blanco's case and soon cases of other victims of repression on the continent. This international effort finally led to Blanco's release, although he was forced to go into exile. Later, Blanco was permitted to return to Peru, where he was elected to parliament while still espousing the revolutionary socialist cause.

On both sides of the former split in the International, there were recalcitrants who opposed reunification. On the IC side, the British Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy, was violently opposed. The French section, led by Pierre Lambert, supported Healy. Central to Healy's platform was the notion that Cuba remained capitalist after the revolution, and that Castro was a bourgeois leader. On the IS side, Michel Pablo, who had been the main spokesman for the Fourth International prior to the split, and who had become a prominent supporter of the Algerian revolution, opposed reunification. Also on the IS side, a grouping of Latin American organizations, led by Juan Posadas, went its own way. The supporters of Posadas had a sectarian, competitive attitude toward the Castro leadership; they also adopted some very strange crackpot positions, including advocacy of a nuclear Third World War. Soon after the reunification of the International, Michel Pablo split and established a small international grouping.

Most Trotskyists in the world, however, supported reunification. The reunited Fourth International was sometimes known by the name of its leading body, the United Secretariat.

The Wohlforth-Robertson faction in the SWP split into two groups, but both rejected the reunification at the 1963 SWP convention. They charged that the SWP was rapidly abandoning Marxism. Both groups supported Healy, but Healy supported

Wohlforth against Robertson, demanding that Robertson accept his line on all questions. After the convention, Wohlforth turned over to the majority documents that proved that Robertson was disloyal to the party and violated party rules. The Robertson group was expelled. A year later, the Wohlforth group was also expelled. By the time of their expulsions, neither of these two groupings had any real intention of supporting or helping to build the SWP.

At the convention, a meeting of pro-Cuba activists discussed the situation in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Cubans living in the United States who supported the July 26 Movement had helped us build the FPCC. Now most of them had returned to Cuba. In most areas, the FPCC had dwindled down to supporters of the SWP and YSA. Since we did not want the FPCC to become a sectarian front group, the meeting decided to stop trying to build it. The FPCC then existed for a while as a paper organization, until the assassination of President John Kennedy dealt it a mortal blow.

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The SWP's position of giving critical support to the positions of the Chinese government in its dispute with Moscow was a subject of controversy. We defended those positions that echoed our criticism of the Soviet bureaucracy's break with Leninism and the class struggle outlook on a world scale. (At one point the Kremlin accused Peking of capitulating to "Trotskyism" and Peking made the same accusation against Moscow.) We also defended the Chinese revolution against the Soviet government's denial of economic and defense assistance to China. These measures were aimed at courting imperialism at China's expense.

But the Chinese party still supported Stalin, and ruled the country with Stalinist methods. The Chinese Communist Party had been Stalinized following the failure of the 1925-27 revolution, which Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalists had drowned in the blood of a million workers. The Chinese CP had established a bureaucratized structure during the years of struggle against the Japanese occupation and Chiang Kai-shek, and it brought that model of organization into the victorious 1949 revolution. It was a variation on the Soviet system, topped by a privileged bureaucratic caste headed by Mao Zedong. We reaffirmed our position in favor of a political revolution in China to establish workers' democracy.

A minority led by Arne Swabeck, who had been a party leader since the early days, back with James P. Cannon, held that Mao and his party had broken with Stalinism long before the taking of power. We should cease advocating political revolution, he said, and give Mao our support, albeit with criticisms. This position was supported by a small grouping in Los Angeles, where Swabeck lived, and in Seattle and Milwaukee.

At the convention I also began to better understand a negative result of the party's isolation in the 1950s. In discussions with Farrell, I learned that the central party leadership made a decision to loosen party standards of activism in that period. The idea was to hold as much of the cadre together until more propitious times came along. Then, as collective action would be required in the mass movement, it would make the need for disciplined functioning by the party membership more understandable.

Certain branches, under the looser party rules, tended to go their own ways. One or two leaders in such branches became almost like cult leaders of their tiny groups. This was reflected at the 1963 convention in the monolithic positions of the Seattle and Milwaukee branches. The Seattle branch soon split from the SWP, and founded the Freedom Socialist Party, under the leadership of Clara Kaye and Richard Fraser, who were husband and wife. Sometime later, they divorced, leading to another split in their group. Earlier, in 1959, before I had joined, another monolithic grouping in the Buffalo and Youngstown branches, led by Sam Marcy, had split from the SWP and formed the Workers World Party. The Milwaukee branch also split away as the party began to grow and require cohesive action.

These were extreme examples. In Boston, where Larry Trainor was the central leader, he tended to bring along the whole branch with his opinions or his interpretation of the party line, and to assume that it was only right that there should be no serious challenge to his views. Some of his views were wrong, in my opinion, and his attitude led to some negative developments later. Trainor never fostered a cult around himself, however, nor did he counterpose his own leadership to that of the national party. As a result, many of those he helped recruit and educate became valuable leaders of the movement, although they sometimes had to overcome aspects of his influence in doing so.

Peter Camejo and I were elected to the party's National Committee by the convention delegates. I was elected as a full member with a deciding vote, and Peter was elected as an alternate. Alternates participated in meetings of the NC with voice and consultative vote. Alternates were also ranked in sequential order, and the highest ranking alternate would become a full member with a deciding vote if an opening appeared in the full committee. The NC elected me to the Political Committee, the daily leadership committee resident in New York.



## 14. THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

For people who are old enough, it is often said that they remember where they were when President John Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. I certainly do. I was in the YSA headquarters on Fourth Avenue near Twelfth Street, not far from the SWP headquarters. In the hall with me were Peter Camejo and Ralph Levitt, one of the Bloomington defendants. Levitt was working for the defense committee.

We were listening to the news when the announcement came. I said, "I hope it's not that nut who tried to join the party, that guy who is a one-man Fair Play for Cuba Committee chapter in New Orleans." Imagine how I felt when it turned out he was the one charged with the act.

The SWP and YSA had received letters from a Lee Harvey Oswald, asking to join. His letters, as I remember them, were politically confused, and the photo that was sent with them was strange. In it, the person who was supposedly Oswald held copies of *The Militant* and the Communist Party's *Worker*. He also sported two or more rifles and hand guns sticking out of his belt. A similar picture appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine after the assassination. Oswald, it turned out, had posed for similar photographs holding the Communist Party's paper and the Workers World Party's *Workers World*.

One look at the picture and everyone in the leadership of the party and YSA thought we were dealing with a nut or a provocateur. Oswald purchased subscriptions to *The Militant* and *Young Socialist*. But no one in our leadership thought we should accept him as a member. In any case, our policy was not to accept at-large members in places where there was no party branch or YSA chapter, for the reason that there was no real way of evaluating the applicant.

The press featured Oswald's connection with the FPCC and speculated that Castro or some unspecified "reds" were behind the assassination. We were a potential target because we were well known as supporters of the Cuban revolution. A city cop came to the SWP headquarters and stationed himself inside the front door to see who came in and out.

The New York *Daily News*, attempting to fire up the atmosphere against the left, stated in an editorial: “The fact remains that Oswald was a Marxist and proud of it. The fact remains that the Communist Party continually preaches death to imperialism, capitalism, etc. It is only natural for lamebrains such as Oswald to conclude that this means killing your enemies wherever and whenever you can reach them defenseless. Ideas have consequences.”<sup>1</sup> This was all a pack of lies.

As *The Militant* pointed out a few days later, the editorial was also an attempt to cover up the fanatical hatred that the right wing had for Kennedy, particularly because of the concessions the government was being forced to make to the fight for Black rights. In Dallas during the days before the Kennedy visit, for example, the rightists had posted leaflets displaying a photo of Kennedy and the words: “Wanted for Treason.”

The New York SWP had scheduled a public forum with Dr. Fritz Pappenheim as the speaker for the night of November 22. We canceled the forum, and assumed Dr. Pappenheim would figure that out, as we had no way to contact him. But some other comrades and I kept watch at the headquarters just in case; and there he came down the street, disciplined soul that he was, ready to speak come hell or high water. He was greatly relieved that we had the brains to cancel the event.

The murder of the US President had generated a climate of intense emotion and anxiety, raising the serious possibility of attacks on the left. So, the Political Committee decided to meet not at the headquarters, but in the home of George Weissman. We knew we could be singled out as scapegoats, given our strong political denunciations of Kennedy on everything from his administration’s developing war in Vietnam and his inaction in defending the civil rights fighters, to his attacks on Cuba.

We decided that Farrell, as party National Secretary write a letter to Mrs. Kennedy, expressing our condolences to her and her children. I did the same for the YSA.

Farrell also prepared a statement expressing the party’s strong identification with the concerns of millions, including the Black population, who were deeply upset and alarmed by the assassination. The statement, which presented the basic Marxist position on such actions, was distributed to the media and published in the next issue of *The Militant*, dated December 8.

Dobbs stated: “The Socialist Workers Party condemns the brutal assassination of President Kennedy as an anti-human, anti-social, and criminal act. We extend our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Kennedy and the children in their personal grief.

“The act springs from the atmosphere created by the inflammatory agitation and deeds of the racists and ultraconservative forces. Political terrorism, like suppression of political freedom, violates the democratic rights of all Americans and can only

strengthen the forces of reaction. Political differences in our society must be settled in an orderly manner by majority decision after free and open public debate in which all points of view are heard.”

The Cuban ambassador to the United Nations issued a statement condemning the assassination.

Ralph Levitt, as a defendant, was understandably very uneasy about what this turn in the political climate implied about the prospects of defeating the Bloomington witch-hunt. I was concerned about Ralph’s morale, and asked Farrell for a hand. We held our talk over a relaxed restaurant meal, also joined by Melissa Singler. Farrell’s patient and kind approach helped Ralph regain his sense of proportion and a more balanced view of the political situation. Ralph was relieved, and jumped back into the work of organizing the defense committee.

We knew a reporter on *The New York Times*, Peter Kihs, who was fair minded and an opponent of McCarthyism. Farrell got in touch with Kihs, who agreed to write an article on why Marxists oppose acts of individual terrorism as harmful to the workers movement, with specific relevance to the Kennedy assassination. Farrell suggested that Kihs get in touch with all the socialist groups, and get statements from them to this effect. The result was a fairly lengthy piece in the *Times* that was the first attempt in the major media to counter the potentially inflammatory atmosphere.

At the highest level of government Chief Justice Earl Warren insisted that the assassination was the work of a single deranged individual. Warren called on people to “abjure hatred,” intolerance, and violence of all kinds. This helped dispel the development of anticommunist hysteria, which would have run counter to the then-current policies of the federal government.

Soon after his arrest Oswald was murdered by a crony of the Dallas police, Jack Ruby, in the basement of the Dallas jail. The murder occurred while Oswald was surrounded by cops, and the event was broadcast live on TV. Ruby hardly seemed the type to sacrifice himself in a burst of patriotic feeling. He was an unsavory character, a hanger-on of the cops and the owner of a cheap striptease establishment. The murder cut short any possibility for Oswald to defend himself. Oswald’s only statement, made earlier to reporters while he was being displayed by the cops like a trophy, was, “I’m a patsy.”

These peculiar circumstances made it impossible to know what had really happened in the assassination of Kennedy. As a consequence, all kinds of conspiracy theories have grown up in the decades since.

Melissa Singler and I were painting our apartment when we heard, live, the assassination of Oswald over the radio. Horrible as it was, we could not help breathing

a sigh of relief that this turn of events had precluded a witch-hunt trial of Oswald directed at drumming up anticommunism again. The December 8 issue of *The Militant* condemned Oswald's murder as well as the Kennedy assassination. A front-page article detailed how his constitutional rights had been violated from start to finish by the Dallas police and prosecutors.

Melissa Singler had been recruited in Detroit. She was a "red diaper baby," a term that we and others on the left used to describe the child of a radical parent. But Melissa's parental political influence was unusual. Her mother had been a member of the Proletarian Party, a group that dated back to the early 1920s, but which did not join the unification of communist forces that formed the Communist Party at that time. The Proletarian Party later adopted Stalinist politics but remained a small, independent sect based in Michigan. One of the members of the United Socialist Students of Greater Boston had been a supporter of this small group.

Melissa's mother worked in the office of a United Auto Workers local union in Detroit. The office staff was unionized, but not by the UAW. Melissa's mother helped lead a job action against the UAW bureaucrats' mistreatment of the office workers. Under Melissa's influence, and through attending our Friday Night Socialist Forums in Detroit, her mother came to support much of our Trotskyist politics.

Melissa had artistic talent. She helped design the *Young Socialist*, and later covers for books published by Pathfinder Press, which became the successor to Pioneer Publishers. She also for a time managed Pathfinder Press by herself in a hall rented in another building. Pathfinder had grown too big to fit into "116."

She was on the YSA National Executive Committee at the time of the assassination, and later became secretary to Farrell Dobbs. Farrell was always fond of Melissa, whom he called "little bit" in reference to her diminutive size.

In the years after the Kennedy assassination, a mythology has developed among liberals and even some leftists around John Kennedy and his brother Robert, who was Attorney General at the time. The Kennedy administration is hailed as enlightened and progressive, redolent of "Camelot," the mythical realm of King Arthur. Many people today credit Kennedy with fighting Jim Crow, when in fact he and his brother had done everything they could to hold back and blunt the Freedom Now movement. Some claim Kennedy would have pulled US troops out of Vietnam had he not been killed. The truth is that the US intervention in Vietnam was escalated step by step on his watch.

It is even speculated that Kennedy was against the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, but had to go along because it was a scheme that President Eisenhower, his predecessor, had cooked up. But Kennedy called for a Bay of Pigs-style invasion *during the 1960*

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*election campaign*. In office, he pushed all the dirty tricks against Cuba, including arming and training counter-revolutionary guerrillas to wage terrorist campaigns inside Cuba and plotting Castro's assassination. And, of course, Kennedy brought the world to the brink of nuclear war in the 1962 missile crisis in an effort to break the Cuban revolution.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee held its Fourth Annual Conference in early December, a month after the assassination. They projected an intensification of the voting rights fight.

In another development, Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, announced he was suspending Malcolm X, his chief spokesman, from his posts. He also barred Malcolm X from speaking publicly. The pretext for this punishment was that Malcolm had made intemperate remarks about the Kennedy assassination. Malcolm had described Kennedy's death as a case of "chickens coming home to roost" — suggesting that the wave of murderous violence against Blacks was now being turned against the US rulers who had permitted it. It soon became clear, however, that Elijah Muhammad had other reasons for moving against Malcolm.

## 15. MALCOLM X

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 19, 1925. In February 1946 he was sentenced in Massachusetts to 8-10 years imprisonment for burglary. While in prison he was won to the Nation of Islam, a Black Nationalist religious sect founded by W. D. Fard and headed at that time and until his death by Elijah Muhammad.

Emerging in the early 1930s, The Nation of Islam was one of the groups that developed as a result of the decline and splintering of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, which had galvanized a large section of the Black community after World War I. The Nation of Islam taught a religious doctrine that Black people were blessed by God and that whites were devils specially created to oppress Black people. They called for the creation of an independent Black nation in the United States, but tended to stress that the achievement of this state would be the work of God, not human beings.

In 1952 Malcolm X, as he had renamed himself in the Nation of Islam manner, became assistant minister of the Nation of Islam in Detroit. In 1954, he was appointed minister of the Harlem mosque. A powerful speaker and thinker, Malcolm was a great success as a proselytizer for the Nation of Islam, which began to attract significant support in the late 1950s and early 1960s as nationalist sentiments spread among Blacks in the wake of an increased pace of civil rights activity throughout the country.

As the Black struggle burgeoned in the early 1960s, in the North as well as the segregated South, Malcolm X began to press the Nation of Islam to become more deeply involved in the struggle. His conflict with the leadership deepened when he discovered that the moral precepts of the Nation of Islam (which had helped reshape his life and which included opposition to drugs, alcohol, and violence and sexual abuse against Black women) were not being adhered to by Elijah Muhammad.

Malcolm X was suspended from the Nation of Islam at the end of 1963. In early 1964 he broke from the organization. Instead of attempting to combine religious and political organizations, he established a mosque for those who shared his religious

beliefs and a Black nationalist political organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, to participate in building a Black Nationalist movement in the United States

Today, Malcolm X is a recognized hero of Black America and he is also widely respected among many other sectors of society, so much so that his picture even appears today on a US postage stamp.

But that's not the way it was in the 1960s. Prominent liberals like James Wechsler, Social Democrats like Bayard Rustin and Tom Kahn, the Communist Party USA and other left-wing groups and spokespersons attacked Malcolm X with bitter hatred. Even the Black leaders of the civil rights movement treated Malcolm with guarded circumspection. And while he is a hero today, Malcolm's revolutionary ideas, especially those he developed or began to talk about openly after his break with the Nation of Islam in 1964, have largely been ignored and suppressed in the chorus of post-mortem praise.

This background needs to be remembered in order to understand and appreciate the revolutionary response of the Socialist Workers Party to the rise of Black nationalism and the revolutionary development of Malcolm X.

The split in the Nation of Islam resulted in a remarkable development on the part of Malcolm X. Malcolm had until then been the main public spokesperson for the Nation and was well known for his fiery brand of Black nationalism. Now, in what would turn out to be the last year of his life, Malcolm X broadened his horizons and deepened his understanding of the nature of the system that was responsible for the oppression of African Americans. Without giving up his Black nationalist viewpoint, he became an internationalist and was even moving in an anti-capitalist and socialist direction when he was gunned down in early 1965, most probably by government agents.

Even before his break with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm took notice of the fact that *The Militant* defended the Nation's civil rights against police frame-ups. *The Militant* also reported the content of his speeches honestly, in contrast to the daily press and most publications on the left. When he encountered *Militant* salespeople — Black or white — outside his meetings he would often stop to say, "That's a good paper."

Harry Ring, a *Militant* staff writer, interviewed Malcolm X early in 1964. In a change from his past positions Malcolm said that he would now support the civil rights movement in the South, while continuing to support the right of Blacks to armed self-defense against racist attacks. He began to accept speaking engagements in the South.

In a March 12 statement reprinted in *The Militant*, he outlined his plans for a new Black organization. “Whites can help us,” he said, “but they can’t join us. There can be no black-white unity until there is first some black unity. There can be no workers solidarity until there is first some racial solidarity. We cannot think of uniting with others, until after we have first united among ourselves.”<sup>1</sup> This too, was new. Malcolm was thinking of the need for workers solidarity; but such solidarity had to be constructed on the basis of equality, and it required that Blacks first be organized as Blacks to fight their special oppression.

The struggle itself was bringing the Northern and Southern movements closer. Blacks were intensifying their fight in the North as well as all across the South. In New York City, a massive school boycott was being organized, as well as a rent strike in Harlem to protest the appalling conditions in the slums of the Black ghetto. The rent strike, led by Jesse Grey, was widespread, but had a weakness in not involving many rent strikers in the actual organization of the action. The YSA helped out. We went from door to door in Harlem, handing out leaflets and explaining the issues.

Malcolm X agreed to speak at the Militant Labor Forum on April 8. We knew that the meeting would draw far more people than could fit into our usual meeting hall at 116 University Place. So we rented the Palm Garden Ballroom for the event. Eight hundred people showed up for his talk on “Black Revolution.” Among them were my parents. Like many other people, my parents had been influenced by the incessant public smear campaign against Malcolm X. But they came to see for themselves. They did hear a powerful revolutionary speech, quite different from what they had been led to expect from the press. Years later, my father would proudly tell people that he had heard Malcolm X firsthand.

The meeting was deemed important enough that the *New York Post* sent one of its top columnists, the liberal James Wechsler, to cover the event. Wechsler wrote a column warning of the danger of the “young Trotskyist intellectuals” getting together with the angry Black masses that Malcolm spoke for.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the cops and the press raised a hoax about the formation of a Black youth gang in Harlem, called the “Blood Brothers,” who were supposedly organizing to murder whites for political reasons. One reporter said they were trained by “Black Muslim dissidents.” The scare campaign was obviously directed against Malcolm X. We scheduled a Militant Labor Forum at 116 University Place, with Clifton DeBerry, the SWP’s Presidential candidate, Quentin Hand from the Harlem Action Group, William Reed of New York CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), and James Shabazz, a leader of Malcolm’s Muslim Mosque, Inc. It was a hot night, and the forum was packed. We were pleasantly startled when Malcolm X walked in



with Shabazz and spoke in his place.

Malcolm had founded the Muslim Mosque, Inc. right after his split with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. But Malcolm's subsequent experiences and his travels to Africa and the Arab world had caused his viewpoint to evolve; he became convinced of the need for a broader, non-religious organization. At a rally held at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem he announced the formation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

Jack Barnes and I held an interview with Malcolm X in early 1965, a few weeks before his assassination. He outlined the development of his thinking in the year since the split. He told us that the "press has purposely and skillfully projected me in the image of a racist, a race supremacist, and an extremist. First, I'm not a racist. I'm against every form of racism and segregation, every form of discrimination. I believe in human beings, and that all human beings should be respected as such, regardless of color."

Explaining the split in the Nation, he said, "The split came about primarily because they put me out, and they put me out because of my uncompromising approach to problems I thought should be solved and the movement could solve.

"I felt the movement was dragging its feet in many areas. It didn't involve itself in the civil or civic or political struggles our people were confronted by. All it did was stress the importance of moral reformation — don't drink, don't smoke, don't permit fornication and adultery. When I found that the hierarchy itself wasn't practicing what it preached, it was clear that this part of its program was bankrupt.

"So the only way it could function and be meaningful in the community was to take part in the political and economic facets of the Negro struggle. And the organization wouldn't do that because the stand it would have to take would have been too militant, uncompromising and activist, and the hierarchy had gotten conservative. It was motivated mainly by protecting its own self interests. I might point out that although the Black Muslim movement professed to be a religious group, the religion they had adopted — Islam — didn't recognize them. So religiously it was in a vacuum. And it didn't take part in politics, so it was not a political group. When you have an organization that's neither political nor religious and doesn't take part in the civil rights struggle, what can it call itself? It's in a vacuum. So, all of these factors led to my splitting from the organization."

Shortly after the split, Malcolm made his pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca, where he learned that Islam was colorblind, and accepted all races and peoples.

He also told us, "I used to define Black nationalism as the idea that the Black man should control the economy of his community, the politics of his community, and so

forth.

“But, when I was in Africa in May [1964], in Ghana, I was speaking with the Algerian ambassador who is extremely militant and is a revolutionary in the true sense of the word (and his credentials as such for having carried on a successful revolution against oppression in his country). When I told him that my political, social and economic philosophy was Black nationalism, he asked me very frankly, well, where did that leave him? Because he was white. He was African, but he was Algerian, and to all appearances, he was a white man. And he said if I define my objective as the victory of Black nationalism, where does that leave him? Where does that leave revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania? So he showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary.

“So, I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of Black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as Black nationalism? And if you notice, I haven’t been using the expression for several months. But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the overall philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of the Black people in the country.”

He explained the function of the two organizations he had helped form. First was the “Muslim Mosque, Inc., which is religious.” This was the first group he established after the split. “Its aim is to create an atmosphere and facilities in which people who are interested in Islam can get a better understanding of Islam.”

As a result of his thinking and experiences abroad, he came to the conclusion that another organization had to be built, a political organization which would be secular. “The aim of the other organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is to use whatever means necessary to bring about a society in which the 22 million Afro-Americans are recognized and respected as human beings.”

In this interview, he went on to talk about the role of students and youth in the struggle in the United States and worldwide, his opposition to US intervention in Congo, Vietnam and elsewhere, his contempt for the Democratic Party, and his belief that capitalism eventually will “collapse completely.”<sup>3</sup>

*The Militant* sent reporters to cover the meetings of the OAAU, which often featured a talk by Malcolm. We also sent people to sell *The Militant* at those meetings. My brother Roland was one of the most consistent salespeople at these events. Sometimes the crowd would be suspicious of these salespersons, especially if they were white. But Malcolm would urge the audience to buy the paper, endorsing it as “one of the best.”

In his April 8 talk to the Militant Labor Forum, Malcolm said that “1964 will be America’s hottest year yet; a year of much racial violence and bloodshed. But it won’t be blood that’s going to flow only on one side. The new generation of Black people that have grown up in this country during recent years are already forming the opinion, and it’s just an opinion, that if there is going to be bleeding, it should be reciprocal — bleeding on both sides.”<sup>4</sup>

Malcolm was right. In July a Black rebellion rocked Harlem. Robert DesVerney, writing in *The Militant* reported, “Armed with nothing more than courage, bottles, bricks, bare fists, and occasional Molotov cocktails, Harlem residents, provoked by years of savage brutality by New York’s corrupt and racist cops, managed to fight the tactical riot force of the police to a stalemate in three days of demonstrations and open hostilities.

“The immediate cause of the outbreak was the killing on July 16 of a 15-year-old Negro boy, James Powell, by a white police lieutenant wearing civilian clothes.”<sup>5</sup>

The rebellion had a deep impact on me and on my political consciousness. Nothing like this had happened before in the United States during my lifetime. But it was only the beginning. In the following years, similar Black rebellions spread to cities across the country. New militant Black organizations formed, and older ones were transformed. Malcolm X was the prophet and symbol of this new upsurge. The worldwide youth radicalization that marked the political period called “the Sixties” was profoundly influenced by the American Black movement.

When he returned from a tour of Africa and Europe at the end of November, Malcolm blasted a renewed assault by Belgian and US imperialism on Congo. The purpose of the attack was to prop up the Belgium puppet Moises Tshombe, precursor to the infamous Mobutu. Tshombe’s forces were under strong attack from the followers of the assassinated Patrice Lumumba. At an OAAU rally of about 1,000 in Harlem, he characterized Tshombe as the “worst Negro in the world,” and said of the President-elect, “Johnson is sleeping with [Tshombe].” Addressing the crowd, he said, “Man you voted for him [Johnson]. You were insane, out of your mind. I don’t blame you. You were tricked.”<sup>6</sup>

Malcolm X agreed to speak at another Militant Labor Forum on January 7, 1965. The title of his talk was “1965 — Prospects for Freedom.” About 600 people came to hear him. After the talk, I jumped up on the stage and introduced myself as the editor of the *Young Socialist*. I asked Malcolm if he would do an interview with the YS. He readily agreed, and we set the day and time. The result was the interview referred to above.

I discussed the project with Jack Barnes, newly elected National Chairman of the

YSA. We agreed that Jack should accompany me to do the interview, to help build the YSA's relations with Malcolm X. I drew up a list of questions, and we went with a tape recorder up to Malcolm's office at the Hotel Teresa on 125th Street in Harlem. Malcolm was dressed immaculately, as always, but I noticed that the collar of his white shirt was frayed. Clearly he was having financial troubles since the break with the Nation. We had a good interview with him, and we went away convinced that he would like to talk again with us.

I took the tape, transcribed it, and edited it lightly. I also sharpened some of Malcolm's points. We had agreed that Malcolm would have the final say on the article. I had to work at my new assignment on *The Militant*, as well as edit the *Young Socialist*, so we decided that Jack would take the draft back for Malcolm's approval.

Jack was excited when he came back from his meeting with Malcolm. He told me that Malcolm liked the way I had edited the piece and he had nothing to change. He also discussed the planned march against the Vietnam War that Students for a Democratic Society had initiated and that the YSA had endorsed and was building. Malcolm wanted to know how we planned to resolve the contradiction between our full revolutionary socialist program and our support of a demonstration that had limited objectives. Malcolm had been wrestling with questions like this for some time, even before he was expelled from the Nation of Islam. The Nation had always talked in a militant fashion, but it never participated in struggles along with other groups. Malcolm X wanted to take part in the Black struggle as it was, and at the same time he wanted to further his militant revolutionary objectives.

Malcolm and Jack also talked about the possibility of Malcolm making a nationwide speaking tour of the college campuses, organized by the YSA. Jack told him that he thought student groups of many types, and even student governments and faculty could be drawn into such an effort. What we would do is spearhead the project. Malcolm replied that even if only the YSA sponsored the speaking tour, it would be OK with him.

But this was not to be. Malcolm X was assassinated on February 22, 1965 as he was about to address a meeting of the OAAU at the Audubon Ballroom. My brother Roland was present, and had to duck for cover as the shooting started. He got up to witness Malcolm collapse and die on the stage.

Melissa Singler and I were at the YSA's national headquarters. We rushed over to 116 University Place, as did most members of the party and YSA. An event of some sort was scheduled to take place later in the afternoon. Tom Kerry, shaken like we all were, addressed us. He told us that in face of this terrific blow we should go ahead with our plans, and not allow this criminal act to demoralize us. We had just received

off the press the issue of the *YS* that contained Malcolm's interview. We put a special insert into each copy about the assassination.

Three people were charged and tried for the assassination. One of these, Talmadge Hayer, was caught at the scene because he had been shot by one of Malcolm's followers. The other two were members of the Nation of Islam. Hayer admitted his part in the crime, but has always said the other two defendants were not part of the plot. The government sought to put the blame on the Nation, which had certainly opened itself to the charge, by making openly hostile and threatening remarks about Malcolm. There had been a fire-bombing of Malcolm's home, and an attempt on his life when he was driving through the Sumner Tunnel in Boston, which he thought were the work of the Nation. But shortly before the assassination, Malcolm came to believe that the government was the main force behind actions taken against him, including in other countries. He said that the Nation didn't have the resources to carry out these actions.

Herman Porter was at the Audubon Ballroom when the assassination took place, planning to cover the meeting for *The Militant*. He also covered the trial of those accused of the murder, who were all convicted. His *Militant* articles on the trial were collected into a pamphlet, which made a strong case that it was the government, through one of its covert agencies, that was responsible.

The *New York Times* gloated in its reporting of the assassination, suggesting that Malcolm X, as an apostle of violence, got what he deserved. Today, this same mouthpiece for the ruling class portrays the historical Malcolm as a tame figure.

Some 30,000 people passed by Malcolm's casket in the Harlem funeral home where his body was on view. At the funeral itself, thousands of Blacks and a few dozen whites stood in line on a bitter cold day, but only 1,000 were able to get in. In the audience were John Lewis, chairman of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee); Black comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory; Stanley Branch of the Chester, Pennsylvania, Freedom Now Committee; James Farmer of CORE; Harlem rent strike leader Jesse Grey; James Foreman, executive director of SNCC; Robert Moses, head of SNCC's Mississippi voter registration project; and even Bayard Rustin, a Black social democrat and a political opponent of Malcolm X.

Ossie Davis, the Black activist and actor, spoke. Ruby Dee, also an actress and Black activist, read the many statements from around the world and the country, many from Africa, saluting the fallen leader. In a very moving passage in his speech Ossie Davis said, "Malcolm was our manhood, our living Black manhood. This was his measure. This was his meaning to his people. In honoring him we honor what is best in ourselves. We know him for what he was — a prince. Our own, Black, shining

prince — who did not hesitate to die because he loved us so. And now we surrender his services to Islam.”<sup>7</sup>

We also held our own memorial meeting at 116 University Place. Clifton DeBerry chaired the meeting, which was addressed by James Shabazz, Robert DesVerney, and Farrell Dobbs, National Secretary of the SWP. The final speaker was Jack Barnes, who spoke on the meaning of Malcolm’s life for the new generation of revolutionists. We of that new generation felt that Jack was speaking for all of us. The YSA soon put out a pamphlet with our interview and Jack’s speech.

There were other memorial meetings we held around the country. George Breitman gave a speech in Detroit, which we published in full over two issues of *The Militant*, entitled “Malcolm X: The Man and His Ideas.” We soon published books by and about Malcolm that explained and preserved Malcolm’s contribution to the movement for the liberation of all humanity.

Malcolm X was the greatest person I have ever met.

## 16. A BLACK FOR PRESIDENT

In the 1964 elections, the SWP decided to run Clifton DeBerry for President. He was the first African American to be nominated by a political party to this highest office. His running mate for Vice President was Edward Shaw. Both were relatively young, DeBerry being 39 and Shaw 40. Both were on the party's Political Committee, and Shaw was the recently elected National Organization Secretary of the party.

I was chosen by the PC to be the campaign director. This was part of a transition from being a leader of the YSA to taking on strictly party assignments. I was still YSA National Chairman and editor of the *Young Socialist*, but I was now writing more frequently for *The Militant* on subjects that included the war in Vietnam and the Black struggle. Since I would be 28 in 1965, I would graduate from the YSA in any case.

Finances for the campaign had to be kept separate from the usual party finances, so we raised funds specifically for the campaign. We had to operate on a shoestring budget, but we were able to send DeBerry and Shaw on nationwide speaking tours, and we put out campaign leaflets and a poster. We won support from more advanced activists, especially among students and other young people. Our main target was youth.

To reach youth interested in the campaign, but who were not necessarily ready to join the YSA, we formed Students for DeBerry and Shaw (in some areas called Youth for DeBerry and Shaw). We obtained as many speaking engagements on campuses as we could for the candidates.

The candidates personified two of our central issues: the Black struggle and the defense of Cuba. DeBerry had been a member of the Communist Party when he was recruited to the SWP by Farrell Dobbs in the 1950s, when Dobbs was the party organizer in Chicago. DeBerry had been a union organizer, and was active in the Black struggle. Shaw was recruited when he was a sailor. He had been a leader of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

The SWP campaign strongly supported independent Black political action. The

highest expression of this was the Freedom Now Party in Michigan, which won ballot status for a statewide campaign. The central leader of the Michigan FNP was the Rev. Albert Cleage. The SWP campaign supported the FNP.

At the Democratic Party convention, the predominantly Black Mississippi Freedom Democrats sought to unseat the official all-white Mississippi delegation. The Freedom Democrats were an outgrowth of the struggle to register Blacks in that state, particularly the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign, spearheaded by SNCC. In that struggle three young civil rights workers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, the first one Black, the other two white, were murdered, sparking national outrage and attention. But the convention rejected the Freedom Democrats' appeal, and even succeeded in keeping the issue from coming to an embarrassing floor vote. The result outraged the Freedom Democrats, SNCC and other Freedom Now fighters.

The Republicans nominated Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who was on the far right wing of the party. His Democratic opponent was President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who had been Kennedy's Vice President, and who succeeded to the oval office after the assassination. Johnson, a former Texas senator who had only recently taken some distance from his fellow Southern segregationists in the Senate, was, of course, to the left of Goldwater. Liberals, labor officials, civil rights leaders and even many Republican voters supported Johnson.

Most people on the socialist left also supported Johnson as a lesser evil. An exception was the Communist Party, which supported him as a positive good and put forward the Johnson campaign slogan, "All the way with LBJ." The Students for a Democratic Society put out a campaign button with the words, "Part of the way with LBJ."

Over the Labor Day weekend, the Young People's Socialist League held its convention, and rejected support to either capitalist party, a break with its parent group, the SP-SDF. While the SP-SDF hadn't officially taken a position, its prominent leaders, including Norman Thomas and Michael Harrington, were openly campaigning for Johnson. The SP-SDF suspended the YPSL, charging it had taken a position "outside the basic framework of democratic socialism."

I wrote an open letter to YPSL, urging it to support the SWP campaign, and a number of YPSL members did join Students for DeBerry and Shaw. YPSL itself disintegrated. Some former YPSL members regrouped and formed what would become the International Socialists.

I wrote an article in the *Young Socialist* entitled, "Is Johnson the Answer to Goldwater?" I also wrote a campaign statement that was issued in the name of the candidates: "How to Fight Goldwaterism."



We and the Freedom Now Party certainly were fighting against the dominant current. But we were attracting those who were coming to an understanding of the need for independent working class and Black political action.

We did not equate Johnson and Goldwater but argued that supporting Johnson was not the way to fight the threat that Goldwater represented. The so-called “lesser evil” capitalist politicians like Johnson were part of the system that spawned the extreme right. We attacked Goldwaterism for its openly anti-union, pro-racist and warmongering stands. Goldwaterism was an expression of reaction to the Black Freedom Now movement.

We also exposed Johnson’s wretched record on Black rights and warned that he was escalating the Vietnam War. In the middle of the campaign, Johnson bombed North Vietnam, using a phony incident in the Tonkin Gulf to provide cover for a near-unanimous resolution by Congress that gave him the legal fig leaf for years of bloody war against Vietnam.

In contrast to the capitalist candidates, we stressed the need for the Black freedom movement to stay in the streets. We argued against the notion of placing reliance on the Democrats, which meant limiting or stifling the struggle for their benefit.

At the end of the campaign, the Students for DeBerry and Shaw organized two conferences on independent political action, in Detroit and New York. In Detroit, Rev. Cleage spoke to a rally at the conference: “Any Negro with all his marbles will vote for Clifton DeBerry.” Besides the two candidates, James Shabazz of the OAAU also spoke. In New York, Shabazz was again a speaker. He was joined by Dr. Otto Nathan, an economist and executor of Albert Einstein’s estate. Paul Boutelle, who was the candidate of the Freedom Now Party in Harlem, spoke. He joined the SWP soon thereafter. Sharon Krebs, one of a group of young people who defied the government’s ban on travel to Cuba in the summer, supported the socialist ticket. Rev. Cleage and his brother Henry, both candidates of the FNP, sent messages to the New York meeting from Detroit.

I was the final speaker at both conferences. I urged the many youth present to join the YSA. As a result of the campaign and the windup conferences, we made some important recruits, including a number of African Americans and a renewed YSA chapter in Philadelphia.

While in Detroit, I also spoke to the Black youth group at Rev. Cleage’s church on the class and race divisions in American society, and advocated revolution. I remember one young man in particular, whose face would light up at various points I made. The more militant I was, the brighter he smiled. He was Derrick Morrison, who would soon join the YSA and play a leading role in our activities.

Our support for Black nationalism and self-determination was beginning to attract young Blacks trying to think through the relation between Black nationalism and socialism. Our championing of the ideas of Malcolm X played an important part in their thinking. They came to agree with our view that the Black struggle was a central part of the socialist revolution to be carried out by the whole working class, and that Blacks would play a key role in that revolution.

George Breitman's writings in particular, attracted a number of young Black revolutionists in Detroit. Since George lived there at the time, they sought him out. They were startled to find he was white, but that fact also helped convince them of the possibility of revolutionary action alongside white workers.

Lyndon Johnson won the presidential election by a landslide. The vote for the Freedom Now Party unfortunately disappointed its leaders, who had unrealistic expectations about an immediate mass response from Blacks. They became demoralized and the Freedom Now Party withered away. The vote for DeBerry and Shaw was small, as we expected, but we weren't campaigning primarily for votes but to spread our ideas and win new supporters to the party and the YSA. This we accomplished on a modest scale. The Communist Party hailed Johnson's victory, convinced that he would now move in the direction of peacefully resolving conflicts.

The Students for a Democratic Society was hopeful that the President would now wind down the Vietnam War. They received a rude shock a few months later when Johnson ordered a massive escalation of the Vietnam War, with a major bombing campaign against North Vietnam and the massive deployment of US troops. I spoke at a rally against the war that SDS sponsored at Harvard soon after, and an SDS leader there told me, "You were right" about Johnson.



Two weeks after the assassination of Malcolm X a mass march for Black voting rights attempted to leave Selma, Alabama to go to Montgomery, the state capital. Governor Wallace called out state troopers, and the local sheriff armed white "posse men" with whips to stop the march in a bloody attack on the unarmed protesters. Scores were injured, including SNCC Chairman John Lewis, whose skull was fractured.

"But that was only the beginning," Fred Halstead wrote in *The Militant*. "The terror lasted into the night when posse men went through the streets beating on automobile hoods with nightsticks and yelling: 'We want all niggers off the streets.'"<sup>1</sup>

The attack was televised and shown throughout the nation and the world. Americans were stunned by the brutality of the carefully planned attack and Wallace's defiance. Demonstrations in support of the marchers mushroomed in city after city, the largest

being some 25,000 in Harlem in New York City. Even the more conservative civil rights leaders demanded that federal troops be sent to Alabama, or Blacks would have to arm to defend themselves.

Another march was planned two weeks later, with Martin Luther King at the head. Wallace vowed he would smash that one, too. The federal government went to court to try to stop the march, but the outcry was so huge that President Johnson relented and allowed the march to proceed. He also sent federal troops to guard the marchers.

Over 5,000 began the march in Selma, and then, in an agreement worked out with the federal government, most returned to Selma. Three hundred continued the two-day trek to Montgomery. Of these 250 were Black Alabama freedom fighters and 50 were “dignitaries.”

The YSA sent Peter Camejo, its National Secretary, and Betsey Stone, YSA National Organization Secretary, to the march. They were accepted as part of the “dignitaries” contingent. Camejo covered the march for *The Militant* and obtained an interview with the recovering John Lewis. Betsey at one point slipped into a ditch at the side of the road. She was helped up by a fellow marcher, who turned out to be Marlon Brando.

The Selma events marked a turning point. The Johnson administration, escalating the war in Vietnam, wanted to quench the anger fueling the rising Black movement at home. Johnson sponsored the first new civil rights law that had any teeth to it, the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Congress approved the law under the pressure of the massive outcry in defense of Black voting rights in the South.

The movement wasn’t quelled, however, but was inspired by the victory.

## 17. I LEAVE THE YSA AND BECOME MILITANT EDITOR

Much of the day-to-day work of members of both the party and YSA was prosaic. There were weekly branch business meetings, and for those who were members of both the YSA and SWP, that meant two such meetings. There were street sales of *The Militant* and the *Young Socialist*. Sales began to pick up in the 1960-64 period, as the Black and youth radicalization began to develop. We sold *Militant* subscriptions door to door, particularly in Black neighborhoods. We ran state and local election campaigns, and this also meant petitioning to get SWP candidates on the ballot. New York and Detroit had regular weekly public forums, and other areas began to follow suit.

For big events we had our announcements printed professionally. But for ordinary weekly public meetings, even offset printing was too expensive. In the early days we used a mimeograph, cutting the stencils on manual typewriters, with handmade headlines and home-grown line drawings by our artistically inclined supporters. By the mid-sixties, we obtained machines that could make stencils photographically. We also used the new IBM Selectric typewriters that could print proportional fonts. We made headlines from special commercially produced paper with typefaces that you could rub off onto the mock-up. I suppose that these time-consuming technologies would be unknown, if not unimaginable to activists of today, but they were quite typical for the time.

Our most technologically advanced activity was the publication of our weekly newspaper, *The Militant*, which was to become a big part of my life activity for the next several years.

The Fourth National Convention of the YSA, held over the 1964-1965 New Years weekend, marked my graduation from the youth organization and a shift to direct party-building work (as distinct from building the party through strengthening the YSA). Jack Barnes was elected the new National Chairman of the YSA, and I became a staff writer for *The Militant*. For a time, I remained editor of the *Young Socialist*,

until the new editor, Doug Jenness, was able to move to New York. In this interim Jack Barnes and I held our interview with Malcolm X. I had been working on *The Militant* part time for much of 1964 and early in 1965. The final issue of the bi-monthly *Young Socialist* that I edited was dated April-May, 1965, and was sold at the first large antiwar demonstration, called by Students for a Democratic Society.

I learned a lot working under *Militant* editor George Weissman. He could sharpen an article politically and stylistically often simply by rearranging or deleting sentences or phrases. He tried to keep the author's words and style intact. Tom Kerry, who at that time was editor of our magazine, *International Socialist Review*, was a good editor too; but Tom had a different approach. Although he preferred not to rewrite someone else's work, and would make suggestions for improvement, he sometimes could not resist the urge to insert expressions of his own. Regular readers could probably infer that Tom was the source of these very colorful invectives. Weissman's lighter touch did not sacrifice political clarity, but made the different articles in the paper reflect the styles of the various authors, making for more variegated and interesting reading.

George's main fault as an editor was that he was a night owl and procrastinator. Sometimes he would not come in to the office until 3 p.m. or later. We would have a staff meeting to plan the issue on Thursday afternoon. Most of the staff went to the New York branch meeting Thursday night and the regular Militant Labor Forum Friday night, as well as taking part in various branch activities on the weekend. As a result, most of the work on each issue was done on Monday and Tuesday. Because of George's schedule, we would most often stay up all night Tuesday through Wednesday morning, drinking coffee and eating sausage sandwiches and hot peppers from Smith's bar and grill across the street. Staff writer Fred Halstead said the paper was improvised, like jazz.

Harry Ring did the main work of laying out the paper and writing headlines. Every so often he would snap, become furious with George's lack of discipline and storm out of the building. Once, Farrell ran out after him to talk him into coming back so that the issue could be completed. After cooling off for a bit, Harry would always come back.

The final copy would be delivered to the printer Wednesday morning, and George would go home and crash all day. The rest of us would get the proofs back from the printer during the day. After a few hours sleep, Harry would come in to lead the work of final proofreading and layout. We would finish around 6 p.m. and take our mockup and final proofs over to the printers.

Weissman had agreed to be the editor for a limited time. Actually he was the

acting editor. Joe Hansen was still listed as editor on the masthead, but he and his wife Reba had gone to Paris as SWP representatives to the new center of the reunified Fourth International.

I was asked by the Political Committee to become the new acting editor. In the late spring of 1965, George Breitman came to New York from Detroit for a few weeks to train me for this assignment. The first issue that I was responsible for was dated June 7, 1965.

To the relief of the staff, I immediately set up a much more normal schedule. We still had the long day on Wednesday, but we were able to finish earlier because we had done most of the proofreading and mock-up beforehand. Fred Halstead, however, still liked to work through the night sometimes, especially when writing an important article he wanted to ponder about. Sometimes I would leave him at his desk when I went home at 9 or 10 p.m. on Tuesday, and find him still tapping thoughtfully on an article when I came in the next morning at 8 a.m.



Younger readers who are used to lithograph printing, personal computers and Internet publishing might find it interesting to learn a little more detail about how *The Militant* was put out in those days.

Before writing an article, the authors would usually be given a line count by George Weissman or Harry Ring. Harry would take a black grease pencil and draw the outline of the space allotted to each article, using the pages of a previous issue as a guide. The staff would then compose the articles on old manual typewriters, with the margins set for 68 characters on a line. With that setting, we knew approximately how many inches of type each article would take.

After editing, the articles would be sent over to the commercial printers. There the articles would be typed on a linotype machine. This machine had a standard keyboard, and as each letter was typed, a mold of that letter would fall down from small boxes onto a holder, and a line of molds would be built up.

The machine also melted lead. When a line was finished, hot liquid lead would flow into the molds, making a single rectangular piece of lead with the molded letters raised in relief on one edge. The line of lead type would then fall into a long container just under the previous line, and in this way a column of type would be built. The used molds were then mechanically sorted by the machine back up to their respective boxes. The raised letters on the column would then be inked and printed on a proof sheet a little wider than the column.

Two of these proof sheets were made. One would be used for proofreading, usually

by two people, one reading the original copy out loud while the other checked for errors on the proof sheet. The other proof sheet would be taped onto Harry's mockup to see if it really fit. If it didn't, marks were made to indicate what should be cut or what space was unused. The corrected proofs were sent back to the printers.

Photographs were sent out to a photoengraver. They were marked to indicate which part of the photo was to be used, and whether the photo was to be blown up or reduced. The photo was screened into a pattern of dots and etched on a metal plate. The plate was then glued to a piece of wood, so that the plate's surface was the same height as the columns of type.

We called those mounted engravings "blocks." Harry would outline on his mockup the space each block would occupy. Headlines were made up in the print shop from molds of different sizes and styles of letters. Then they were cast with hot lead.

Finally, with all the spaces on the mockup pasted in with proofs, or left blank for the blocks, we would take the mockup over to the printers, who used it to make up the pages in a frame, using the lead columns and blocks.

After each page was made up, a new proof was made for the whole page. We would once again proofread each article against the copy. One person would read over each page without the copy for a final proofreading. Sometimes we had to cut an article to make it fit. To make a cut at this stage we had to throw out lines of type from the bottoms of paragraphs, up to the point where a sentence ended. The printers would saw off anything on the line to the right of the period. (Actually, the printer's frame showed the page in reverse, something like a mirror image, so the period was really on the left of the sentence in the frame.) Sometimes we would have to saw off part of a photo block.

To accommodate this method of final cutting, we wrote paragraphs with the most important sentences first.

When a hole appeared, we would throw in an advertisement for a book or pamphlet. We had a stock supply of these small ads already made up and kept at the printers. Sometimes, to fill space, we put thin pieces of lead in between each line of type.

When we were all done, the printers would tighten the frame, locking in the lines of type, blocks and headlines. The frame would then be put on a flat bed press and the pages would be printed.

Subscription copies of *The Militant* were rolled up in a paper wrapper by a mailing company. These wrappers with the subscribers' names and addresses were prepared by the *Militant* business office. They were printed from plates with raised letters. The plates were stacked in a printing machine, which took them one at a time and, with a loud clunk, printed the names and addresses on the wrappers. The plates themselves

were typed from subscription forms, on a machine that whacked the plates with a thump as each character was typed so that the letters and numbers would be raised on the plate.

In the years ahead, we made gradual improvements by adopting more modern technology.

I like all aspects of revolutionary journalism, from writing and editing to layout and printing to selling. I like the smell of print shops. I like the old hot type process and the new cold type print shops too.



## 18. THE NEW ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

At the 1960 founding convention, the YSA had about 130 members. Following the 1961-62 New Year's convention, that figure went up to about 230. We held at that level for two years or so. Although this is a small number, it was not out of line in comparison with other left-wing and socialist groups at the time.

In the early years, we had more than our fair share of very alienated people with peculiar personalities. Some people of that sort were attracted to groups like ours for the wrong reasons — simply because we stood at such variance with the prevalent attitudes in society at large. By 1964, however, we had won over a layer of young people who were influenced by real struggles, primarily the Cuban revolution, the Black struggle and resistance to the witch-hunt. They were participants in real life actions, along with other young militants. As a result the bulk of our members were pretty much just like others of their generation. It was simply becoming more common for young people to hold views like ours.

We were developing a strong youth cadre through a natural sifting process, with some who had joined earlier dropping away and new, more committed recruits replacing them. Our geographical distribution also spread out into areas where there were no party branches, usually places where there were college campus struggles. This put the YSA in a good position to plunge into the new antiwar movement that arose among students in 1965.

The 1964-65 YSA convention held over the New Year's holiday weekend occurred during the first truly mass and sustained student campus action in our political experience — the Free Speech Movement at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. YSA members participated in the FSM, and the convention heard first-hand reports from the Berkeley delegates.

The precipitating issue was the right of students to carry out support activities on campus on behalf of the civil rights movement. Jack Weinberg, who later became a member of the campus Independent Socialist Club, oriented to the International Socialists, set up a literature table for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The

university authorities had him arrested.

Weinberg was put into a police car. A growing crowd of students, eventually numbering thousands, surrounded the car and prevented the cops from taking Weinberg to jail. For two days the protesting students used the roof of the cop car as a speaking platform.

The Free Speech Movement emerged as a coalition of campus groups. YSA member Syd Stapleton became one of the central leaders. The main leader who emerged during the fight was Mario Savio. The FSM organized thousands of students in sit-ins, and held a successful student strike around the issue of student political rights, in the face of adamant resistance from the university administration and the state-appointed Board of Regents that ran the California university system.

Harsh rules, arising out of the witch-hunt experience, prohibited free political expression and activity, especially of a left-wing variety, on campus. The cops tried to repress the revolt, but this only brought more students into the movement. At the height of protest, some 10,000 students participated and many more supported them.

The issue of student political rights, or “student power” as it came to be called, became intertwined with the political issues that fueled the radicalization.

At the YSA convention, I had suggested that the war in Vietnam could trigger a strong response among youth, especially on campus. We knew, of course, that we were not strong enough to create a mass response ourselves, and we could not know what was about to happen.

Shortly after I got back to New York in January, C. Clark Kissinger, the National Secretary of the Students for a Democratic Society, phoned the YSA national office. He informed us that SDS was calling for a national student demonstration in Washington against the war. Jack Barnes and I met with Kissinger soon after. We offered the cooperation of the YSA in building the action. SDS sent letters to the major peace groups, most of which ignored the invitation. But the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) endorsed the action.

In early February, President Johnson initiated the major escalation of the war, sending the first big wave of troops and beginning the continual bombing of North Vietnam. Support for the march began to take off.

The youthful SDS was linked to the League for Industrial Democracy, a social-democratic group. The LID and many of the former leaders of SDS were completely opposed to the march. Leaders of the traditional peace groups like SANE were also unhappy with the idea. C. Clark Kissinger came under intense pressure to include opposition to North Vietnam and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (which the government called the “Vietcong”) as part of the basic stance of the call

for the march.

The YSA encouraged resisting the pressure, arguing that, in contrast to North Vietnam and the southern fighters, the US had no right to be in Vietnam at all. We called for immediate withdrawal of all US troops.

The SDS leaders basically held firm against the pressure from the LID. They decided that the official theme of the march would be “End the War in Vietnam,” a position we accepted because it was fundamentally directed against the US government, rather than just being for peace in the abstract or criticizing both sides equally. This thrust of opposition to Washington remained a hallmark of the movement from then on.

The march was set for April 17. SDS printed up thousands of placards, reflecting different views on how to fight against the war. But they left out the call for immediate withdrawal, a concession to the more conservative peace groups and the LID. We carried the signs reading “Self Determination, Not US Sponsored Dictatorship.” For us, the principle of mass action to oppose the US war was the deciding factor, not the particular slogans being raised.

SDS resisted LID pressure on another issue — whether to exclude so-called “communists” from the march. It was decided that all who were against the war would be welcome. This was a big step forward from the old exclusionary policies of organizations like the Student Peace Union. While the issue would continue to come up in various forms in the years ahead, non-exclusion became a central pillar of the new antiwar movement.

We in the YSA and SWP threw ourselves into building the march. On campuses across the country committees arose to organize for the march, often taking on some variant of the name, Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Some older peace groups, including Women Strike for Peace, and others, endorsed the action. In a breakthrough, leaders of SNCC endorsed the march.

The issue of *The Militant* preceding the march carried the headline, “Join the March on Washington to Protest the Vietnam War!” over a statement by Jack Barnes as the YSA National Chairman. Barnes drafted the initial version of the statement. I revised and edited it, and he checked it over and made final changes. In the coming years, we would often work together in this fashion.

The issue of the *Young Socialist* we sold at the march was the last I would edit. After that, Doug Jenness became editor. The issue of *The Militant* at the march featured a headline in huge type demanding “GET GIs OUT OF VIETNAM.” On the front page was an interview I had conducted with C. Clark Kissinger.

*The Militant* also included a speech by Fidel Castro that called on the USSR and

China to unite in support of the Vietnamese in face of the US attack. The two giant countries were letting their differences create obstacles to providing Vietnam with much needed aid. Emphasizing the need for greater aid from both countries was a Cuban theme throughout the war.

The demonstration was a big success, with 20,000 participants marching on Congress from the Washington Memorial. This was the largest student demonstration in US history up to that point, and signaled a new mood of rebellion on the nation's campuses.

Shocked by the scope of the action, the State Department announced April 24 that it was sending speakers to colleges and universities across the country to "explain" the war.

Early in May, the situation was compounded by a US invasion of the Dominican Republic to crush a popular uprising by revolutionary military officers, who armed civilians against the US-installed dictator of the country. The revolt smashed the dictatorship's army in three days, but the US salvaged its control of the country by sending 24,000 troops. It would take months for the US troops to put the rebellion down, and stabilize a subservient government.

So the State Department had to try to explain away two invasions. As I wrote in *The Militant*: "The State Department's touring 'truth team' defending the US war in Vietnam got badly battered on the first three campuses it went to."<sup>1</sup> The more the government tried to explain the war to students, the more students turned against the war.

The first "teach-in" was held before the march. Some of the faculty at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor were considering calling a strike to protest Johnson's escalation of the war. They were threatened by the university administration and by state legislators. Since many of these faculty members were young and without tenure, they beat a very intelligent and successful retreat, only to continue the struggle with a different tactic. They decided that instead of a strike, they would hold classes as usual on March 24, but with a focus on the political and historical background to the war, and then continue in an all-night discussion on the war from 8 p.m. that evening until 8 a.m. the following day. They used the phrase "teach-in" in reference to the sit-ins of the civil rights movement.

Following the Michigan lead, dozens of other campuses held similar events at the same time. Some 3,000 students showed up for the event in Ann Arbor. The teach-ins enabled faculty members and other speakers who opposed the war to present the facts about the US invasion, and educated tens of thousands of students. They deepened unity against the war of faculty and students, and made it harder for the university

administrations or politicians to crack down on either.

On May 15, a national teach-in was organized in the nation's capital, with a broad array of speakers on the war. McGeorge Bundy, a top State Department spokesman, was invited to speak, but he chickened out at the last minute. About 4,000 people attended the 15-hour proceedings. More than 100 campuses held their own teach-ins that day.

On May 21, the largest of the teach-ins opened at the University of California at Berkeley. About 30,000 participated in that 34-hour marathon. Speakers were invited to present the Johnson administration's side, and they were scheduled to do so, but they backed out. An important speaker was Isaac Deutscher, a biographer of Trotsky and Stalin, an expert on the Soviet Union, and an anti-Stalinist Marxist. He was also invited to speak at the Washington teach-in. His reasoned speeches presented to such large gatherings the proposition that it wasn't the Soviet Union, China, or Vietnam that had initiated the Cold War, but the capitalist West.

Those who had organized the Berkeley teach-in formed an ongoing coalition called the Vietnam Day Committee. SWP and YSA members became part of the VDC, as did people from the other socialist groups, although the VDC was led by independents. Paul Montauk, an SWP member in his forties who already had more than two decades of political experience, played an important role in the nuts-and-bolts organizing of the VDC.

The new anti-Vietnam-War movement had begun in earnest, and it would be here to stay until the war ended.

In August, the Black ghetto in the Watts section of Los Angeles exploded in a sustained Black rebellion. Like previous uprisings elsewhere, it was ignited by the strong-arm methods used by two cops of the notoriously racist L.A. police department in arresting a young Black man for a misdemeanor. It took a week for the cops and 13,000 California National Guardsmen to subdue the rebellion. More than 4,000 Blacks were arrested, 30 were killed, and 900 injured. This powerful expression of rage against racist oppression had a major impact on the country. It deepened the radicalization of young people, including young whites. Many saw the connection between racism at home and the racist war against another people of color, the Vietnamese.

Several prominent leaders of the protest movements, including Robert Parris Moses of SNCC, David Dellinger and Staughton Lynd of the antiwar movement, and Carl Oglesby of SDS, called for a "Congress of Unrepresented People to Declare Peace in Vietnam" in early August around the anniversaries of the atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At this conference, 17 student antiwar committees including the Berkeley

VDC formed a National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam (NCC). The VDC called for nationwide and international antiwar actions for October 15, and this call was endorsed by the NCC and SDS.

Soon after, the DuBois Clubs, the Communist Party youth group, won approval for moving the NCC offices to Madison, Wisconsin, where they had a sizable group. Frank Emspak, a supporter of the DuBois Clubs and the son of a top national leader of the United Electrical Workers Union, became the national leader of the NCC. (The DuBois Clubs were named after W.E.B. DuBois, who was a founder of the NAACP and a historic leader of the Black struggle. DuBois also supported the CP for many years.)

Although we supported and participated in the Congress of Unrepresented People, we initially gave little weight to the potential role of the NCC. We were still looking to SDS to take the initiative. But it soon became clear that the SDS national leadership was turning away from spearheading the new antiwar movement after their triumph of April 17. The SDS leaders failed to see that the war had become the central issue in US and world politics. Instead, they wanted to build a new radical movement around "community organizing," a vague term that never became a coherent political orientation. It took us some time to realize that SDS as a national organization was frittering away the opportunity they had following April 17. The Berkeley VDC filled the leadership vacuum with its call for autumn actions, on the weekend of October 14-15.

Some 70,000 to 100,000 people in about 60 cities participated in the demonstrations that day. The largest of these was held in New York City where some 30,000 marched down Fifth Avenue. The Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee was formed to organize the New York demonstration. It typified the broad, inclusive antiwar coalitions that arose in cities all across the country, and it remained the most important antiwar group in the New York area throughout the history of the movement. Fred Halstead of the SWP became a key staff member of the New York Peace Parade Committee. Internationally, hundreds of organizations responded to the VDC call and organized demonstrations all over the world.

The figure of 30,000 that *The Militant* used was based on a count that I made. We knew that the police and daily press always underestimated protest demonstrations, while action organizers sometimes inflated the figures. Street marches tend to form rows of people marching side by side across the width of the march. I made a rough count by estimating the average number of people in each row, and counting the rows as they passed a fixed point. We did our best on *The Militant* to give accurate numbers, which was useful in gauging whether or not the movement was growing over the

course of successive demonstrations.

The NCC called a national conference of antiwar committees to be held in November in Washington, D.C. This conference proved to be a major confrontation between two opposed strategies for the developing antiwar movement. The most consistent proponents of these two strategies were the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, and the youth organizations associated with them.

It may seem odd that these two currents played such a central role in the movement. After all, we were just emerging from the witch-hunt and anticommunism was still strong. The overwhelming majority of those who participated in the actions were not political supporters of either the CP or the SWP.

But the lines of difference between these two organizations — primarily whether to focus on mass action or electoral politics, on independent working class political action vs. support to the Democratic Party — represented fundamental lines of division that had appeared in mass movements in the United States and elsewhere throughout the twentieth century. The division was basically between the strategies of class struggle and class collaboration. The Communist Party current and the SWP/YSA current simply gave more thought-out expression than others to these counterposed perspectives. The battle over these two lines of approach was to arise time and again in the anti-Vietnam-War movement.

In addition, the two groups were cadre organizations of dedicated people who would take the time and expense to come to leadership gatherings of the movement, such as the one called by the NCC. Of course, there were many people playing leading roles in their local committees who also attended. But these independents did not usually have strong opinions on strategy. The CP and SWP would be arguing not primarily in hopes of convincing people from each other's groups, but in order to win over the independents.

Another very important force was the radical pacifists, represented by figures such as Dave Dellinger, A.J. Muste, and Staughton Lynd. They had few forces but had moral weight. They didn't always agree among themselves, and would sometimes bloc with one side and sometimes the other. They represented a tradition that favored civil disobedience and other acts of individual witness as a means of protest rather than mass action. That line of approach was also raised time and again in the new antiwar movement.

If the major peace groups had taken up the fight against the war, they would probably have dominated the movement at first. But the issue was just too radical for most of the old-line peace groups like SANE (Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy). They couldn't break out of the framework of anticommunism and state the truth that

it was Washington's aggression that was responsible for the war. They still felt the need to blame both sides. They couldn't accept non-exclusion because that would have meant the inclusion of groups designated as communists. They opposed the slogan of the immediate withdrawal of US troops because that might allow the other side, the Communists, to win in Vietnam. On all these points they were out of touch with the youth who were being drawn into the movement.

The officials of the US labor movement, the AFL-CIO, could have played a decisive role if they were so inclined, but they were much further to the right on the war question and more anticommunist than the moderate peace groups, whom they denounced. They were deeply committed to US foreign policy, and were tied into some of the CIA's dirtiest tricks around the world. Only a few trade union officials challenged the official AFL-CIO policy at this point.

So the radicals stepped into the breach.

By the time of the conference, we had realized that we were in for a major fight with the CP over what direction the antiwar movement should take. Before the conference, *The Militant* published articles on the issues we knew would be in dispute, most by Fred Halstead. These helped prepare our members and those who were working with us in the local committees. At the same time, Dick Roberts took on the task of keeping *Militant* readers abreast of developments in the war itself.

We came to the NCC gathering with a sizeable contingent of party and YSA members to carry out our organized participation. The CP came similarly prepared.

My main role in our antiwar efforts was as editor of *The Militant* and as a member of the Political Committee developing our party's policies in the fight against the war. We published articles explaining the differences in the movement, often by Fred Halstead and Harry Ring, and occasionally by myself or other leaders of the party. Sometimes, as part of the leadership of our forces, I also played a role at the major gatherings where the movement would debate out its next steps. It was in this capacity that I was at the NCC convention.

A pretty intense struggle took place at the NCC conference from the very outset, with Frank Emspak from the CP youth and Lew Jones from the YSA literally struggling over the microphone, each pulling on it from a different side. The struggle was over whether an announcement should be made for an additional workshop where the local committees to end the war could get together for discussion about how to build support for the immediate withdrawal demand. Emspak represented the NCC national office, and Jones the Washington antiwar committee that was hosting the event.

The CP supporters were determined to block the formation of a group dedicated to the immediate withdrawal demand, even if it was simply one group within the



broader coalition, which was all we were proposing. They saw the militancy of the campus committees and the demand for immediate withdrawal as an obstacle to turning the movement back toward the Democratic Party.

We didn't get much sleep, as the faction fighting became intense. One early morning, about 4 a.m., Staughton Lynd, a supporter of immediate withdrawal, came into Jack Barnes' room at the hotel where the NCC conference was being held, and where we were discussing our strategy. Lynd pleaded with Jack and me to agree not to call a meeting of those who wanted a national organization of campus and local youth antiwar committees that could eventually support the immediate withdrawal demand. We refused.

We went ahead and organized the "thirteenth workshop," so called because there were only 12 approved workshops. We had to organize the workshop separate from the main conference venue, and we even had to physically protect it from potential disruption by the CP supporters.

The "thirteenth workshop" was too narrow to establish a national organization of antiwar committees. Instead, we decided to set up a publication which would continue to push for such a national organization. This publication was called the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter*.

A national organization of the independent antiwar committees did not result from the conference, due to CP opposition. Many at the conference just could not understand the fight, because it tended to take an organizational form. But the counterposed lines were subsequently clarified.

The CP wanted the movement to go into electoral politics, specifically, into the Democratic Party. This was their strategic orientation for the movement. They were opposed to the immediate withdrawal slogan, not in and of itself, but because the so-called "doves" in the Democratic Party rejected the idea. The CP tended to be hostile, even implicitly exclusionary towards any grouping, like ours, that didn't share their orientation to the liberal Democrats.

Our views became sharper and more defined in this struggle. We were for building the broadest movement possible of all who opposed the war, excluding no one, no matter what overall political views they had. Within the movement, we would argue for the slogan of immediate withdrawal of the US troops. One reason for this slogan was that it stood on the principle of self-determination for the people of Vietnam. We didn't concede to Washington even the right to negotiate Vietnam's future. Equally important, this clear-cut demand could best appeal to wide layers of the American people, including the soldiers, as they became disenchanted with the war.

After the conference, it soon became apparent that the National Coordinating

Committee was not what its name implied, but was just one tendency in the movement located in Madison, Wisconsin. We, along with other supporters of the idea, began putting out the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter* addressed to the rank and file antiwar activists, particularly the students and other youth. It was true to its name, and helped organize the movement for the next actions. Gus Horowitz became the editor.

The fight we put up at the NCC conference convinced friend and foe alike that we were leaders of a substantial current and a force to be reckoned with in the new antiwar movement.

## 19. THE OVERTHROW OF THE ALGERIAN REVOLUTION

On June 19, 1965, a military coup led by Col. Houari Boumedienne overthrew the revolutionary government of Ahmed Ben Bella. Ben Bella was arrested, along with thousands of left-wing militants of the National Liberation Front. Demonstrations in support of Ben Bella were repressed. Right-wing Muslim theologians, who had been on the defensive in the first years of the revolution, immediately supported the new regime, as did Washington and Paris.

On June 26, Fidel Castro blasted the coup in a speech given to young people who had been scheduled to attend the Ninth World Youth Festival in Algiers (which Boumedienne soon cancelled). Castro expressed his pain and anger at this blow to the Algerian revolution.

“We are not going to speak in diplomatic language, we are going to speak in revolutionary language,” he said. “We cannot discuss this question without creating enmity. But in these circumstances what is important is the correct point of view, a correct and objective analysis as far as possible.”<sup>1</sup>

Boumedienne had headed an army of Algerian rebel exiles in Tunisia during the revolutionary war, and he supported Ben Bella in the 1962 struggle that brought Ben Bella to power. After the coup, Boumedienne attempted to reassure the Algerian people that he was still for the socialist project. Castro took that claim up in detail, asking why then was it necessary for the military to overthrow the revolutionary government? That wasn't a revolutionary or socialist undertaking.

Castro also expressed his personal appreciation of Ben Bella, recalling the Algerian leader's support of Cuba during the missile crisis. When the speech was distributed in Algeria, Boumedienne closed down the Cuban press service there. Major excerpts from Castro's speech appeared in *The Militant*.

The SWP and the Fourth International subsequently analyzed the reasons for this defeat. We noted that the FLN never embarked on the road of transforming itself from

a political-military guerrilla force into a revolutionary socialist party, unlike the Cuban July 26 movement.

In contrast to the Cuban revolution, the initial mobilizations of the Algerian workers were not developed. There had been important nationalizations, but these were not built upon to eventually expropriate the capitalists, as had happened in Cuba. Instead of moving forward, Ben Bella temporized with the various factions in the leadership, hoping for a consensus on advancing the socialist objective.

In Algeria, the differences at the top expressed different class interests. By not turning to the people for support against his foes, Ben Bella allowed the initiative to pass to Boumedienne. When the blow came, the masses were not prepared to counter it.

We came to the conclusion that the workers' and peasants' government had been overthrown, registering the fact that the possibility of going forward toward a socialist revolution had ended. A new popular revolution would be required to open that road once again.

The SWP used the term "workers' and farmers' government" both as a slogan leading towards a revolutionary socialist government, and as a tool in analyzing situations like the one in Algeria. As a transitional slogan, it meant urging the workers and peasants (or workers and working farmers in a country like the US) to take power into their own hands. As a tool for analyzing, it helped understand situations that were in a transitory stage: a stage in between a capitalist state and a workers' state, where a revolutionary overturn created a government that had the potential to advance toward a workers' state. Joe Hansen did most of the theoretical work on this concept.

The concept had helped us to understand what happened in the Chinese revolution. In 1949, Mao's peasant army took power, smashing the old state led by Chiang Kai-shek's Koumintang. It did so, however, under the Stalinist theory of a "bloc of four classes," that included the "patriotic bourgeoisie." Socialist measures were limited to nationalizations of capitalists who had not supported the Koumintang (a substantial section of the capitalists, of course). Independent mobilizations by China's small working class were suppressed or tightly contained. The land reform, which was the great aspiration of the peasant uprising, was halted in part of the country.

Under the impact of the American invasion of Korea, however, the bourgeois allies proved ever more unreliable. The Chinese capitalists hoped that the US would cross over into China and liberate them from the revolution, a real possibility. China sent troops to Korea to fight the imperialist threat. The Chinese CP leadership turned to the workers and peasants, and mobilized them (under bureaucratic control) to smash the capitalists and to complete and consolidate the overthrow of landlordism. In that

way, a nationalized and planned economy was created by the revolution; and so we said that by 1952 a workers' state was established in China.

It was, however, a workers state that was saddled with a Stalinist-type bureaucratic caste.

In hindsight, we came to the conclusion that the regime that had been set up with the victory of Mao's rebel army in 1949 was a workers' and peasants' government, even though it was not led by an internationalist revolutionary party, but by a Stalinist party. This government came to power in a real mass revolution which smashed the old state. The Chinese leadership had shown itself, in spite of its flawed program, to be capable of leading the exploited classes against landlordism and capitalist property. Under pressure from US imperialism, it carried through the transition to a workers' state.

When the Cuban revolution occurred, we were in a position to better understand it in light of the Chinese experience. The Cuban revolutionary leadership was not hindered by a Stalinist program, and was determined to carry through its program for a national-democratic revolution to the end. At first the Cubans set up a coalition government with anti-Batista capitalist politicians who had some credibility with the masses. But these capitalist figures were soon forced out when they attempted to stop the agrarian reform, the creation of a popular militia, and other measures in the interests of working people.

At a certain point in this revolutionary break with the bourgeois forces in Cuba, a workers' and farmers' government was established. Hansen suggested that the definitive shift in the class character of the government was marked by the resignation in late 1959 of the liberal Felipe Pazos as head of the national bank and his replacement by Che Guevara. This government carried through the expropriation of the capitalist class and the formation of a workers state, basing itself on the mobilization of the workers and peasants, women and the youth.

In Algeria, we saw that this type of intermediate government could retreat and decay as well as go forward. While the Ben Bella government had a revolutionary and socialist program, it wasn't able to put it into practice. There was nothing foreordained about this defeat. It came down to a question of leadership, a test the Cubans passed and the Algerians failed. In the end, even though what you say is important, what you do in practice is decisive.

## 20. THE 1965 CONVENTION OF THE SWP

Early in September, the SWP held its convention in New York, around the themes of the Vietnam War and the Black struggle. Joe Hansen gave the international report, highlighting the war as the central issue of the class struggle worldwide. Farrell Dobbs gave the political report, which focused on the new antiwar movement. Longtime SWP leader Vincent “Ray” Dunne remarked in the discussion that this was the first time we saw an antiwar movement develop *after* the shooting started. Before both world wars there had been movements against entering, but the great majority of these peacetime pacifists converted into warmongers once the US was in.

Robert DesVerney presented the Black liberation resolution, and YSA National Chairman Jack Barnes gave the report on the fight of young people on both interconnected fronts.

In the next period, Jack became the central leader of the antiwar activity of both the SWP and YSA. He helped think through the oft-times tricky tactical questions involved in trying to hold antiwar coalitions together while maintaining their focus on building mass actions against the war that could allow ordinary Americans, including workers and soldiers, to express their opposition.

One of Jack’s strengths at this time was his ability to work smoothly with the various leaders of the older cadre of the SWP, as well as with the younger ones. He could help build a consensus by integrating the ideas of many different leaders, and rank and file members as well.

As the war and the movement against it grew, we honed our position down into some simple and clear but profound ideas. The most important by far was to focus on mass action against the war. Along with this, we promoted the demand for immediate withdrawal of US troops and the principle of non-exclusion.

Another important concept we hammered away at was that the antiwar movement should be focused on the single issue of the war. This was the only glue that held the

movement together. The various forces in the leadership of the movement did not agree on much else, and what most of them did agree on (pro-Democratic Party politics) would have tended to push them more toward accommodation with the liberals rather than consistent struggle against the government's course.

We always kept in mind that the majority of the American people did not follow any of the radical tendencies in their overall politics. As more and more people became opposed to the war they would join in demonstrations and other activities that centered on the war, but not necessarily on other issues. We also stressed that the tactics of the movement had to be peaceful, to attract as wide a layer as possible.

Throughout the years that followed, the question of having a "single-issue" or "multi-issue" focus was one of the points of contention and even of splits in the antiwar movement. Other tendencies held unrealistic expectations of somehow turning the movement against the war into a multi-faceted movement for social change or even a radical party of some type. But they never could agree on precisely what they wanted. The CP and various social-democratic currents sometimes supported the arguments for a multi-issue focus because they favored turning the movement toward Democratic Party politics. Reducing the stress on the centrality of the war would aid that objective.

Often at antiwar conferences, the different perspectives would be reflected in a debate on whether or not to "set the date" for the next major action. We knew that setting a demonstration date would get the ball rolling, focus attention on a specific objective, and enable the movement to reach out to new forces to build the action. Those opposed to our perspective often argued against setting the date in order to gain time to change the orientation and objectives of the movement.

Sometimes people who had been newly radicalized by their participation in the antiwar movement argued that demonstrations, which had a value earlier, were now outmoded and ineffective. They said that it was necessary to go beyond peaceful mass actions and take up more militant tactics. But this meant ignoring the need to reach out to the many millions of people who were still not yet convinced to take any action at all.

In the end, our orientation generally carried the day and helped change US politics profoundly.

Another issue that was not specifically on the convention agenda, but which we discussed at that time and subsequently in both the SWP and YSA, was whether we should join SDS. SDS had clearly made a name for itself for having organized the first big antiwar demonstration in April, 1965. As a result, many newly radicalizing young people were joining SDS and new chapters of SDS were being formed all over the country. It seemed to offer fertile ground to reach people with our socialist ideas.

We decided, however, that it was more important to focus on the developing antiwar movement. The SDS leadership had turned away from antiwar organizing. Joining SDS and trying to maintain our antiwar focus would have necessarily led us into needless internal fights with the SDS national leadership over the central course of action that should be followed. It would have been more difficult to organize antiwar actions and to reach the larger body of young people who were activists in the antiwar movement. In a few places, YSA members did participate in SDS, but the experience did not generally prove to be beneficial.

Even though we were not members of SDS, we were still able to reach SDS activists who did participate in the antiwar movement. Local SDS chapters, in particular, often went their own way, independent of the policy pronouncements of the national SDS office. We were able to work well with many of these SDS chapters, and we won some of these SDS activists to our ideas.

In contrast to our approach, the Progressive Labor Party decided upon an entry tactic into SDS. That experience led to continual faction fighting and ultimate disaster for both PL and SDS.

The resolution and report on the Black struggle deepened the position we had adopted in 1963. We took into account the development of Malcolm X's ideas after his split with the Nation of Islam, the ghetto uprisings, and the intensification of the struggle in the South. We also adopted a position in favor of the formation of an independent Black party, an extension of our support to independent Black political action. Such a party would tend to be largely working class in composition due to the class structure of the Black nationality. A Black party would not only fight for the specific interests of the oppressed Black people, it would also point the way forward for the working class as a whole in breaking with the capitalist parties.<sup>§</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> A few months after the convention, in December, the SWP in New York held a special dinner to honor one of the most important leaders of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956, E.D. Nixon. When Rosa Parks was arrested on a Montgomery bus for refusing to give up her seat to a white man, it was E.D. Nixon whom she called for help.

During the bus boycott, SWP leaders Farrell Dobbs, Fred Halstead and Clifton DeBerry went to Montgomery, where they met many of its organizers, including Nixon, and became friends with him.

In 1948 a French socialist who toured the American South wrote about "E.D. Nixon ... a vigorous colored union militant who was the leading spirit in his city of both the local union of Sleeping Car Porters and the local branch of the NAACP. ... Nixon has both feet on the ground. He is linked to the masses. He speaks their language. He has organized the work of race defense with the precision and method of a trade unionist."<sup>1</sup>

Nixon sensed that the mood of the Black masses in 1955-56 in Montgomery was such that



The 1965 convention adopted a resolution on party organization. A three-person committee, composed of Farrell Dobbs, James P. Cannon and George Novack, had been created to draw up this resolution. Farrell wrote the original draft, and George Novack edited it into final form. The document was based on previous resolutions the SWP had adopted. The new resolution basically sought to reaffirm perspectives and methods of functioning that had been part of our tradition, but which were more honored in the breach than in practice during the period of the witch-hunt. The party, faced with the deep conservatism and relative isolation of that time, had been forced to live with lower expectations and less organizational cohesion.

With the rise of the Black struggle and the youth radicalization, Farrell saw the need to reaffirm the SWP's historic view of the need for a democratic centralist combat party. This view flowed from the analyses of Marx and Lenin, that when the great majority of workers and other people exploited and oppressed by capitalism came to the conclusion that a fundamental social change was necessary, there would be armed resistance organized by the capitalist ruling class, using the police and army against the workers.

Moreover a broad enough popular movement against capitalism would be more than the army and police could handle, especially since the army could be won over to the side of the workers, as was illustrated in the Russian revolution. The army is really composed of workers and farmers in uniform, and is not immune to the general ferment in society. We saw harbingers of this phenomenon in the US during the later stages of the fight against the Vietnam War, when widespread antiwar sentiment took root among the soldiers.

To fight the rebellious working class, the rulers would have to resort to mass counter-revolutionary formations organized around radical, ultra-rightist politics. Such fascist movements had already been seen in the 1920s and 1930s, with the Italian Fascists, the German National Socialists, and the Spanish Falange. For the workers to win when such showdown battles erupted, they would need not only revolutionary

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a big step forward could be taken, and he led the organization of the bus boycott together with a core group of younger Black ex-GIs.

When he retired in 1964, *The Black Worker*, paper of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, wrote, "It must be said that Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. may never have been given the Nobel Peace Prize Award were it not for the fact that Brother Nixon induced Rev. King to take the chairmanship of the Montgomery Improvement Association which ultimately was successful in abolishing discrimination in bus transportation."

Nixon's role in the fight was largely forgotten and ignored later, which is why we brought him to New York for this special dinner in his honor.

mass organizations such as class struggle unions, soviets, factory committees and armed detachments, but a disciplined party that had been trained in struggle and that had a clear Marxist program and political will to power.

We knew that we were a small revolutionary propaganda group, not yet a real revolutionary party. Black people and youth were radicalizing, but there was as yet no mass radicalization of the working class as a class. Our reaffirmation of the organizational character of the party was a reaffirmation of our goal of socialist revolution. But it was more than that. We were affirming the need to build a disciplined, educated cadre organization in the here and now.

Most of the older leaders joined Farrell in seeing the need to reaffirm our organizational character. Younger party leaders of my generation wanted to build an activist movement. We were sympathetic to the concept in the resolution that the party's internal life had a natural rhythm, balancing discussion and action. There were regular periods for broad discussion among all the party members nationally. Then, after decisions were made by majority vote, we would all join together to put those decisions into practice as a united party.<sup>§</sup>

Since 1961, internal differences in the party over Cuba, the Black struggle, Maoism and the Fourth International had become very sharp. The various minorities kept trying to re-open discussion on these questions in some of the branches even after decisions had been made by convention vote. Continual argument over settled questions tended to hamper our work in the broader mass movement. We were unable to conduct fruitful discussion of what to do on a daily basis. In the important New York branch, where I was a member, one meeting broke down into shouting matches from the floor. It was so unruly that the chairperson could not keep order. Farrell Dobbs, drawing upon his respect among the membership, had to take over the chair to calm things down.

Our younger members, in particular, were fed up. We wanted to turn our attention fully to work in the antiwar and Black movements. We pressed forward for more active branches that could continue to win new members to our cause.

An aspect of the resolution that appealed to the younger members was its emphasis on serious organization in all matters. This was a source of pride in the SWP. We rejected all dilettantism and organizational slovenliness. Clifton DeBerry once told me that when he first came around the SWP in Chicago, he was impressed to see Farrell Dobbs, who was the Chicago organizer at the time, sweeping the SWP premises.

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<sup>§</sup> In light of subsequent experience, more will be said about this question in Volume Two of this book

We paid attention to organizational details, knowing that it wasn't enough to have good political ideas. Our ideas had to be put into practice, and that meant organization. We loved the slogan of the 1930s Minneapolis Teamsters under the leadership of the Trotskyists: "Whether a picnic or a strike, do it right!"

Jack Barnes had earlier played a key role as the Chicago branch organizer in turning that branch around, establishing regular public meetings (we called them forums), sales of the press, and strong finances. Another branch which became a model was in Detroit, which had maintained weekly forums through the witch-hunt period, as had the New York branch. Soon, every branch was re-establishing norms of activity that had been lost in the 1950s in many areas.

Most of the party leaders and activists, young and old, supported the organizational resolution. But Murry and Myra Weiss, who did not have big political differences, were opposed.

One point in the resolution that broke new ground referred to the case of James Robertson and his supporters. The Robertson group had come to the conclusion that the SWP had lost its revolutionary orientation, and could not be changed. Accordingly, they rejected the idea of loyalty to the party. In fact, they described the party as a "diseased shell." This was truly a split perspective. They intended to stay in the party only until they felt they had won as many over to their views as they could. The Robertson group developed these ideas in documents that were kept secret from the rest of the party.

Tim Wohlforth, whose group had split with Robertson at about the time these documents were produced, didn't want to be associated with this perspective. Wohlforth's loyalty was not to Robertson's faction but to the Socialist Labour League in Britain, headed by Gerry Healy. The Healy group had opposed reunification of the Fourth International and had its own schedule for a split. Wohlforth turned the Robertson documents over to the party leadership, and as a result the Robertson group was expelled. They formed the Spartacist League, which is still around today.

Murry and Myra were opposed to the expulsion. They had no sympathy for Robertson's politics, but they charged that the expulsion was wrong because it was based only on an *idea*, the idea that the party was a diseased shell, and not on an *act* of indiscipline. Most of us thought that the distinction was nonsense in this case. Even a conventional community service organization like the Kiwanis Clubs would refuse to grant membership to people who held no loyalty to the organization whatsoever.

James P. Cannon supported the resolution. But Cannon later sent a letter to the leadership, warning of the danger of stifling the internal discussion and debate in the party. Cannon wrote in response to an action taken against the Kirk-Kaye group in

Seattle, who had circulated a letter to the party branches attacking the party's antiwar policy. The Kirk-Kaye group eventually walked out of the party on their own steam.

Cannon strongly agreed with the party's policy in the antiwar movement, but he advised against any tendency to take all our organizational concepts and norms of disciplined behavior and turn them into absolute principles, all enforceable by expulsion. "Don't strangle the party," he warned.

He stressed the party's organizational tradition, which went back way before the witch-hunt, of thoroughly debating and clearly resolving political questions before taking action against any who might refuse to live with the decision reached by the majority.

It seemed to me and other young leaders that the party had shown no weakness of the type Cannon warned against — just the opposite. Years of almost continual debate had settled a whole series of big political questions. The party now needed to continue in a basically activist direction and act in the unified manner that had been set by the organizational resolution.

Murry and Myra Weiss resigned soon after the 1965 convention. A factor in Murry's resignation was personal. He had suffered a very serious stroke and could no longer function at the same level as he had in the past. The other political minorities also left or deliberately provoked their own expulsions, as they felt no longer at home in an SWP that held views so at variance with their own.

The 1965 convention was a turning point. It armed us politically and organizationally to participate effectively in the burgeoning movement in the years ahead. Our well-disciplined and competent organizational functioning would earn us much hostility from those who disagreed with our proposals and perspectives, but it maximized our effectiveness well beyond what might seem possible, given our small numbers. We were a renewed and replenished party, ready for the battles that lay ahead.

In the early and mid-1960s, many new radicals were identified with a general current of thought labeled as the "New Left." This current, mostly identified with the Students for a Democratic Society, rejected democratic centralism, in favor of what they called "participatory democracy." The rationale behind this concept did have the merit of trying to involve as many activists as possible in the decision-making process, not just a handful of leaders. But the notion of participatory democracy stressed the often illusory goal of consensus and downplayed the importance of decision-making votes. As a result, when differences of opinion arose, participatory democracy usually gave way to backroom deals among leaders. Furthermore, adherence to this concept didn't prevent SDS from falling into fierce internal factionalism in a few short years.

SDS and other groups like it eventually split into rival groups with dictatorial internal lives, sometimes around the cult of a single leader.

While our democratic centralism and organizational thoroughness was anathema to the New Left, it was very different from the dictatorial centralism promoted by the pro-Moscow and pro-Peking groups. The Stalinization of the world's Communist Parties in the late 1920s crushed internal democracy in those parties. No deviation was allowed.

Of course, in the United States, the CP could only punish dissenters by expulsion and shunning, while Stalin imprisoned and murdered hundreds of thousands of the real communists who opposed his counter-revolution. But the US party aped the Soviet model as best it could. The Maoist groups did the same in following the Chinese model.

Democracy in the SWP was real, as real as its centralism. Given our historical battle with Stalinism, the right of the membership to have the final say, and the right of all members to criticize the leadership and discuss all questions was jealously guarded.

Holding regularly scheduled conventions was an important part of this internal democracy. We held conventions every two years. A period of pre-convention discussion, at least for three months, was the norm. The National Committee would prepare resolutions on the major issues before the party, so that these could be published in a timely way to kick off the discussion. Sometimes there were counter-positions from a minority on the NC, and these were also published in a timely fashion.

All members could participate in the written pre-convention discussion on any subjects, and they could present their own counter-resolutions if they so chose. They could form tendencies and factions in the pre-convention discussion to advocate their views. There were also discussions and debates in the branches. The internal bulletins of the SWP during the 1960s and 1970s were filled with articles by party members, a testament to the rich internal discussions that were part of our tradition.

If there were differences defined by counterposed resolutions, delegates from the branches to the convention would be elected in proportion to the support each position received. The delegates so elected would then make the final decision at the convention.

Trotskyists tended to be non-conformists, stiff-necked rebels. They also tended to be wordy. I think Trotskyists wrote more per capita on political issues, including polemics, than any other group in the world. And what they produced was often of a very high level politically. Polemics could also be sharp. A revolutionary workers' party can be pretty rough and tumble. Joe Hansen, a well respected older leader and one of the most able polemicists, set a good model of civility in conducting political

debate.

Sometimes, the losers in a debate would feel they hadn't been given a fair shot, and would charge that they had been bureaucratically suppressed. In retrospect, I think that there were isolated instances of high-handed or bureaucratic acts in the SWP in these years. But, on balance, I also think that we were one of the most democratic organizations on the left. I know of no other group that conducted written and oral discussions anywhere near as extensive as ours.

Certainly, we were more democratic than the capitalist Democratic and Republican parties, where money and machine politics rule. We were also more democratic than the bureaucratized and sometimes gangster-ridden trade unions.

## 21. FIDEL CASTRO ATTACKS TROTSKYISM

In January 1966, Havana hosted the Tricontinental Conference of African, Asian, and Latin American Peoples. This was a meeting of movements who advocated fighting against imperialism and for socialism. Moscow and Peking sent delegations. It was apparent that apart from pro-Peking groups from Asia, other movements that were opposed to the Kremlin's policies had been screened out, including the Trotskyists, who supported the Fourth International.

Under pressure of the Cubans, the Tricontinental conference adopted many militant resolutions that were implicitly opposed to the Kremlin's line of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism. For the pro-Moscow Communist Parties of Latin America, these resolutions were just window dressing, and they never intended to carry them out. Castro gave a speech at the end summing up the conference.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International issued a statement in response to Castro's speech. The statement was directed to Castro. "On the one hand, this speech is imbued with an incomparable revolutionary spirit, as when you proclaim that 'for Cuban revolutionaries the battleground against imperialism is the whole globe,' when you promise that 'revolutionary movements in any corner of the globe can count on Cuban combatants,' when you tell the American imperialists once again that the only way they can gain peace is to get out of Vietnam, when you call upon the Latin American revolutionists to extend armed struggle to an ever-growing number of countries in order to make it impossible for the imperialists to concentrate their forces against the revolutionary forces of a sister people. Reading this part of your speech we feel in solidarity more than ever with this orientation and line of action.

"But on the other hand the speech also levels systematic, slanderous attacks against Trotskyism, the Trotskyist movement and the Trotskyist program as a whole, attacks whose unjustified nature is felt by us with indignation and revulsion."<sup>1</sup>

This statement was occasioned because Castro had repeated the Stalinist charge

that Trotskyism was an agency of imperialism, the charge made in the 1930s in the infamous Moscow Trials of old Bolsheviks, which hardly anybody (Castro included as far as I can tell) gave any credence to after Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of the crimes of Stalin.

Among other things, Castro had stated: "Even though at one time Trotskyism represented an erroneous position, but a position in the field of political ideas, Trotskyism became during the following years a vulgar instrument of imperialism and reaction." Castro went on at length along these lines.

Castro's attacks were based on the words and actions of followers of Juan Posadas. These groups in Cuba and other Latin American countries proclaimed themselves to be Trotskyist. But Posadas had left the mainstream of the Fourth International as a bitter opponent. He and his followers promoted exotic views that had little in common with Trotskyism. They also tended to act in a very sectarian and provocative manner in the places where they had groups.

Che Guevara had not been seen in public for a time, and his whereabouts was not publicly known. This caused speculation in some quarters, particularly among opponents of the Castro leadership.

Followers of Posadas, including the journalist Adolfo Gilly, claimed that Guevara had been silenced or that he had left Cuba in a political break with Castro. Gilly suggested that Che had supported the supposedly more revolutionary Peking line. There wasn't a shred of real evidence for these claims. A Mexican follower of Posadas even made the outrageous and slanderous charge that Castro had "eliminated" Guevara because of alleged political differences. After the conference, Gilly also said in the US socialist journal *Monthly Review* that Guevara had been killed. (In later years Gilly left the Posadas group and joined the Fourth International.)

In his speech, Castro made it clear that his comrade Che was alive, that he was still carrying out his revolutionary duty, and that the situation would be clarified in due course. Every word of this was true. It later emerged that Guevara and a number of other Cuban revolutionists were preparing to launch a guerrilla front in Bolivia, along with Bolivian revolutionists, after a failed attempt to rekindle the revolution in Congo. The Cuban government's secrecy about Che's departure from Cuba and his current whereabouts were intended to aid that project.

It's not surprising that Castro was outraged by Gilly's smear and the irresponsible role of the *Posadistas* in Guatemala and elsewhere. But Castro's response made an amalgam between the *Posadistas*, who hated the Cuban leadership, and the mainstream of Trotskyism, which had strongly defended the Cuban revolution and leadership. Castro, of course, was right to rebut the Posadas group's false charges. But he also



made an erroneous attack on the entire Fourth International and Trotskyism in general.

We took this attack very seriously, and devoted many pages in a number of issues of *The Militant* to answering Castro's charges, point by point. Joe Hansen wrote the major articles, but we also reprinted the statement of the Fourth International as well as documenting the fact that the mainstream Trotskyists worldwide and in the United States were among the most consistent and effective defenders of the Cuban revolution. Where was the spirit of Castro's 1962 speech "The revolution must be a school of unfettered thought?" we asked.

Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, the editors of the independent, pro-Cuba socialist magazine *Monthly Review*, also took up Castro's attack on Trotskyism, saying that the "accusation has no foundation whatever, as anyone who has seriously studied the history of the communist movement since the October Revolution must know. It was precisely this accusation which provided the rationalization for the Soviet purge trials of the 1930s. If anything has been proved — and not least by the Soviet government itself — it is that the trials were a shameless frame-up; and no evidence has ever been produced to restore credibility to the accusation."<sup>2</sup>

The independent newspaper the *Guardian*, also pro-Cuba, likewise printed a refutation of the charges. Their editor-in-exile Cedric Belfrage, who attended the conference, added that "Castro's blast seemed out of context since the Peruvian guerrilla movement, which the conference treated with the same respect as all others, is well known to have been sparked by Trotskyists. [The reference was to Fourth International leader Hugo Blanco, who was the central leader of a mass peasant movement for land. This movement defended the peasant occupations with arms, under the slogan "Land or Death!" At the time, Blanco was in prison in Peru. — BS.]

"Furthermore Trotskyists have since shown from the record that the sources quoted by Castro on Guevara's disappearance were not of Fourth International spokesmen, and that the groups affiliated with the International have in fact always supported Castro and the Cuban revolution."<sup>3</sup>

The American Stalinists, however, couldn't contain their glee. While failing to report a single one of the militant resolutions adopted by the Tricontinental Conference, the CP paper, *The Worker*, zeroed in on Castro's attack on Trotskyism. CP leader Gus Hall also wrote a long article attacking the view put forward by the editors of the *Monthly Review* that "the only kind of revolution that has any chance of succeeding in Latin America today is a socialist revolution." This was also the view of the Cuban leadership, who popularized the concept with the slogan, "Socialist revolution or a caricature of revolution!"

Joe Hansen wrote a reply to Gus Hall that we ran in *The Militant*, explaining that

the real difference between the Stalinist and Trotskyist views was whether or not to subordinate the movement of the workers and peasants to the national capitalist class. He explained that a burning question in Latin America was to carry out radical land reform. But any such project would have to come into conflict not only with landlords and the imperialists, but with the native capitalist class as well. The working class, in alliance with the peasants, would have to take power to carry through the agrarian reform. In explaining Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, Hansen wrote, "Therefore, [Trotsky] argued, the coming revolution [in Russia] would begin with bourgeois goals." [Radical agrarian reform, in Marxist terminology, is part of the goals put forward by the great democratic revolutions led by the bourgeoisie.] "The proletariat will have an opportunity to take power under revolutionary-socialist leadership. In power the proletariat will transcend the bourgeois character of the revolution by establishing a *proletarian* dictatorship with *socialist* aims."<sup>4</sup> The experience of the Russian and Cuban revolutions confirmed this view, Hansen explained.

So what was the meaning of Castro's attack on Trotskyism? Today, we know that the anti-Trotskyist diatribe was merely an episode, and that Castro would not abandon the revolutionary course that he had set. But at that time we had to consider several possibilities. One possibility was that Castro, incensed by the slanders and actions of the Posadistas, accepted help from Stalinist advisors to present his counter-attack. It was also possible that Castro's anti-Trotskyist attack was meant to appease the Soviet leaders, as a political concession made in return for Soviet aid. But at the time we also had to consider the *possibility* that the Castro leadership of Cuba was moving towards a Stalinist world view. Fortunately, time proved that the last possibility had no real foundation.

In March, Castro gave a speech in which he stated, "I told them also [referring to a delegation of Christian Democrats from Chile who attended the Tricontinental Conference] that I did not think that conditions in Chile permitted a revolution of that type [a bourgeois-democratic revolution led by the bourgeoisie], and that in the conditions of Chile if a revolution was desired, it would necessarily have to be a socialist revolution, and I explained why. Because in an underdeveloped country, burdened with debts as Chile is, a country where large masses of the population live in the worst conditions, would necessarily have to strike a blow against the interests of imperialism, of the [land owning] oligarchy, of big industry, of the import-export trade and of the Bank if something was to be done, to give something to the peasant masses and to the masses of workers in the country.

"And, also that to wage a battle against the oligarchy and against imperialism, the

support of the worker and peasant masses was necessary and that the masses of workers and peasants would not lend support to any bourgeois revolution, because the workers and peasants would not be willing to collaborate to serve the interests of an exploiting class.”<sup>5</sup>

We concluded that the Cuban leadership had not changed course. Castro never repeated his attack against Trotskyism. The old Cuban Stalinist Blas Roca published one article defending the attack from the criticism it had received. The incident faded into the background as time passed, and no further information was ever revealed about the reasons for the attack.

## 22. ANTIWAR SENTIMENT DEEPENS

Over the Christmas-New Years holiday, 1965-66, we said goodbye to the historic offices of the SWP at 116 University Place, and moved to a new hall on the north side of Union Square, at 873 Broadway. The old headquarters had become too cramped and cluttered now that we were growing. In addition, the electrical wiring in the old wooden building was very old, and we were concerned about the danger of fire. The new premises had much more space. There was a wide-open loft that we partitioned into meeting rooms, offices and a *Militant* editorial office.

The renovation was carried out by volunteers, Jack Barnes and I among them. I worked a lot on the construction, which was spearheaded by Nat Weinstein and my brother Roland, who were both employed in the construction trades. Pathfinder Press moved into another building.

Every move offers a chance to throw out things that one no longer needs. This was true of the SWP, too. There was an attic at 116 that I had never seen. I don't think it had been visited by anybody for years. We found all sorts of useless stuff, including boxes of old newspaper clippings that *The Militant* staff had used many years past. We tossed out all the old junk.

Along with the junk, we also found a gem: a painting by Diego Rivera, the great Mexican muralist and painter. Rivera had supported the Trotskyists in the 1930s, offering Trotsky refuge when he came to Mexico, the only country that would defy the imperialists and Stalinists by offering asylum to the old Bolshevik.

The painting was a study that Rivera had created in preparation for his celebrated work at the newly constructed Rockefeller Center. Rivera had been commissioned to produce a mural with the theme: "Man at the Crossroads looking With Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future." The rebellious and independent artist included a scene showing a worker, a soldier and a black farmer together with Vladimir Lenin. That wonderful mural was notoriously destroyed at Rockefeller's order when Rivera refused to take out the head of Lenin.

Our study for the mural was a fresco. The painting had cracks, and some parts of

the plaster had crumbled. Nat Weinstein, a house painter by trade, was also was an artist. He went to work and restored the fresco, which we sold to the Mexican government.

One disadvantage of the new headquarters was that we were located across the street from a firehouse, and would be subject to the fire alarm and the incredible horn blasts from the fire engines each time they were called out. I soon learned to completely ignore this noise. I blocked it out and kept my attention on whatever I was doing to get *The Militant* out. Whatever success I have had as a thinker I believe was due not to any ability to think fast, which I do not have, but to this ability to concentrate.

No sooner had we moved in to our new headquarters than the New York City transit workers went on strike. It was their first-ever 100 percent solid job action. They shut down both the subways and buses, defying the mayor, the Transit Authority and the courts, which had issued an injunction against the strike. The Transit Workers Union president, Mike Quill, tore up the injunction in front of TV cameras. He and other union leaders were arrested. This was the first mass workers' action I had seen up close.

The strike was so solid there was no attempt to start a back-to-work movement or run the system with scabs. Without its mass transit system, New York is a nightmare. The city was a mess. Many people drove into the city before they wised up and just stayed away or walked. There was total gridlock at times in many areas, with cars blocking each other going crosswise at each intersection. The whole thing was quite exciting.

Tom Leonard, who had a lot of experience in the seamen's and other unions, covered the strike for *The Militant*. He took me to meet the strikers, and encouraged me to get into conversations. I wrote an article reporting what the workers were saying in their own words.

The strike lasted 13 days and was a major demonstration of labor's power. The workers didn't win everything they wanted, but they made gains. President Johnson's State of the Union address a few days later frothed with hatred of the strike. He called for new antilabor laws which "will enable us effectively to deal" with such actions, which he said could do "irreparable damage to the national interest." Whenever capitalist politicians talk about "the national interest" take heed. They invariably mean the interests of the ruling rich, not that of the nation's majority.

A few days after the strike ended, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee issued a public statement attacking the Vietnam War. SNCC leaders had endorsed antiwar actions as individuals, but this was the first time SNCC, as an organization, blasted the war. Referring to the recent racist murder of a Black civil rights fighter in

Alabama, the statement, which was read by SNCC chairman John Lewis, said, "We know that Samuel Younge was murdered because US law is not being enforced. Vietnamese are being murdered because the United States is pursuing an aggressive policy in violation of international law. The US is no respecter of persons or law when such persons or laws run counter to its needs and desires."

SNCC called for resistance to the war, and for young people to join causes such as the civil rights movement rather than submit to the draft, "knowing full well that it may cost them their lives, as painfully as in Vietnam."<sup>1</sup>

SNCC communications director, Julian Bond, had just been elected to the Georgia legislature, a result of registration of Black voters. After the release of the statement against the war, the Georgia crackers went bananas. The legislature voted not to seat Bond. Over 1,000 people, including Dr. King, marched on the state capitol in protest.

The Justice Department ordered an investigation, not of the refusal to seat Bond, but to see if SNCC and Bond had violated the law against counseling draft evasion! The government backed off in the face of major protests nationally.

Despite divisions on other matters, the November conference of the National Coordinating Committee conference did unanimously adopt a call for demonstrations against the Vietnam War to be held on March 25-26. These demonstrations were about twice as large as the first International Days of Protest half a year earlier. In New York some 50,000 people marched down Fifth Avenue, organized by the Parade Committee. Sylvia Weinstein and I carried the SWP's banner, marching along with a small group of SWP supporters. Most SWP and YSA members marched in the contingents of their respective antiwar organizations.

Antiwar sentiment was deepened by events in Vietnam in April. Buddhist monks initiated protests against the US-installed military dictatorship. Broad sections of the population joined the protests. In the northern part of South Vietnam, Danang and Hue experienced virtual insurrections. Sections of the South Vietnamese army joined the revolt. There were massive student demonstrations in Saigon that fought pitched battles with the police. On May Day, 100,000 workers, women and youth marched in Saigon, with banners denouncing the US bombing of the countryside and use of poison chemicals, and demanding an end to the war and the withdrawal of US troops. While this upsurge was eventually repressed, it exposed the lie that Washington was in Vietnam at the will of the South Vietnamese people.

In May, there was a march by women against the war in New York. This was inspired by a similar women's march in Berkeley, California. Caroline Lund was one of the spokespeople for the march, and was a leader of the antiwar committee at Columbia University and secretary of the Organizing Committee to Bring the Troops

Home Now, which initiated the march. She was a member of the SWP and YSA. The action was supported by a wide range of prominent women active in the movement.

As the 1966 elections approached, many activists were drawn into electoral politics, especially in the Democratic Party. As a result, actions against the war became smaller, even though antiwar sentiment in the general population was growing. This became a feature of the antiwar movement in the years to come; election periods tended to see downturns in street protests.

In a sense, the line of the Communist Party that the movement should orient to the Democratic Party was carried out in practice by most activists during elections, while our orientation of building mass actions came to dominate the rest of the time.

We ran our own election campaign in New York in 1966. Heading our ticket as candidate for governor was Judy White, a young antiwar activist. Judy was actually too young to serve in the office. But we ignored that formality and ran a vigorous campaign anyway, arguing that young activists like Judy represented a real alternative to the war makers. In later years we often ran young candidates in defiance of the rules.

This SWP campaign garnered significant support as a means of protesting the war. A.J. Muste; Paul Sweezy, co-editor of the independent socialist magazine *Monthly Review*; Edward Keating, editor of *Ramparts* magazine; Dr. Annette Rubinstein, a Marxist literary critic; James Haughton, director of the Harlem Unemployment Center; and Linda Dannenberg from the Parade Committee endorsed White for governor. The *Guardian* called for a vote for the SWP.

Judy White won a lot of support from rank and file activists as well. Ninety-five students and two professors at Columbia University backed the socialist ticket. A long list of endorsers signed a full-page ad in the *Guardian* calling for a vote for Judy White. Michael Meyerson, a former national leader of the DuBois Clubs, and the Queens College DuBois Club urged a vote for the socialist ticket.

These latter endorsements were a real surprise, because the DuBois Clubs were considered to be the loyal youth organization of the Communist Party, and the CP had always opposed voting for the SWP.

The CP generally backed Democratic Party candidates in the elections, but in some cases they ran their own candidates in districts that were considered safe for the Democrats. In this year they ran the famous historian and CP leader Herbert Aptheker for Congress in one of these districts. The SWP called for a vote for Aptheker, in spite of our criticisms of the CP, as a vote against the two capitalist parties and as a way of furthering the debate among radicals over the need to break with the Democrats. Aptheker and the CP, however, refused to urge a vote for the SWP.

In early September, the New York headquarters of the Communist Party was bombed. At the end of the month, the SWP headquarters was fire-bombed. Both attacks occurred at night, and no one was hurt. Neither the federal or city authorities, who had both venues under continual scrutiny, found the perpetrators.



## 23. A POLITICAL ASSASSINATION

In the afternoon of May 16, 1966, an anticommunist fanatic came into Debs Hall, as the SWP Detroit headquarters was known, and pulled out a rifle and an automatic pistol. He ordered the three people present to line up against a wall. Shouting “you’re all a bunch of commies!” he opened fire.

The fusillade killed Leo Bernard, shot through the heart, and gravely wounded Jan Garrett and Walter Graham, who were shot several times each. Bernard, 27, was a member of the SWP. Garrett, 22, was a member of the SWP and YSA. Graham, 19, was a member of the YSA. All were very active in the antiwar movement.

Three hours later, the police arrested Edward Waniolek, an unemployed cab driver, at a public library. They had been tipped off by his wife, who said he had told her as he left their house that he was “going to kill some communists.”

It turned out that the police already knew about Waniolek. He had visited the South African consulate in New York a few months earlier, saying he wanted to go to the racist country to fight the communists. He said that the US was “overrun with communists,” and that he had guns and was going back to Detroit and would “start shooting communists.”

The South African consulate notified the Secret Service, who in turn notified the Detroit police. But the cops did nothing until Waniolek carried out his threats. How differently the police would have acted if someone said they were going back to Detroit to “kill the mayor” or “kill some cops!”

The attack took place on a Monday. I was working on the issue of *The Militant* that would be wrapped up on Wednesday. Joe Hansen, who was working on *World Outlook*, came to *The Militant* office to help.

A hastily arranged meeting of the Political Committee drafted a statement. All the units of the party and YSA were notified. Memorial protest meetings began to be organized across the country.

The Political Committee statement said, in part, “This shocking, tragic and ominous deed is not an isolated act. It follows the bombing of the W.E.B. DuBois club offices

in San Francisco and the bombing of the headquarters of the Berkeley Vietnam Day Committee.

“The pattern is one of terroristic intimidation against the American antiwar, anti-racist, radical youth and socialist forces.... This murderous assault was politically motivated. It was a product of the witch-hunt atmosphere that has been stirred up and intensified by the ‘dirty’ war in Vietnam. From the White House on down to the John Birchers and the Ku Klux Klan, the country is being incessantly incited against the ‘communist menace.’ Today’s glorified hero is the green beret [elite special forces] in Southeast Asia.”<sup>1</sup>

The response from antiwar and antiracist fighters, and other socialist groups, was heartening. In Detroit, as the news was flashed on TV and radio, over 40 students from Wayne State University and the University of Michigan spontaneously went down to the hospital to offer blood for Jan Garret and Walter Graham, their fellow students, who were undergoing emergency surgery.

Memorial and solidarity meetings were held across the country. The memorial meeting in Detroit, held at Debs Hall, was packed, with a wide variety of speakers from different organizations. Dr. David Herreshoff, the faculty sponsor for the YSA at Wayne State, and a former SWP member, wrote a moving poem about the shooting, which he read at the memorial meeting. The poem connected Beethoven, a piano that was in the hall and the “jangling cacophony” in Waniolek’s brain (Waniolek had been listening to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony when he was arrested.)

The YSA and SWP members in Detroit were especially affected, of course, and responded with resolve and determination. Nineteen-year-old Joe Sanders was typical. Writing years later he said: “I was not yet a member of the YSA when the shooting occurred. I joined the next month, partly in response to the shooting. Walt and I were pretty good friends, students together at Wayne State University. In fact Walt skipped our Spanish class in order to go to Debs Hall and run off leaflets. Had I been a member, there’s a good chance that I would have been with Jan, Walt and Leo that day.” Like Joe, several other young people joined the Detroit YSA and SWP in the months following the shooting.

In addition to editing *The Militant*, I worked with Jack Barnes, then the organizer of the New York branch of the SWP, and other members of the branch to organize a meeting in New York.<sup>§</sup> I began to call people in the antiwar movement, Black

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<sup>§</sup> At the Fifth national convention of the YSA held in March, Jack was “graduated” and replaced as National Chairman by Lew Jones. Betsey Stone became the National Secretary. Some time earlier, Peter Camejo had gone out to Berkeley to strengthen our movement and antiwar activity there.

organizations, and other socialist organizations. I urged that they send speakers or issue statements. We created a broad united front of protest against the terrorist act, and showed that the radical movement in general would not be intimidated, but would gain strength through a united response.

The campaign was an unqualified success. At the New York meeting, Timothy Wheeler, a young leader of the Communist Party, spoke in the name of the CP, and called Leo Bernard “my comrade.” To have speakers from the CP and SWP on the same platform was unprecedented. Other speakers included John Fuerst of Students for a Democratic Society; James Aronson, editor of the independent socialist newspaper the *National Guardian*; A.J. Muste; Dave Dellinger, editor of the radical pacifist magazine *Liberation*; Pedro Juan Rua of the Puerto Rican Pro-Independence Movement; and other figures in the civil liberties and civil rights movement.

Farrell Dobbs spoke for the SWP. “On behalf of the Socialist Workers Party,” he said, “I wish to address myself first to the guest speakers and to those of you in the audience who are not members of our organization.

“We deeply appreciate your presence here tonight. In simple human terms, your act of solidarity gives us comfort and lends us encouragement at a time of grief and a time of trial.”

He also pointed to the “return to that which is rich and deep in the roots of the American radical movement. And when you see that development today, at this critical hour, and think of the great battles that were won in the past with firm principled adherence to the concept of the united front within the movement despite differences, we can be more confident than ever of ultimate victory.”<sup>2</sup>

We received messages of support from Stokeley Carmichael, the new chairman of SNCC, and Elizabeth Southerland of New York SNCC; William Worthy, foreign correspondent for the *Afro-American*; Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X; Bertrand Russell, the British mathematician, philosopher and peace activist; Carey McWilliams, editor of *The Nation*; Staughton Lynd; Frank Wilkinson, of the Committee to Abolish HUAC; Noam Chomsky, professor of language at MIT and antiwar figure; Ann and Carl Braden, directors of the Southern Conference Educational Fund; Willard Uphaus; Irving Howe, editor of *Dissent* magazine; Howard Zinn, professor of government at Boston University; and many others.

There were messages from other socialist organizations, including Progressive Labor, Spartacist, Tim Wohlforth for the American Committee for the Fourth International, and a host of local antiwar committees. There were also messages of solidarity from different groups around the world, including from the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

There was general agreement by all these forces that it was the culture of anticommunism, fostered by the government and press, including the daily “body counts” of so-called “communists” killed in the Vietnam war, which led Waniolek to decide to “shoot some communists.” The blow was aimed at the whole movement, and it was important for the SWP to respond in such a way that solidarity from a broad range of groups and individuals could be expressed.

But we were the immediate target, and the mobilization of the party and YSA to build solidarity was important to maintaining our morale. We were able to answer the murderous attack with a political counter-attack that marked an advance, in the face of a terrible blow, in the battle against the red-baiters and witch-hunters.

## 24. THE FIRST BLACK PANTHER PARTY

In February 1965, Stokely Carmichael and three other SNCC organizers went to Lowndes County, Alabama. At the time, Blacks comprised 80 percent of the population of the county, but not a single Black was registered to vote. The rate of white voter registration, however, was *very* impressive — 2,400 whites were registered out of an eligible 1,900 — a rate of 118 percent!

The four SNCC field workers started “working with local people who had begun registering Negroes,” wrote John Benson in *The Militant*. “In the course of struggling to register, and protesting inadequate schools, unpaved roads, and police brutality, the people of Lowndes County decided they needed their own party.”<sup>1</sup>

The movement to build their own party independent of the Republicans and Democrats resulted in the formation of the Lowndes County Freedom Party, which chose as its symbol a Black Panther. When we heard of this development, we sent Benson down to Lowndes to report firsthand.

“MAY 1 [1966] — When I arrived in Lowndes County I didn’t know what I would find,” John wrote. “My first experience in Lowndes was at the regular Sunday evening mass meeting, attended by about 250 Negroes. I had expected that SNCC would play a dominant role, but the whole meeting was run by local people. Almost every speaker was an activist who had lived in Lowndes most of his or her life.”<sup>2</sup>

Benson interviewed Stokeley Carmichael on the new party. In this *Militant* interview Carmichael blasted the Democrats nationally as well as in the South.

We had also sent Dan Styron and Betsey Stone to join and report on a civil rights march in Mississippi. This march began where James Meredith, who had been the first Black to successfully attend the University of Mississippi, had been gunned down by racists during a one-person walk for justice. Styron reported that the theme of the march became “We want Black power!”

The march was endorsed by a wide range of groups including Dr. King’s Southern

Christian Leadership Conference. But this march was defended by the Deacons for Defense and Justice. The Deacons had been formed in Bogalusa, Louisiana, to defend civil rights workers who were threatened by racist murderers. The Deacons spread to other areas.

On the march, they did not carry guns. They provided armed guards for the campsites at night and armed escorts for marchers who had to get to the Memphis airport.

Styron reported that “Implicit in the concept of black power is self-defense. This tactic for opposing the violence of white racists was a major topic of discussion as the march moved slowly toward Jackson. Most of those opposed to blacks defending themselves were some whites, a few black ministers and some from the North. The overwhelming sentiment was for self-defense, and to most local people the argument seemed academic.”<sup>3</sup>

Betsey Stone went from the Mississippi march to Lowndes, and picked up on reporting where Benson had left off. Both reporters were struck by how deep were the roots of what became known as the Black Panther Party. “I found that many of the leaders and activists in the Lowndes County Freedom Organization [later Party],” Stone wrote, “have gained experiences in other working-class struggles. Many are veterans of the trade union movement. Others played key roles in the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956. Most of the men who are activists in the Freedom Organization, like most of the black men in Lowndes County, are workers in heavy labor occupations in the building trades. The majority of them go to nearby Montgomery for work.”<sup>4</sup>

She also reported that Black voter registration had been much facilitated as a result of Blacks building their own party. She said this was much more effective than the voter registration done on the Mississippi march, which did not spend much time in each town it passed through. Betsey quoted John Hulett, chairman of the Black Panther Party, as saying at a meeting, “We are registering the people ourselves. Then, we won’t need any marchers through here.” We developed close relations in this period with John Hulett and the leaders in Lowndes.

The concept of Black power was being promoted by leaders of CORE as well as SNCC. *The Militant* became a champion of this new stage in the movement. I interviewed Lincoln Lynch, the associate national director of CORE, for the paper. CORE had originally developed as part of the Quaker-oriented Fellowship of Reconciliation, another project developed primarily by A.J. Muste. As such, it had been committed to non-violence. In this new stage, CORE advocated self-defense. I also covered a debate between Carmichael and Rustin, for and against the concept of Black power.

George Breitman noted in a *Militant* article that SNCC and CORE were coming

closer to the ideas of Malcolm X. "As a result of these changes," he wrote, "SNCC and CORE can now be considered the *radical* wing of the movement, with the NAACP representing the conservative wing, and Martin Luther King's SCLC somewhere in the middle, somewhere to the right of center."<sup>5</sup> Both organizations came under attack by the capitalist press, white liberals, the NAACP and even SCLC for advocating Black power, for opposing the Vietnam War, and for advocating Black self-defense. To his credit, King spoke out against the war the following year.

In Alabama, SCLC was urging newly-registered Blacks to register as Democrats, and actively opposed the formation of the Black Panther Party. SNCC's role, especially the part played by Carmichael, in helping to build the Lowndes County Freedom Party led to a sharp difference with the SCLC.

In October, an advertisement published in the *New York Times* by old guard leaders of the movement implicitly attacked Black power. The signers included Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Bayard Rustin, Whitney Young of the Urban League, and A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Dr. King did not sign the ad, and his comments on the subject were contradictory. It seemed that he didn't want to endorse the new militancy but didn't want to cut himself off from the young people who were behind it.

The Black Panther Party in Lowndes was a vanguard development, and was not replicated elsewhere. It had an uphill fight just to get organized. In May 1966, a mass meeting nominated candidates for the fall election. Holding such a meeting was one way candidates could get on the ballot in Alabama. But the law stated that such a meeting had to be held at or near a polling place, most of which were in white-owned stores or homes.

The one place where the meeting could be held to meet the legal requirement was the courthouse lawn. But officials refused to permit a meeting. The Freedom Organization called the Justice Department, which sent someone to tell the Black leaders that he just couldn't get the city to budge, so the nominating meeting would have to be called off. Hulett and other leaders said they would go ahead with the meeting anyway. They were told that the sheriff couldn't guarantee their safety, and they replied they would defend the meeting themselves.

Once he saw they meant business, the Justice Department's man got the city to agree that the meeting could be held in a local church, and would be considered official.

For most who attended, the nominating meeting was the first time they had voted. In the November election, the Black Panther Party didn't win, but it gained legal ballot status by garnering 41 percent of the vote. It was now the Lowndes County Freedom Party.

## 25. A NEW STAGE OF THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

The Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, a new coalition formed on a national scale, formed shortly after the November elections and issued a call for massive demonstrations in New York and San Francisco on April 15, 1967.

The Communist Party supported the call, leading to an important period of unity in the movement. There were differences of opinion within the CP and its youth group, the DuBois Clubs. Prominent leaders advocated supporting demonstrations as well as “peace” Democrats as a means of opposing the war. They also saw opportunities to win youth in the light of SDS’s move away from supporting antiwar actions.

This shift made possible the formation of a new national antiwar student organization, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (the SMC). This marked the achievement of what we had advocated as a minority in the divided Washington conference of 1965.

The staff of the SMC was composed of representatives of the DuBois Clubs, the YSA, and the radical pacifists. Linda Dannenberg, representing the pacifists, became executive secretary. Paul Friedman represented the DuBois Clubs. Gus Horowitz was the staff member from the YSA. Thus the division that had occurred at the NCC conference was overcome, at least for a time. The *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter* dissolved, and turned its mailing lists over to the SMC.

On December 8, the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy, one of the more conservative peace groups, held an antiwar rally in New York. I reported on the rally for *The Militant*. “The growing opposition to the Vietnam war was reflected when 20,000 people jammed Madison Square Garden to capacity for a Rally to End the War Now,” I wrote. “Many of the people present were older members of SANE. But there was also a sizeable contingent of young antiwar fighters, who gave a spirited militant tone to the rally.

“Also present, sitting in a large block, were rank-and-file unionists organized by



SANE's Trade Union Division. Joel R. Jacobson, speaking for the trade union division, received a big applause when he announced that there were 5,000 unionists present from such unions as District 65 Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union and Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Workers."<sup>1</sup> These were maverick unions, but their presence and the size of the rally showed that the movement was reaching into the mainstream.

Up to this point, the capitalist press had for the most part repeated the lies coming from the Pentagon and White House about the war. The first major cracks appeared at the end of 1966. Articles from Hanoi by Harrison Salisbury in the *New York Times* reported that American bombing had caused extensive damage to civilian areas in the North Vietnamese capital, and that civilians had been targets since 1965 (which the government had denied). Other major newspapers reprinted these accounts.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* said in an editorial, "The credibility gap yawns wider as one reads Salisbury's account ... The government is waging a war of steel and fire in Vietnam. It should not treat the American people as a second adversary, to be kept at bay with a smoke screen of distortion and soothing syrup."<sup>2</sup> From this point on, more of the truth about the war began to appear in the mainstream press.

This reflected a growing debate within US ruling circles about the war, reflected in Congressional hearings, the media, and disputes among prominent politicians.

The marches on April 15, 1967, in San Francisco and New York registered the deepening antiwar sentiment. In New York, the crowd was estimated by a professional crowd appraiser to be 400,000, but it was hard to tell because the massive march from Central Park to the United Nations swarmed over many streets, and many never even got out of the park before the rally at the UN was over.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the march. It was the first time that he had joined an antiwar demonstration — a step that both reflected the groundswell of antiwar sentiment and helped deepen it. Dr. King was joined at the podium by SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick of CORE.

We were stunned by the massive turnout. Jack Barnes and I watched from a vantage point in Central Park as wave after wave of marchers filed past, each contingent announced by banners and posters. This was heady stuff. Our small group couldn't pull off anything like this by ourselves, but we had played a key part in advocating a course in word and deed that allowed the growing antiwar mood to express itself in such a visible and powerful way.

The man who played a pivotal role in this tremendous success, A. J. Muste, died of a heart attack two months before. A huge portrait of Muste was near the front of this historic march. It was a fitting memorial.

About 75,000 turned out at the march in San Francisco. This was the largest antiwar action yet on the West Coast. Some of the more left-leaning trade unions had endorsed the New York march. Seven thousand unionists marched in San Francisco, the largest contingent being from the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

Nearly a half million marched nationally against the war on April 15, a qualitatively larger number than in previous actions. This was the largest demonstration in US history at the time and marked a new stage in the antiwar fight.

The executive director of the coalition that built the San Francisco action was Kipp Dawson, a member of the SWP and YSA. Less than a year and a half earlier, she had been elected to the steering committee of the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter*, at the "thirteenth workshop" we had set up at the NCC conference in November 1965. It had appeared to some that we had isolated ourselves at the NCC conference; in reality we had laid the foundation for a truly broad antiwar movement.

After the demonstration, Dawson moved to New York to be part of the staff of the Student Mobilization Committee. Syd Stapleton, a YSAer from Berkeley and a leader of the antiwar and free speech movements there, also joined the SMC staff in New York.

## 26. BIG EVENTS IN WORLD POLITICS

As *Militant* editor, I worked with the writing staff as well as with the Political Committee in deciding what topics to include in each issue. In addition to articles on local activities sent in by branch members and our coverage of the war, the antiwar movement, the Black struggle, labor battles and US politics, we gave extensive coverage to big international events.

Three of the important international events we had to report and assess, other than the Vietnam War, were the bloody defeat of the workers and peasants of Indonesia dealt by the October 1965 military coup, the “Cultural Revolution” which rocked China during those years, and the 1967 Israeli-Arab war.

Indonesia gained its independence from the Netherlands in a three-year war against the colonial power following World War II. Under President Sukarno, Indonesia adopted a neutral course in the Cold War, and took an anti-imperialist stance. The Sukarno government helped organize an international conference in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. This conference was the origin of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries.

Indonesia had maintained close ties with China, in defiance of the United States. In that period the US had been boycotting the People’s Republic of China in favor of Chiang Kai-shek’s exile government on Formosa (now Taiwan). Washington tried to claim that Formosa was the legitimate government of China.

The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was pro-Beijing, and had become the largest Communist Party in the capitalist world, with over a million members and millions more in unions and peasant organizations that looked to the PKI.

The PKI subordinated itself to the Sukarno wing of the bourgeois government, and relied on Sukarno to lead the country forward, to protect the party’s rights, and to remain an ally of China. They were following Mao’s class-collaborationist line for countries of the Third World rather than learning the real lessons of the Chinese revolution.

The leaders of the Indonesian CP were convinced that rightist elements and the military would be held back by their alliance with Sukarno. That was true for a while,

as had been true in China under Sun Yat-sen (the founder of the modern Chinese nationalist movement), but it did not remain the case as class conflict deepened in the 1960s (just as it did not remain true in China during the 1925-1927 popular upsurge under Sun's successor, Chiang Kai-shek).

Important sections of the developing capitalist class began to chafe under Sukarno's rule. They were determined to smash the power of the PKI. A confrontation was inevitable. But the PKI did not prepare its mass base of workers and peasants for the confrontation, either politically or militarily. The top generals planned a coup. Too late, some sectors of the PKI tried to stop the generals by backing a pre-emptive coup by some left-wing officers (again, not relying on the mobilization of the masses). This attempt became the pretext for the real coup, led by General Suharto in October 1965.

At first, Suharto kept Sukarno on as a figurehead, in recognition of Sukarno's popularity. But that didn't last long. Sukarno was pushed out and effectively placed under house arrest, until he eventually died.

The coup initiated a massive bloodbath directed against the PKI members and supporters, and more broadly against the whole workers' and peasants' movement in the country. The murders were carried out by the army and reactionary mobs organized by the army and also by rightist Islamic groups (these were a small fraction of the predominantly Muslim country). As more news leaked out, the numbers of victims went up to hundreds of thousands. Today estimates are that between one and two million people were killed. The PKI was destroyed and the workers and peasants were crushed and set back for a long time to come. A brutal, corrupt, and pro-imperialist military government had outlawed Marxism and crushed all dissent.

The US made no bones about its support of the coup, and didn't utter a peep of protest about the slaughter. In fact, Washington had been waiting for an opportunity to reverse the Indonesian anti-imperialist revolution, and undoubtedly collaborated with the coup plotters behind the scenes. The coup was a major victory for US imperialism. Indonesia had gone from being a country allied with China to an enemy of China. Indonesia now entered into a close military, political and economic alliance with the US. This tremendous defeat set back the world struggle for socialism and strengthened Washington's military position in Southeast Asia, emboldening the Pentagon to continue its war against Vietnam, and raised the possibility of a wider war with China. But the Maoist leadership in China offered no analysis of this catastrophe or discussion of what could have been done to prevent it. Nor was any serious analysis forthcoming from Moscow.

The SWP and the Fourth International did make that critical analysis. We were

aided in this by testimony from a former PKI member who survived and got out of the country. Joseph Hansen wrote the major articles for *The Militant*.

While there were no public statements from the Chinese government about the cause of the defeat or the increased danger to China itself, the disaster seems to have added to unrest in the bureaucracy and elsewhere in Chinese society. Was Mao's course correct? The defeat of Mao's line in Indonesia came on top of China's increased isolation in the world due to Mao's ultraleft extremism. Mao openly rejected a united front among the workers' states and Communist parties against the US aggression in Vietnam. Beijing would have nothing to do with any governments or parties that did not meet with Mao's approval.

Opposition to Mao's overall course did develop in China, stemming primarily from the years of economic disasters and famine that followed the imposition of "communes" on the peasant masses, and the attempt to launch a Great Leap Forward in industry through makeshift methods such as making steel in backyard blast furnaces.

Mao's response to criticism of his course was to launch the misnamed "Cultural Revolution" against his opponents in the government, the party, in the universities and among intellectuals generally.

The Mao faction, on the defensive, organized discontented young people to fight on his side. These youth, many of whom thought they were being organized to fight bureaucracy, were unleashed to drive the oppositionists out of the many prominent positions they held. To make this possible, schools were closed throughout the country and transportation provided to bring students to Beijing where they were organized into the Red Guard movement.

Mao and his supporters presented this campaign as a movement against bureaucracy and "capitalist roaders" in the party and government. Two of those publicly disgraced were China's head of state, Liu Shao-chi, the premier under Mao, and Deng Zhouping, the General Secretary of the Communist Party.

Mao claimed the campaign was aimed at establishing a regime like that of the Paris Commune of 1871, with complete democracy, every tendency allowed to be heard, and rights scrupulously guarded for any minority. The reality was the opposite. Mao's opponents were violently suppressed. The campaign succeeded for the time being in crushing the opposition, and also succeeded in setting back Chinese culture and science as the Red Guards suppressed virtually all intellectual activity. The economy was set back by the violent turmoil and large numbers of people died from the repression and its social consequences.

When the purge was complete, Mao tried to stabilize bureaucratic rule. He saw the danger that some of the Red Guards, believing the anti-bureaucratic line they had

been fed, would challenge Mao as well. Many of these idealistic young people were aware of bureaucratic abuses and had hoped Mao's campaign meant what it said about the Paris Commune and democracy. Mao turned to the army to disperse the Red Guards and other potentially dissident educated youth. Millions of the students were permanently consigned to distant rural areas, unable to continue their education and barred from returning home.

In the organization and dispersal of the Red Guards, Mao relied on the support of the army. The head of the army, Lin Piao, was Mao's right hand man during the Cultural Revolution, and was even enshrined in the country's constitution as Mao's heir. But Lin Piao and Mao had a falling out (the issues are not clear), and Lin Piao tried to escape to the Soviet Union. But his getaway jet was shot down.

Many radicals in the United States and other countries were taken in by Mao's pretense that the Cultural Revolution was a genuine struggle against bureaucracy and for socialist democracy. The editors of *Monthly Review* took this stand. George Novack and Joe Hansen answered them in a sharp but friendly and educational manner.

On a world scale, new Maoist groups were formed among young people who had become radicalized by the Vietnam War. In the US, two of the fragments of SDS became Maoist groups, with several hundred members each, competing with each other. There were a number of Black radicals taken in by Maoism, also. A section of the new radicalization was derailed in this manner. Following the lead of Mao, these groups tended to become very sectarian and ultraleft, refusing to work with other groups and abandoning the antiwar movement.

For a time, there was talk among these various Maoist groups of forming what they called a "new communist movement." But they were so sectarian they could never agree among themselves over how this was to be done. A factor in their failure to unite was that some of these groups became cults around a single figure, none of which could ever recognize another's claim to the throne.

Some of these Maoist groups would attempt to forcibly take over the speakers' platform at big antiwar demonstrations. Believing the revolutionary cause could be advanced through decisive actions by small groups, they thought that the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators would be won over if only they heard a call to arms. In the later part of the antiwar movement, there were more attacks on demonstrations from ultralefts than from the far right groups (other than the cops), which were intimidated by the size of the antiwar actions.

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In June 1967, Israel, armed to the teeth by the US and Britain, invaded and defeated

Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and expanded its control over the remainder of Palestinian territory that they had not taken in 1948 (the West Bank held by Jordan and the Gaza Strip held by Egypt) plus Egypt's Sinai peninsula and Syria's Golan Heights.

During this savage attack, the Israeli forces used napalm against Palestinian civilians. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled the Israeli blitzkrieg, and many more came under an Israeli occupation that has lasted for nearly four decades. This new forced exodus of Palestinians added to those who were driven from their homeland in the 1948 war that set up the state of Israel. The Palestinian diaspora now numbered in the millions.

The words weren't used at the time, but Israel, in the 1948 and 1967 wars, had carried out the greatest "ethnic cleansing" since World War II.

Washington and the capitalist press went on a pro-Israel and anti-Arab propaganda campaign. Politicians in both parties, including those who had become critical of the Vietnam War, jumped on the jingoist bandwagon, as did some of the leaders of the more conservative peace groups.

Joe Hansen, who was the editor of *Intercontinental Press* (previously called *World Outlook*), was still the formal editor of *The Militant*, and he talked to me about how to handle the question in the paper. His advice was to highlight the danger that this conflict could lead to World War III, in the context of the already high tensions between the US and USSR. The Soviet Union backed the Arab side. I went along with this proposal, and that's how we first reported it. I was uneasy that we didn't come out more decisively on the Arab side.

Jack Barnes felt as I did, and after discussion in the Political Committee, the next issue came down clearly on the Arab side in a front page article that I wrote. I noted the *Wall Street Journal's* statement that the US had been ready to send troops to support Israel if the Arab states had gotten the upper hand. Our stand resonated with the many antiwar youth who were reaching general anti-imperialist positions.

The New York branch held a forum on the war. The speaker was Peter Buch, who had been a socialist-Zionist as a teenager but rejected Zionism before joining the SWP. He spoke under a large banner reading "Hands Off the Arab Revolution!" The meeting hall was packed, in spite of the sweltering heat and humidity. The forum was important in organizing and educating fighters, ourselves included, to counter the pro-Zionist avalanche in the mainstream press.

We reported on the catastrophe the war had inflicted on the Arab countries and especially on the Palestinian people. We published statements and articles by Jewish and Palestinian socialists in Israel who were connected to the Fourth International.

## 27. 1967: THE STRUGGLES HEAT UP

A few days after the huge April 15 demonstrations against the Vietnam war, Muhammad Ali, the world heavy-weight boxing champion, denounced the war and said he would not show up for his scheduled April 28 induction into the army. Ali had been recruited to the Nation of Islam by Malcolm X, but stayed with the group after Malcolm broke with it.

*The Militant* reported Ali's statement: "Why should they ask me, another so-called Negro, to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are being treated like dogs and denied simple human rights?"

"I will not disgrace my religion, my people or myself by becoming a tool to enslave those who are fighting for justice, equality and freedom."<sup>1</sup>

Ali was stripped of his boxing title. The media denounced him. But wherever he went to speak in the following months, he was greeted by enthusiastic Blacks in meetings numbering in the thousands. Ali's courageous stand was an expression of the growing Black revolt and helped intensify the already overwhelming opposition in the Black community to the war.

In Oakland, California, young militants initiated the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, which spread to other cities and became known world-wide as the Black Panthers. They used the symbol of the Lowndes County Freedom Party, but the two groups were not connected. The Black Panthers gained national attention and notoriety by holding a peaceful legal protest while holding unloaded rifles in the gallery of the California state legislature.

In May, an all-Black conference on Black Power in Los Angeles drew 1,500 people, and was addressed by speakers including H. Rap Brown, who had recently been elected national chairman of SNCC. He talked about the "two-party myth," *The Militant* reported. "There is really only one party with two names, the Democrats and Republicans," Brown explained. He called for "black political action independent of both wings of this one party wherever we constitute a majority."<sup>2</sup>



Stokeley Carmichael received a tremendous ovation when he stepped to the podium. He advocated Black political parties for the South in predominantly Black counties, and Black control of ghettos in the North. There were similar Black Power meetings elsewhere.

Attacks on Blacks fighting for their rights in the South by cops and vigilante racist groups continued to take place. A vicious police raid occurred at Texas Southern University, directed against a student strike for the right of a SNCC chapter to exist at the mostly Black school. Cops not only attacked a protest, but invaded dormitories where the students fled the violence. They fired thousands of rounds, and smashed the facilities with axes. *The Militant's* account was written by an eyewitness.

In June, an antiwar demonstration of 20,000 in Los Angeles greeted President Johnson, who was attending a \$500-a-plate fundraising dinner. The day started with a rally that heard SNCC leader H. Rap Brown, Dr. Spock, and Muhammad Ali. Then the throng marched to the hotel where Johnson was to speak. Massive numbers of cops were hidden in the parking garage under the hotel.

Seizing on an ultraleft action by a small group organized by the Maoist Progressive Labor Party, which the great majority of demonstrators were unaware of, the cops declared the action an unlawful assembly and attacked on motorcycles. Hundreds more police stormed out of the parking garage, clubs swinging. Cops also blocked the march from the rear, so people could not get away.

Hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were injured, 60 seriously enough to be taken to the hospital, and 50 were arrested. One thousand city police carried out the carefully planned assault. The cops clubbed reporters, and TV coverage exposed the brutality.

The Los Angeles Peace Action Council and the Student Mobilization Committee, which had called the demonstration, fought back politically. Joined by the ACLU and other antiwar and civil liberties organizations, they gathered hundreds of statements about the assault from witnesses. The PAC and the SMC called for a demonstration on August 6, the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

About 10,000 showed up for that march, and the police assault was not repeated. But the terrifying brutality nonetheless made it more difficult for a time to organize antiwar actions in Los Angeles. Many ordinary people feared a repetition of the police violence. The Los Angeles police department had a well-deserved reputation as a particularly brutal, corrupt and racist outfit.

*The Militant* was on a biweekly schedule to allow for summer vacations when successive issues reported on Black rebellions in Newark, New Jersey, and Detroit, Michigan. Like previous rebellions, these were sparked by police brutality. These uprisings were not easily put down. The Newark police had to call in the New Jersey

National Guard with tanks to drown the rebellion in blood. In Detroit, even the National Guard wasn't enough. The federal government had to send in troops.

*The Militant* covered these rebellions in full. SWP member Lawrence Stewart, a Black resident of the Newark ghetto for 25 years, provided us with a first-hand account, including interviews with people on the streets. Derrick Morrison, 21, did the same in Detroit. These accounts gave the real flavor of the long pent-up anger of those participating, in their own words, and the exhilaration they felt in massively fighting back against the white power structure. We also ran an anonymous article by a reporter for a daily Newark newspaper, an article that paper had refused to publish. It described the brutality of the police and National Guard as they indiscriminately beat, arrested, wounded and murdered Blacks. There were 4,000 arrests in Detroit, and nearly 100 were murdered by the forces of order in the two cities.

"In the rebellious area I got a taste of how a Vietnamese or a Dominican felt when American forces occupied their homelands," Morrison wrote. "The occupation forces had brought out all of their artillery — rifles, machine guns, tanks and helicopters with mounted machine guns."<sup>3</sup>

There was more systematic fighting back than in previous rebellions. Snipers fired on cops and troops.

Just after these events, the first conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity took place in Havana. Joe Hansen attended the conference for *The Militant*. He wrote that the "main theme of the conference was reaffirmation of the program of socialist revolution as opposed to the line of 'peaceful coexistence' with the so-called 'progressive' sector of the national bourgeoisie, adaptation to its fraudulent electoral process and abandonment of armed struggle in countries where all peaceful roads have been blocked by the oligarchs and their imperialist backers."

Stokeley Carmichael and others from SNCC were there. They were given places of honor. Their speeches explained the Black Power movement and the ghetto uprisings. "Their analyses ... were highly appreciated by the Cubans," Joe wrote, "for whom many aspects of the black power movement and its outlook had been unclear and even puzzling. In return the SNCC representatives spoke in warm terms of how much they had learned by seeing the gains of the Cuban Revolution and listening to the revolutionaries from the 27 countries represented at the gathering."<sup>4</sup> *The Militant* reprinted Carmichael's speech.

The conference "opened the way for a regroupment of revolutionary forces in Latin America — a most welcome contrast to the attacks against 'Trotskyism' which marred the Tricontinental conference," Hansen wrote.

A few weeks later, the Communist Party's *The Worker* attacked the conference,

without mentioning it was held in Havana or that Castro gave the main speech. *The Worker* criticized Castro's speech in a roundabout fashion. They didn't take on Castro directly, but denounced speakers from the floor who echoed Castro's themes.

In September, The SWP nominated Fred Halstead for President in the 1968 elections, and Paul Boutelle for Vice President. The ticket embodied our two main campaigns, the fight against the Vietnam War and the fight for Black liberation. Boutelle, who had previously been a candidate for the Freedom Now Party in Harlem, had joined the SWP. We began the campaign early, so that we could use it for over a year in popularizing our ideas in the turbulent times.

Fred Halstead continued to play a leading role in the antiwar movement while he ran for President. Following the April demonstrations, strains were developing in the coalition that had called the actions. The debate was over what to do next. The Student Mobilization Committee held a meeting before the meeting of the broader coalition, the Spring Mobilization Committee, and adopted a modified version of a proposal by Kipp Dawson calling for a march on Washington in the fall.

Some in the coalition pushed for "going beyond" protest to "resistance," the orientation that the national SDS had adopted in opposition to mass marches. This vague slogan meant different things to different people. The radical pacifist Dave Dellinger interpreted it to mean non-violent civil disobedience. We agreed with Dellinger on non-violence because we recognized that peaceful demonstrations were the only tactic that could facilitate the involvement of large numbers of people at the time.

An agreement was reached that there would be a peaceful mass march, and that there would be separate acts of civil disobedience. The meeting of the Spring Mobilization Committee adopted this compromise, but there was a big fight over whether or not to set a date for a mass action. Failure to set a date, we feared, might give ammunition to those who were reluctant to call any action at all. Finally, however, it was agreed to hold a mass march on October 21. The march would go to the Pentagon, where the civil disobedience would also take place.

Why the Pentagon? Jerry Rubin, who had played a central role in setting up the Vietnam Day Committee at the Berkeley campus, had become part of the Mobilization Committee's leadership. He had evolved since his VDC days, and, along with Abbie Hoffman, had formed a loose grouping called "Yippies." The Yippies promoted activities intended to shock the public: street theater, exotic dress, drug use, and various absurdist tactics. Rubin proposed that at the Pentagon, the Yippies would attempt to "levitate" the building 300 feet into the air. While everyone in the coalition recognized the tongue-in-cheek character of this proposal, most liked the idea of protesting at the

command center of the US war machine. We agreed.

At first, the government refused to grant a permit for the march unless the Mobilization Committee publicly repudiated the planned acts of civil disobedience. The Committee refused. It appeared that the government might try to use troops to prevent the march, but the threat intensified support for the action, and the government backed down. It was agreed that there would be a rally at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, followed by a march across the Potomac River to the Pentagon, where there would be another rally. Those who wished to carry out civil disobedience would attempt to enter the Pentagon, and would be arrested.

Shortly before the action, we learned of the capture of Che Guevara in Bolivia, where he had been leading a guerrilla insurgency, and of his murder by Bolivian troops under orders from the United States government. That night I cried at the loss of this great revolutionary.

Fidel Castro's speech confirming Che's death was the lead front-page article in the issue of *The Militant* that we sold at the march. The issue included a page of excerpts of Che's writings.

I had selected a large picture of Che for the front page. The picture wasn't wholly rectangular, but in an "L" shape. This raised some eyebrows among some older comrades, including Farrell Dobbs, as this was a departure from our usually conservative style. The issue was well-received at the march.

The Young Socialist Alliance created a poster of Che, with his declaration, "Wherever death may surprise us, let it be welcome if our battle cry has reached even one receptive ear and another hand reaches out to take up our arms..." Many young people bought these posters, and held them up during the rally and march.

At least 100,000 people attended the rally, the largest antiwar demonstration yet in the Capital. John Wilson of SNCC called for a minute of silence in memory of Che. Everyone joined the tribute. Dave Dellinger spoke, as did Dr. Spock, the author of best-selling books on the care of infants and small children. Spock played an important role in the antiwar movement. In his book *Out Now*, Fred Halstead comments that Dellinger's speech "was a good speech, a before-the-battle speech, and he ended by appealing to the demonstrators to face the troops at the Pentagon without hostility and to carry the antiwar message to them."<sup>5</sup>

The march was spirited and colorful. There were all kinds of banners and signs from different groups. One contingent of Blacks carried the slogan "No Vietnamese ever called me nigger!" — echoing Muhammad Ali. The SWP branches and YSA chapters carried their own banners. One from the Columbia University YSA parodied the slogan of the extreme right, "Better dead than red." Their banner read "Better

Fred than dead — vote Socialist Workers!”

I wrote the lead story on the action for the *Militant*. Like many mass actions of all types, the event turned out somewhat differently than had been planned. The rally and march occurred more or less as foreseen, but the confrontation at the Pentagon saw an unplanned massive civil disobedience.

The army had brought in thousands of troops to defend the Pentagon. When the crowd reached the building, it did not go where the government had said the second rally could take place, but just naturally massed in front of the Pentagon. A few threw objects at the troops, and there was a scuffle, but then most began fraternizing with the troops, who were draftees. Pictures of young people putting flowers into the barrels of the troops' rifles were printed in newspapers nationwide and around the world. Groups of young people went around the troops and occupied areas the government had said were forbidden, such as the steps leading up to the entrance.

It was evident that the authorities pulled back from attacking those who had pushed their way past the line of troops. Such an attack could have infuriated the main mass of marchers. While many of the demonstrators left once they got to the Pentagon, about 30,000 were in the mall in front of it, and several thousand were above them on the steps and elsewhere. It was an exhilarating experience.

It was hard for those participating in the official civil disobedience to get through the crowd in order to be arrested. Dellinger, Brad Lytle (another radical pacifist who played a key role in the antiwar movement) and Dr. Spock finally managed to break through. Dellinger and Lytle were arrested by federal marshals, but they wouldn't touch Dr. Spock.

The crowd largely dissipated as darkness came, but a few thousand stayed well into the night. At midnight the troops were ordered to begin making arrests, but there were still 750 protestors left at dawn.

Some soldiers had a belligerent attitude, but many of the young draftees became friendly with the demonstrators. News of this fraternization spread and helped antiwar activists to begin to view the soldiers not as enemies but potential allies.

In October, there was an attempt by demonstrators, largely from the campus and city of Berkeley in California, to “shut down” the induction center in neighboring Oakland, during a week of activities. The first demonstration of some 3,000 converged on the induction center, and was brutally attacked by the cops. Some demonstrators sought to fight back, but were routed.

Another demonstration was set for a few days later, but this time with different tactics. This one was bigger, with some 10,000 participants. But they didn't march on the center, where 2,000 cops were waiting for them. Instead, they approached from

all sides, blocking traffic. When the cops would charge one group to clear the streets, the crowd would run away, swarming around the cops, blocking traffic somewhere else. These mobile columns thwarted the cops' efforts, and for some five hours the demonstrators ran them ragged and controlled about 20 square blocks around the center.

It seemed to many that a new way had been found to outwit the cops: "mobile tactics." The Student Mobilization Committee and other groups in New York tried to duplicate the Oakland demonstrations. YSA members in the committee warned that calling for shutting down the targeted induction center in lower Manhattan was unrealistic. But they were voted down.

I joined the demonstrations. But the cops had heard of "mobile tactics," by now and were prepared. The contingent I was in was led by Linda Dannenberg and Gus Horowitz. We ran all over the place, but could get nowhere near the center. The cops became pretty brutal, on that first day and in the days thereafter, as the demonstrations grew smaller. We got hold of a picture of a plain-clothes cop with a blackjack cracking the skull of an antiwar Vietnam veteran, and placed it on the front page.

## 28. THE 1968 TET OFFENSIVE IN VIETNAM

The year 1968 was marked by big struggles throughout the world. But three events stood out: the massive offensive by the National Liberation Front in the cities of South Vietnam, the “Prague spring” in Czechoslovakia, and the May-June student-worker uprising and prerevolutionary situation in France.

The Student Mobilization Committee held a national conference at the end of January 1968. The purpose of the conference was to launch a nationwide student strike against the war, in conjunction with other activities.

Some 900 students and youth from 110 colleges and 40 high schools attended the conference. The Communist Party once again tried to utilize the conference to turn the SMC into a “multi-issue” organization, in line with steering it into the upcoming electoral campaign of the Democratic Party. They tried to utilize the issue of racism to do this. Of course, everyone in the organized antiwar movement was against racism, but they were not agreed on how to fight it.

The first ploy the CP used was to try to force the conference to accept that the Black Caucus, attended by about sixty of the Blacks present, should be given 50 percent of the conference vote. This was intended to factionally misuse legitimate sentiments of support for what came to be known as affirmative action. It backfired when the Black Caucus itself rejected the idea, and instead founded a new organization, the National Black Antiwar Anti-Draft Union, affiliated with the SMC as an independent organization.

I was sent to the conference to aid the YSA members in the struggle with the CP over this question. I explained that the purpose of the SMC was not to try to become another civil rights organization or attempt to be part of the leadership of the Black movement. Blacks should be the leaders of their movement.

I noted that there were big differences in the room on how to fight racism. For example, the YSA and SWP supported Black nationalism, Black self-determination

and Black power, while others, including the CP, were opposed. We supported the right of Blacks to resist racist violence with armed self-defense, and others were opposed. We were for independent Black political action against the two capitalist parties, while others were for Blacks supporting the Democrats. We should stick to the area we agree on: opposition to the racist war in Vietnam.

With the Black Caucus adopting a nationalist line and rejecting factionalism toward the SMC, the CP prudently backed off. A motion was then passed overwhelmingly to the effect that the “purpose of the Student Mobilization Committee is to fight against the racist war in Vietnam.” Ten days of action were projected on campuses and cities across the country, culminating in a student strike on April 26 and mass demonstrations on April 27.

Just after the conference closed, the National Liberation Front launched an offensive in the cities of South Vietnam during the Tet holiday celebrating the beginning of the lunar New Year in Vietnam.

The White House and the Pentagon had claimed that the war in South Vietnam was being won by the US and its client government. We were told that there was “light at the end of the tunnel,” that the territory under NLF control had shrunk to a few border areas that were supplied by North Vietnam, and that the NLF had little or no support in the cities.

Although the Saigon puppet regime had 600,000 troops and the Americans another 500,000, the NLF was able to organize and supply troops in every major city. The US command was unaware of this fact until the surprise offensive was launched. It was obvious that the general population had to be cooperating with the NLF for this to happen.

On the first day, the US embassy in Saigon and significant areas of the city were captured by the NLF. In a few days, the NLF held most of the major cities.

The troops of the Saigon regime were not up to the task of retaking the areas the NLF had liberated. US troops had to bear the brunt of the fighting, often hand to hand and house by house, after the US had mercilessly bombed and shelled these civilian neighborhoods. Vietnamese civilians paid a big price in casualties.

The US forces prevailed militarily, in the sense that the cities were retaken. But politically the NLF had proved to the world that it was a potent force with vast reserves of support among the Vietnamese people. It was now clear that the US was nowhere near winning the war.

These truths had a big impact on the American people. In addition, US soldiers killed in the uprising and in the fighting to put it down numbered in the thousands. The war was affecting American cities and towns, big and small, all across the country,



as the number of young men coming home in coffins mounted.

For most antiwar activists, Tet ended the debate over the slogans of “Negotiate” versus that of “Immediate Withdrawal.” The only way the war would end would be for the US to get the hell out.

Tet deepened divisions in US ruling circles about the war. The *New York Times* reported that the head of US forces in Vietnam, General William Westmoreland, had secretly requested an additional 206,000 troops. The next day, Secretary of State Dean Rusk testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in what became a debate between Rusk and the Committee’s chairman, William Fulbright.

It was later learned that Johnson’s top military advisors, meeting in secret, had decided against Westmoreland’s request, which had been based on the strategy of continuing military escalation. Taking into account what the Tet offensive had shown about the military and political reality on the ground in Vietnam, as well as the growing opposition at home to throwing more young men into the quagmire, they adopted a new course. Their alternative strategy became known as “Vietnamization” of the war (a term which became identified with the subsequent Nixon administration). This meant bolstering the training and equipping of the Saigon puppet army, backing it with US airpower and cutting back on the role of US ground troops.

Senator Eugene McCarthy had already announced he was running in the Democratic primaries as a critic of the war. In the New Hampshire primary on March 12, he won a plurality over President Johnson. Then Robert Kennedy, sensing Johnson’s vulnerability, announced he too would seek the Democratic nomination.

On March 31, Johnson made the startling announcement that he was withdrawing from the race. Westmoreland was pulled from his Vietnam command.

Tet also sparked widespread activity on the nation’s campuses, sponsored by local SMCs, local chapters of SDS, and other groups, leading up to the April 26 student strike. It should be noted that while the national leadership of SDS did almost nothing on the war in this period, its local chapters were free to do what they wanted. In fact, most didn’t follow their national leaders on this point, and joined in mobilizing for the strike.

On April 26, a million students struck against the war in over 1,000 schools, primarily colleges and universities but including high schools. In most places, students didn’t just stay away from classes, but utilized the occasion for leafleting, teach-ins and other antiwar activities. A new layer of activists came into the movement.

The next day, demonstrations were held in cities across the country, the largest being some 200,000 in New York. A new feature of these demonstrations was the large turnout of high school students.

*The Militants* that reported on April 26 and April 27 had a new format. For a few years, we had been building a party print shop, under the leadership of Al Hansen and Howard Mayhew. This was an offset print shop — as opposed to hot-type, which I have described earlier. Over time, our own print shop had become able to obtain the equipment and develop the skills to publish *The Militant*.

For some time Harry Ring and I had been working closely with Al Hansen, picking out our new type-faces and style, and working out the weekly schedule with the shop. One result of switching to offset printing was that the quality of the paper's photographs was greatly improved. The first issue in the new format featured a front page made up entirely (except for the masthead) of a single photograph of a huge throng of students lining up for the April 27 march, with the banners of the SMC being the most prominent.

While antiwar sentiment in the country as a whole was deepened by the Tet offensive, some in the organized antiwar movement became convinced that the war was winding down. Johnson had proposed, in his speech declining the Presidential renomination, to open negotiations with North Vietnam. Hanoi accepted. These negotiations immediately became bogged down, and would go on for five more years, as did the direct role of US troops in the war.

A few days after the huge success of April 26 and 27, a move was made to exclude two SMC staff persons, Kipp Dawson and Syd Stapleton, representatives of the YSA, from the staff.

A meeting in New York of the SMC continuations committee was called to settle the dispute. Some 400 observers and delegates met on June 29. It had become crystal clear in the preceding weeks that the move to exclude the YSA was yet another attempt to change the character of the SMC from an antiwar organization to a general radical group — “less radical than SDS, but still radical,” as one of the organizers of the effort to exclude the YSA explained — by excluding those who disagreed.

The issues had been forced to the surface by our efforts to debate the real issues: non-exclusion and the need for a movement focused on fighting the war. The engineers of the purge took refuge in smear tactics, with one of them explaining in a New York weekly that Stapleton and Dawson had been forced out “not because they were socialists, but because they were douchebags.” The radical pacifists joined with the DuBois Clubs and others in order to scuttle the SMC as an antiwar organization. In part, this was a reflection of the rising pressures of electoral politics in a presidential year.

As an observer at the meeting, it was clear to me that those who supported excluding the YSA and transforming the SMC into a different kind of organization had lost the political debate. I noted with surprise that the defeated side apparently convinced

themselves that the YSA had a mechanical majority of the delegates, which was far from true.

Linda Morse (formerly Dannenberg) suddenly took the floor to announce a walkout of the “independents.” They started to march around the room, shouting “Up Against the Wall, YSA!” A counter-chant soon reverberated — “Bring the Troops Home Now!” About one-third of the delegates marched out, and the rest went on with the meeting.

Those who walked out held their own meeting that night. But their only real point of agreement was the need to get away from building a movement around the Vietnam war. They said that they wanted something more, but they couldn’t agree on what that was. They never met again.

The DuBois Clubs and the CP hoped to destroy an obstacle to their line of joining the so-called “peace” forces in the Democratic Party. The split made things more difficult during the election year but they did not achieve this goal.

They also wanted to get their young members away from the YSA members in the SMC office. The YSA’s views were having an impact on them, as the big events in Czechoslovakia were shaking Stalinism internationally, and the YSA’s sister organization in France was playing a major role in the May-June upheaval.

The YSA was left as the only organized tendency in the SMC. The result was several months of relative isolation. But after the elections the isolation ended. It became clear that the war was not at all close to being over. The war and its consequences were still at the heart of world politics. The SMC would go on to play an even more important role than before.

## 29. THE ASSASSINATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING

Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968. King was there to build support for striking sanitation workers, who were mostly Black.

Powerful forces had set out to discredit and eliminate King. The FBI and its director, J. Edgar Hoover, had targeted Black and civil rights organizations for decades. Hoover zeroed in on King, keeping him under constant surveillance and playing all kinds of dirty tricks to undermine him.

When King came out against the Vietnam War, the pro-war liberals broke with him. In the last year of his life, King also opened a new front in the fight for Blacks, other victims of racial oppression, and the poor. He was reaching out to trade unions. He began to make speeches about the need to overcome the big disparities in income and employment between whites and Blacks, disparities which had widened since the Second World War.

King's first speech opposing the Vietnam war was a February 1967 address at Stanford University entitled "Two Americas." He connected the war abroad with the fight for equality at home. He explained that it was much more difficult to achieve economic equality than to get rid of legal segregation.

He called for a new "coalition of an energized section of labor, Negroes, unemployed and welfare recipients" that could possibly be "the source of power that reshapes economic relationships and ushers in a new breakthrough to a new level of social reform."

King took a further step by supporting the sanitation workers in Memphis. The city's racial discrimination against Black sanitation workers sparked the strike, supported by the all-Black Local 1733 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). The demands included union recognition. The city and state responded with violent attacks by the cops and National Guard.

Memphis' Black community was galvanized into support. The battle became nationally known, and we sent reporters.

*The Militant's* front-page photo was of National Guardsmen, rifles at the ready, confronting peaceful marchers, each carrying a sign reading "I Am a Man." The image of these dignified and determined strikers and their slogan was powerful.

King was on a return trip when he was gunned down. The official version is that King's killer was a lone unknown two-bit racist, James Earl Ray. The government still sticks to this version of events, but the story has never been very credible, and today it is more widely challenged than ever. But even if it were true, the federal, state and city governments were responsible for creating the atmosphere of racism and hatred of Dr. King that made the murder possible. In my opinion, it is likely, as in Malcolm X's case, that some wing of the government was involved.

It's hard nowadays, when King's name is used in vain by capitalist politicians of all stripes, even by racists who boast that they "have a dream" of ending affirmative action (which King strongly supported), to imagine the anti-King statements in the press, by government authorities, and in Congress at the time, especially after he had spoken against the war.

The reaction to the assassination in the Black communities across the country was immediate and violent. Uprisings took place in hundreds of cities as the news got out. It was the most widespread Black upheaval so far.

Television carried scenes of the Capitol building in Washington, partially obscured by black smoke, as Washington, D.C. itself was engulfed. The sentiment was overwhelming that if "they" could do this to King, who preached non-violence, no Blacks were safe. Sixty thousand National Guardsmen were called out to quell the uprisings, and 40 Blacks were killed. There were thousands of arrests.

Our presidential candidates, Fred Halstead and Paul Boutelle, joined the memorial march in Memphis. White National Guardsmen were there in force, with bayonets unsheathed.

Large solidarity rallies were organized by the antiwar movement. Coretta Scott King spoke at the April 27 demonstration against the war, in place of her martyred husband.

The powers that be were shaken. They had hoped that the Voting Rights Act and other civil rights legislation they had passed would pacify Blacks. In the wake of the anger that exploded after King's assassination, more far-reaching laws and measures were instituted. Affirmative action in jobs and education began to make a difference in the lives of Blacks and women. Most of these gains have survived, even though they have been under attack ever since.

Andrew Pulley was one of the youth arrested for joining the popular upsurge in Cleveland against King's murder. The judge gave him a choice: jail or the army. He chose the army. At Fort Jackson, he came in contact with antiwar soldiers, some of whom had been in the YSA before being drafted. He became an antiwar fighter and socialist himself, and, once out of the military, joined and became a national leader of both the SWP and YSA.

## 30. THE MAY-JUNE 1968 REVOLUTIONARY UPRISING IN FRANCE

The antiwar movement, which originated in the United States, had spread around the world. In France, as in most other countries, university and high school students were in the vanguard. Student demonstrations against the war took place at the University of Paris in the suburb of Nanterre in March and again in early May.

Demonstrations in solidarity with the Nanterre students took place at the Sorbonne, the main University campus, located in Paris' Latin Quarter (renamed the "Heroic Vietnam Quarter" by the students). These were attacked by the police, and street battles took place.

The French sister organization of the YSA, the Revolutionary Communist Youth (Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire — JCR) played a central role in the student movement. On May 9, the JCR held a mass meeting of 6,000 in the Latin Quarter. One of the speakers was Ernest Mandel, a leader of the Fourth International. His speech was prophetically titled, "From revolt on the campus to revolt against capitalism."

Among the invited speakers were representatives of the German Socialist Students Union, SDS. But the French government barred them from entering the country, infuriating the protesters.

The next evening, May 10, some 35,000 students held a protest march. The paramilitary shock troops of the police attacked. A running battle ensued that lasted into the morning of the next day. The students built barricades of paving stones torn up from the streets. Their weapons were stones. The cops had clubs and tear gas and the more potent CS gas. The students threw some of the canisters back into the police lines.

People in surrounding apartment houses joined the battle, throwing whatever they

could at the police, including choice invective, and pouring warm water out of windows to disable the gas. They provided rags that the students used to cover their faces and shovels for digging up paving stones. They offered shelter.

The students suffered many casualties and were finally dispersed, with many arrested. But their determined fight at the barricades won broad sympathy among workers.

The leaders of the largest union federation, the General Confederation of Labor (Confédération générale du travail — CGT) were members of the Communist Party. The CP first came out against the students, but the mood of the workers forced them to relent. The CGT called a solidarity demonstration and one-day general strike for May 13.

One million workers and students marched, and the general strike turned out to be more than a one-day affair. Workers in Paris and throughout France continued the strike, and began to occupy their factories and other places of work. Soon two-thirds of France's 15,000,000 workers were on strike, and 2,000 establishments were occupied. Small farmers joined the action, blocking roads with tractors. It had become the greatest general strike in French history.

To report on the uprising, the Militant sent Joe Hansen, the editor of *Intercontinental Press*, and YSA National Secretary Mary-Alice Waters, who had studied at the Sorbonne and was fluent in French. They were joined by Helena Hermes and Brian Shannon, photographers who had taken many photos for *The Militant*.

For ten years, France had been under the authoritarian, centralized "Fifth Republic" of Charles DeGaulle. DeGaulle, however, was never able to decisively set aside bourgeois-democratic rights and procedures.

The pent-up demands of the working people, the wage workers and the farmers, which had been stifled under DeGaulle, exploded. The movement became more and more political and directed at the overthrow of Gaullism.

The student movement became a seething cauldron of open and non-stop political discussion and debate, as well as action — often in confrontation with the police. The JCR had won a leading role. JCR leader Alain Krivine was often among the leaders of the demonstrations, and a superb speaker at the rallies.

The JCR originated in a movement in the 1950s within the Communist Party's student organization. These students began to build solidarity with the Algerian revolution against French rule during the Algerian war, which was just as brutal and dirty as the American war against Vietnam. They also organized against the fascist Secret Army Organization in France (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète — OAS), formed as the extreme right wing of the French attempt to hold onto Algeria, which



had joined the military revolts that brought down the Fourth Republic and brought DeGaulle to power. Most of his far-right backers broke with DeGaulle and sought to topple him when he began negotiations with the Algerian rebels and later agreed to Algerian independence.

Support for Algeria brought the young revolutionists into conflict with the CP leadership, which was opposed to the Algerian revolution. The dissident CP youth became enthusiastic supporters of the Cuban revolution. Finally, they were expelled from the Communist Student Union when they opposed supporting a capitalist-party candidate, Francois Mitterand, for president in 1966. (Mitterand later became president as a social democrat, without much change in his pro-imperialist politics.) Those expelled were joined by other forces, and together they founded the JCR in April, 1966. Trotskyists were part of the JCR, but there were other tendencies as well. Thereafter, the CP became very weak in the student movement.

The JCR militants were experienced in defending themselves and others from the violence unleashed by the fascist OAS against solidarity actions with Algeria. This experience became useful in helping the student movement organize its own defense guards during the May-June events.

One of the students' most prominent and popular leaders was from Nanterre — Daniel Cohn-Bendit. He was not a member of the JCR and had anarchist sympathies. The JCR fought for non-exclusion, advocating that all tendencies in the student movement unite in action while freely debating differences.

The *London Observer* had reporters on the scene. They reported, "Cohn-Bendit's chief supporters are a small, highly organized and fanatically militant group called the Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire (JCR) — a sort of Trotskyist political commando, led by Alain Krivine...."

"They want the students to set an example of militancy which the working class will follow. The irony is that these violent young men have struck a chord of idealism and morality."<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, we were excited, putting it mildly, by the historic mobilization of the working class in France and the role our comrades were playing. An issue of *Life* magazine featured a photo of JCR leader Pierre Rousset on the cover. Our French comrades were impressed that we had sent reporters to cover the uprising in detail for *The Militant* and *Intercontinental Press*. These two publications helped mobilize support for the French struggle in the United States and throughout the world. We were able to reach our international co-thinkers and other politically minded people. My main job was to get out *The Militant* every week with the best coverage of this historic development that we could obtain.

Ray Sparrow was the SWP representative to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, which was headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. Because of the general strike, it was difficult to get material published in France. So Ray worked with the Belgian comrades to help out. Our French comrades would bring their written materials to Belgium, where they would be printed. Then the leaflets, statements and other materials would be brought back across the border by the JCR members.

The JCR played the central role in politically orienting the student movement towards calling for the formation of strike committees in the factories and action committees in the neighborhoods. They pressed to continue the general strike to force DeGaulle's ouster and to form a workers' government based on the mass committees. Such committees began to form, and take over public functions.

The tri-color flag of capitalist France was torn down in the student quarters, and replaced with the red flag of socialist revolution. Their demonstrations were marked by the singing of "The Internationale" — the song of revolutionary international socialism. At the demonstration of workers and students on May 13 there was a sea of red flags, and the revolutionary symbol festooned the occupied factories.

The occupation of the factories by the workers posed the question: to whom do the factories belong — the capitalists or the workers? The general strike posed the question: who should hold political power — the old capitalist regime or the working people? The situation was moving in a revolutionary direction. The DeGaulle regime was in disarray. His premier called the situation "prerevolutionary."

The police were being demoralized by the continual battles with students and workers. The army, made up of conscript citizen soldiers, was open to appeals to join the movement. There was an exceptional opportunity for a relatively peaceful anti-capitalist revolution.

Why didn't this happen? In the aftermath, capitalist pundits around the world denied that a prerevolutionary situation had existed, as they collectively sighed with relief that the danger was over. The Stalinists and Social Democrats the world over echoed them.

In fact, all the preconditions for a socialist revolution were in place, except one. And that was the existence of a mass revolutionary socialist party that would resolutely lead the masses to victory.

The French Communist Party, with some 500,000 members and supporters in the working class, and which led the main trade union federation, was opposed to a revolutionary course, right from the beginning. They initially opposed the student rebellion. They castigated Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a German citizen studying in France, for being a German who had sullied the French flag. They vilified the "Trotskyites."

They called the May 13 demonstration because they were forced to by the sentiment of the workers. When the workers launched the general strike and factory occupations, the CP insisted that the workers had only economic demands, not political ones. They didn't come out against DeGaulle until major capitalist politicians began to raise the need for DeGaulle to step down, and a transitional government be put in place.

On May 29, the CP-led CGT called another demonstration in Paris, and this time the turnout was 800,000. The CP leadership had two goals in mind. One was to keep at the head of the masses. The other was to support a new capitalist coalition government, which they wanted to join, to counter the growing sentiment for a workers' government. But on this march the workers showed what they wanted by carrying red flags and singing "The Internationale." Joe Hansen reported from Paris, "The demonstration had an enthusiasm and a fervor that required little to transform it into the clinching action that would have brought down the regime and opened the socialist revolution in France."<sup>2</sup> But the CP ended the march by dispersing it without a rally.

DeGaulle then made his move. On May 30, he gave a speech dissolving the National Assembly; he called for new elections, declared he would not resign, and threatened civil war if the general strike was not ended. For the first time, the pro-Gaullist rightist forces raised their frightened heads and marched in the wealthy neighborhoods. This was bluster and bluff, but DeGaulle felt confident that the CP would bow to his threats with a sigh of relief and accept his terms.

The CGT leaders ended the general strike piecemeal, settling the strike at the different enterprises one by one. The workers did win some economic demands, but not their main one to reduce the workweek from 48 to 40 hours. The CP hailed this ignominious capitulation and betrayal as a great victory.

Hundreds of thousands of students and workers had been mobilized and revolutionized. When I visited Paris later that summer, the spirit of revolution was still in the air. By virtue of the exemplary role it played, the JCR grew by leaps and bounds, even though it was one of the revolutionary organizations that had been outlawed by DeGaulle. In the US, we went on a campaign in solidarity with the JCR and the other outlawed groups.

While the memory of these great events has been all but erased by bourgeois historians and the Stalinists, we who continue the true revolutionary tradition must keep it alive, for the new generations of revolutionists.

One of the many international demonstrations that were held in solidarity with the French workers and students was initiated by the YSA in Berkeley, California. The mayor ordered the cops to attack the demonstration; but the youthful crowd of 1,000 fought back. In the next five days, a "battle of Berkeley" erupted that ended with a

victory for the wider movement.

The central political leader of the students and youth in this conflict was Peter Camejo. We had sent Peter to Berkeley in 1966 to strengthen SWP and YSA units there. The campus of the University of California at Berkeley was a center of the antiwar movement and the youth radicalization. Peter was a terrific orator. He could explain political ideas in a way that had great appeal to students and youth. So he rapidly became a leader on the campus. He became part of the leading committee of the Vietnam Day Committee.

In the next two years Camejo was prominent in demonstrations and rallies against the Vietnam War, against attempts by the university to limit students' political rights, and in protesting the harassment and police violence against the Black Panther Party, headquartered in Oakland. Camejo was also the SWP candidate for mayor of Berkeley and for the US Senate from California.

In 1968 police attacks on the Black Panthers intensified across the country. In Oakland, Black Panther Party leader Huey Newton had been arrested and charged with the murder of a cop, after police had recognized Newton's car and stopped it. The cops shot Newton in the stomach, and one cop died in the altercation. A movement developed around the call to "Free Huey!" In April, in a police attack on the Black Panther headquarters, their treasurer Bobby Hutton was shot to death by the cops.

The rally in support of the workers and students of France was held on Telegraph Avenue near the campus. It was supported by the YSA, Black Panthers, Peace and Freedom Party, Independent Socialist Club and others. The organizers had appealed to the city council to allow them to hold the rally in the street, as a large crowd was expected. The council refused. To avoid a confrontation, the demonstrators stayed on the sidewalk, with a line of monitors between the rally and the cops.

The mayor declared the demonstration to be illegal and ordered the cops to end it. The demonstrators scattered but fought back. Some barricades were built for defense.

The next day a mass meeting was called on the campus to decide what to do next. All the decisions during the six days of struggle were taken by majority vote at such mass meetings.

At the meeting of 500, Camejo urged returning to Telegraph Ave. that evening to exercise the right to hold a meeting, a constitutional right which was under attack by the mayor and the police. This proposal passed overwhelmingly, and a rally of 2,000 took place. Police surrounded the rally, and barricades began to be built in case of a police attack. The mayor showed up, offering to debate Camejo about the constitutional issues if the demonstrators would move to a parking lot. Camejo reported the mayor's offer to the demonstration and a decisive majority voted to stay put.

The police opened a surprise attack, and a second night of fighting followed, shorter but more intense than on the first night. The police went after anyone, attacking passersby and charging into homes to beat people who had nothing to do with the rally. The police actions turned public opinion in favor of the demonstrators. The YSA headquarters served as a first aid station for the wounded.

The mayor declared a curfew for the next evening in the area where Telegraph Ave. ends at the campus. A delegation of representatives of groups supporting the fight, including Camejo, met with the mayor, but to no avail. They came back to a mass decision-meeting numbering 800. The meeting decided to march to city hall. There, it was decided to enter the curfew area. Many arrests were made, and Peter had to go into hiding. He called me from one of his hideouts, to explain the situation, and we mapped out coverage in *The Militant*. Betsey Stone was on hand in Berkeley to organize our coverage. Peter was also in contact with Tom Kerry, who provided tactical advice.

The protesters shifted tactics. All demonstrations were called off for three days, to concentrate on building a big rally on Telegraph on the fourth day, which also happened to be July 4, “independence day” commemorating the Declaration of Independence from British rule. This decision was made at a mass meeting of over 1,200 people. The police brutality and the curfew were galvanizing support for the demonstrators.

The protesters also decided to attend a meeting of the city council the following day. The mayor had been forced by the public outcry to agree to hold an open meeting where citizens could participate in the debate on the demands of the demonstrators. Over 1,000 people attended the meeting, and many spoke.

“It was a meeting,” Peter Camejo was quoted in *The Militant*, “where people reassured themselves that they were completely right just by listening to each other, by each person getting up and giving their own personal experiences. Most people didn’t know exactly what happened because everyone just witnessed one or another aspect of the events. As the general picture began to dawn on people, it became absolutely clear to everyone: We were completely right in our accusations.”<sup>3</sup>

By a 5-4 vote, the council barred the July 4 rally. In the uproar that followed, a mass meeting was called for that night in the same hall that the city council met. This was a meeting of 2,000, the largest decision-making meeting in Berkeley up to that time (later, some antiwar meetings to debate strategy were larger).

Camejo stated that the July 4 event on Telegraph Avenue had become a symbol for the right of assembly and the right of people to fight for their beliefs. If the demonstrators stood strong and united, he added, it was not excluded that the city

council would capitulate. The proposal to go ahead with the July 4 rally come what may, was adopted by a huge majority. The next day the city council reversed its position, and in a 5-3 vote allowed the rally to proceed.

About 2,500 showed up July 4 for what became a victory rally on Telegraph, a united demonstration addressed by representatives of all the groups that had supported the struggle.

## 31. THE PRAGUE SPRING

The May-June events in France showed that the workers in an advanced capitalist country had the capacity and potential power to make a socialist revolution. The Tet offensive by the Vietnamese liberation movement powerfully confirmed that the workers and peasants in a semi-colonial country, even a poor and economically backward one, could take on the most powerful imperialist country.

Another important sector of the world, the Soviet bloc, where capitalism had been overthrown and bureaucratic Stalinist regimes seemed entrenched, also saw revolutionary developments in 1968.

Czechoslovakia, which had one of the most developed economies in the bloc, was saddled with one of the most hidebound regimes.

In a nationalized and planned economy accurate statistics, openness, and the active participation of the working people in planning and innovation are necessary to continue to make progress, especially as the economy becomes more technologically advanced. The reactionary bureaucracy's stultifying control, marked by lies, suppression of independent and scientific thinking, and the repression of the masses, led to economic stagnation and falling living standards for the workers in this highly proletarian country.

The bureaucratized Communist Party became more and more isolated. A section of the party saw the need for changes, and began to oppose the old guard. This split spilled into the public, encouraging more open discussion, especially among students and intellectuals. For the first time since the Stalinist regime was set up in the late 1940s, there was a revival of political life. The "liberalizers" in the party and state bureaucracy found support in this public discussion. The result was the replacement of the old government headed by Novotny, with reformers headed by Alexander Dubcek.

At this point early in 1968, the pent up aspirations of the masses burst forth. Discussion blossomed, censorship was abandoned, repression went into abeyance, the political police were curbed. The new regime exposed many of the crimes of

Stalinism in Czechoslovakia. Most important, the working class began to mobilize and become politicized. In Prague, the arrival of spring saw rebirth of the earth and the nation.

In April, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International issued a statement, which we published in *The Militant*, on the events. The statement hailed the “students, intellectuals, and workers of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic who for months have been the driving force in a powerful movement for socialist democracy in their country.”<sup>1</sup>

It wasn't easy in those days to balance coverage of the war in Vietnam and the US antiwar movement, the revolutionary developments in France, defense of the Black Panthers and other Black fighters, the Czechoslovak events — all this plus our own vigorous election campaign. What a year 1968 was!

Revolutionary documents circulated in Prague. One, titled the “Two Thousand Words” manifesto, demanded purging the reactionary Novotny forces from the Communist Party, and called for “public criticism, demonstrations, strikes and boycotts to bring down people who have misused power and caused public harm.”<sup>2</sup> The Kremlin zeroed in on this document to denounce the movement and the direction events were taking, and threatened military intervention.

The Soviet leaders were encouraged in this by overtures from Washington. A *New York Times* dispatch from Warsaw which we reprinted said, “Diplomatic sources here say the current relaxation of tensions between Washington and Moscow may have persuaded the Soviet Union and some of its Eastern European allies that they can intervene militarily without fear of Western repercussions. . . . Some Western and Communist sources have been struck by the timing of the new understanding between the superpowers which has grown steadily since the Czechoslovak crisis began earlier this year.”<sup>3</sup>

Discussion deepened in the country. There were open calls for workers' self-management in the factories and socialist democracy, and for the creation of “a genuinely *revolutionary* working class party.”<sup>4</sup> A magazine published excerpts from a Fourth International manifesto that called for a “Government of Workers' Councils in Czechoslovakia.” A Left Communist group was openly formed.

The *Daily World*, the renamed American Communist Party newspaper, featured *The Militant's* coverage of these developments as proof of a counter-revolutionary “conspiracy” and “plot” associated with “Trotskyites.”

In August, Soviet troops were sent in to put down the unrest. The Soviet leaders under the gray, conservative, and corrupt Brezhnev feared an example of socialist democracy that could spread to other Eastern European countries and to the Soviet



Union itself. Washington, while shedding some crocodile tears, also wasn't too keen on the idea of a revolutionary, democratic and pro-socialist movement advancing in Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovakian government and party leadership denounced the invasion. But Dubcek was a liberal, not a Bolshevik. In the face of massive resistance in the streets and factories, Dubcek did not lead the struggle against the invasion but negotiated with the occupiers. He was arrested and it looked likely that he would be shot by the Soviet occupiers, as Nagy was in Hungary after the 1956 invasion. However, the Kremlin found that there was no force in the country they could rely on to form a government. The Novotny crowd was universally despised. The Soviet leaders were forced to bring Dubcek back, but with Soviet forces in control.

Without the Kremlin's invasion, the movement for socialist democracy would have continued to advance, and to give a great impetus to revolutionary forces throughout the globe.

Unlike what happened during the Hungarian revolution, when most Communist Parties around the world supported the Soviet invasion, this time there were big defections. The two biggest CPs in Europe, the French and the Italian, denounced the invasion. Similar positions were taken by the leaderships of the CPs in Sweden, Holland, Denmark, Austria, and Britain. This marked a new stage of independence of these parties from Moscow, but it was not a break to the left but towards social democracy.

The majority of the CP in the United States went along with Moscow. But even here there were repercussions, especially in southern California. There, long-time CP leader Dorothy Healey led a breakaway from the CP. But this too was a break toward social democracy and liberalism, not toward the revolutionary left.

## 32. TALKING TO THE GIs

As chairman of the YSA, member of the SWP Political Committee, and editor of *The Militant*, I had traveled to YSA chapters and SWP branches around the country, either on organizational trips or to speak publicly. I sometimes also visited Toronto or Vancouver, where Canadian comrades had branches. Aside from these excursions to the north, I had never been out of the US.

So when we decided that I would accompany SWP Presidential candidate Fred Halstead on a trip around the globe, I was pretty excited. Our main goal was to go to Vietnam and discuss our antiwar views with GIs and hear what they had to say about the war. My role was to be *The Militant's* reporter as well as an aide to Fred.

At the beginning of the antiwar movement our position, that soldiers sent to Vietnam should be approached as fellow workers and fellow citizens with the right to speak and protest against the war, had been a minority one. Most activists thought of the troops as part of the problem — guilty, along with the government and the commanders, of the crimes being committed against the Vietnamese people. When they talked to potential draftees, the emphasis was on trying to get them to resist the draft. Soldiers were encouraged to desert or refuse to go to Vietnam.

The SWP was also opposed to the imperialist draft, and defended draft resistance and resistance in the military. An early sign of antiwar sentiment in the army was the emergence of soldiers who refused to go to Vietnam, and faced courts martial and jail terms. We were also in the forefront of defending these courageous soldiers.

In addition, we explained that the mass of soldiers were potential allies of the antiwar movement, and that the movement should try to find ways to reach them. Our position was that soldiers did not give up their civil rights when they were drafted, but had the right to oppose the war from within the armed forces. This concept of the “citizen soldier” was outrageous to the brass, and had to be fought for in a series of cases involving our members as well as other soldiers.

As far as our own members were concerned, we did not urge them to resist the draft, but to clearly let the authorities know their political affiliation, and their belief

that they retained their rights of free speech if drafted. This would help them if they faced repression for speaking against the war once inside the army.

In 1960, when I was called up, I explained that I was a member of the SWP. At that time, the armed forces didn't want radicals, and I was classified as "morally unfit" to serve. But later the authorities decided that rejecting those who said they were socialists only encouraged many more to take this ticket out. So young male SWP and YSA members started to be drafted.

When a member was drafted, we formally released him from the discipline of the YSA and/or the SWP. We did not want them to be open to charges that they had divided loyalties, or were expected to defy orders that contradicted our policies.

Pfc. Howard Petrick was the first to be targeted for his views. His immediate superiors considered him a model soldier, but he expressed his antiwar and socialist views, and distributed literature reflecting them to his fellow soldiers. The brass decided to court-martial him in 1966. Caroline Lund and Lew Jones went down to Fort Hood in Texas to interview Petrick and plan his defense.

We launched a campaign to defeat the prosecution, including in the antiwar movement. Caroline became head of the defense committee. The natural sympathy of antiwar fighters with this courageous soldier led to widening support and became a concrete example of how antiwar activity could be carried out among the troops.

Soon there were more soldiers who were threatened for opposition to the war. We spearheaded the setting up of the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee to fight for the right of soldiers to speak their minds, and to help organize their legal and political defense when they were threatened. This committee was led by Matilde Zimmerman. Michael Smith, a young lawyer who had joined the SWP, became counsel to the committee.

Some socialist antiwar soldiers formed discussion groups of soldiers and participated in demonstrations on bases. Courts martial frequently followed. The soldiers won broad support and were able to defeat the frame-ups.

As the war grew more unpopular, soldiers began to join antiwar actions, often in uniform. They stood in the front ranks of marches, as the movement began to understand the importance of reaching out to the GIs. The impact on the general population of seeing soldiers in uniform leading antiwar demonstrations drove the point home. There were frequent attempts to court-martial them, which failed as the growing antiwar movement came to their defense.

All of these cases concerned GIs stationed in the US. We wanted our trip to Vietnam to be an example to the antiwar movement of reaching soldiers in Vietnam itself.

### 33. A TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

Our first stop, in June, was Japan. Fred had been invited to speak at a conference of Gensuiken, the movement against A and H bombs, and another conference of the Japan Peace for Vietnam Committee, Beheiran. We had also contacted our Japanese comrades, who were organizing another, more militant student antiwar conference, together with other members of Zengakuren, the student union.

We flew from New York to San Francisco, where we caught a plane to Tokyo with a stopover in Hawaii. So we were pretty tired when we arrived. Standing in the line for immigration and customs, we were pulled out and interrogated in the office of the chief immigration inspector. We were told that the Gensuiken and Beheiran conferences were OK, but the student conference was off limits. We signed a statement, with a protest, that we wouldn't go to that conference.

The Zengakuren conference organizers held a public protest and news conference including Halstead and me. We were not the only invited international guests, but we were the first to arrive. Others invited included representatives from SDS and SNCC from the US, the French Communist League (successor to the outlawed JCR), and the German SDS. (The German SDS, the German Socialist Students Union, had the same initials as the American SDS, but was socialist from its origin and wasn't connected to the American Students for a Democratic Society.) If all had been subjected to the treatment we got, a central purpose of the conference would have been thwarted. But the authorities backed down, and the international guests were allowed to participate.

This antiwar conference was held during a wave of student strikes for political rights at the universities and against the war. These had been given a big impetus by the April 26 international student strike called by the US Student Mobilization Committee. The response to the SMC call was greater in Japan than in any country outside the United States.

Various student factions at the conference were active in the strikes at universities. They were identified by the different colors of their hard-hats, which they wore as helmets in clashes with the cops, and sometimes with each other. Their weapons were

long stout sticks.

The supporters of the Fourth International were known as the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (IV). There were other factions with the same name, JRCL, without the "(IV)." We learned that there had been a series of splits from the JRCL since it played a big role in the student demonstrations of 1960. Some of the leaders of the other JRCLs met with Fred and me to seek our support against the others. We explained that we did not know the issues involved in these splits, and in any case, the SWP had learned over the years to be very wary of taking sides in internal struggles in other countries, unless the issues were clear-cut and of sufficient importance. We noted that as supporters of the Fourth International, we had a special relationship to the JRCL(IV).

At the conference I met a YSA member from Berkeley, Sharon Cabaniss, who was in Japan for the summer. She knew Peter Camejo. She later became head of *The Militant's* circulation department. Also participating was Jeanette Habel, the representative of the French CL, whom I had met briefly in New York at our headquarters the year before as she headed back to France from Cuba. Another delegate I met was Michel Rocard, from the French Unified Socialist Party (PSU). The PSU at the time, coming out of the May-June events, was to the left of both the Socialist and Communist parties. But over the years it moved to the right and finally dissolved into the SP, and Rocard became a minister in SP-led capitalist governments. Habel has remained a revolutionist.

Fred and I spoke to the meeting. My theme was the world revolution, using the examples of the Tet offensive, the French events and the Prague spring. We felt the wind in our sails in 1968, as these examples made our internationalist program more concrete and understandable.

We took a "bullet train" to Hiroshima to attend the Gensuiken conference. Two memories stand out. One was the annual commemoration of the August 6, 1945 atom bombing of Hiroshima. Over 100,000 people gathered at the Memorial monument. This vast crowd was completely silent as they waited for 8:06 a.m. to arrive, the exact time the bomb was detonated. The striking of a huge gong signaled the moment. Tears were running down my cheeks in solidarity with these silent survivors of the awful event, and a deep hatred swelled in my heart against the US rulers who still celebrate this murderous deed.

It is an August tradition in Japan to memorialize those who died the previous year with bonfires. In Hiroshima, this ceremony was held August 6, a few days early, after sunset. Instead of bonfires, small paper boats, each with a burning candle, are floated on Hiroshima's many streams (the city is on a delta). Each boat represented the soul of one of the hundreds of thousands who perished in the atomic atrocity.

The Beheiren conference, the broadest of the three meetings, was held in the ancient capital city of Kyoto. All three conferences supported a call we brought from the US antiwar movement for actions in October.

Back in Tokyo, we were introduced to the leader of farmers who were protesting flights of US bombers from an airfield that abutted the farmers' land. We visited him in his house, which was quite a contrast to the tiny and crowded apartments in the city. It was built from wood and paper. As was usual in Japan, it was spotlessly clean. The wood beams and floors were highly polished and very beautiful. US bombers roared over the house a few hundred feet above, as they took off on their way to wreak havoc on Vietnam. The farmers erected very tall poles at the airfield's edge to make the take-offs more difficult.

In Japan, at least at that time, white people tended to stand out. On the famous overcrowded Tokyo subway, both Fred and I were much taller than the other passengers. Fred was a big man, and really loomed large, while I am of average height for an American. I began to be conscious of our large reddish noses, compared to the more delicate features of the Japanese. Once, going into an apartment Fred banged his head going through a doorway. Another time, Fred forgot to remove his shoes before entering a comrade's apartment, and the young people present had to hide their smiles at the uncouth act.

We got lost in Tokyo. We wanted to go to Czechoslovakia on the European leg of our trip, but hadn't gotten visas. We were staying at the YMCA, and the clerk wrote out the address of the Czech embassy for us in Japanese. We took a taxi. After we got our visas stamped on our passports, we realized that we had neglected to have the address of the YMCA written down in Japanese. And the embassy was far from the city center. A taxi driver we hired didn't understand any English or our repeating the initials, "YMCA." He was resourceful, however, and stopped to talk to a European-looking woman who spoke both English and Japanese, and we made it back. But the Soviet invasion in August aborted our plans to visit Czechoslovakia.

Japanese food was new to both of us. So much fish! And cooked in every way imaginable — boiled, fried, baked, grilled and raw. Unlike Chinese food, Japanese food doesn't use much oil. I really started to like sushi and sashimi (raw fish with various sauces). But the average serving size was too small for Fred, who lost about 15 pounds during the three weeks we were in Japan. Near the end of our stay, he ordered four complete meals at one sitting.

Our next stop was Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). As our plane approached Tan Son Nhut airport outside the city we noticed the countryside was pockmarked with what looked like circular lakes. We soon figured out these were rain-filled bomb and

artillery craters. Tan Son Nhut was a military and civilian airport, and we saw a US jet fighter take off as we taxied in.

We didn't know what to expect as we got in line to have our passports checked. Our passports had visas for Czechoslovakia, a "commie" country, but the official let us through since we were Americans. Outside, we found an American reporter (from AP or UPI, I don't remember which) waiting for us. We went to his hotel room.

We asked him why the South Vietnamese authorities had let us in, as our trip and its purpose were publicized in the US. He scowled in disgust and sarcastically said that the Saigon government wasn't equal to such a difficult operation as stopping us. He later wrote a dispatch about our visit. He was young enough to be draft bait. He swore he wouldn't be drafted. If he was called up, he would threaten to tell all he knew about the war and the corruption of the Saigon government, he told us.

Coming into Saigon from the airport by taxi, we saw US troops and barbed wire everywhere. The US embassy was especially heavily guarded, with troops behind sandbag bunkers, and barbed wire keeping people a couple of hundred feet away. This was six months after Tet.

We stayed at one of the two big hotels that the French colonialists had built. We didn't get to taste much Vietnamese food, since the hotel served only French style cooking (but not real French, as we would soon find out in Paris).

Our first night we heard the low ominous rumble of US bombs. They were targeting the countryside around Saigon, about 20 miles from us, and our blinds were shaking from the blasts. Each B-52 bomber dropped a long string of bombs (30 or 40 at a time, if I remember right) that would go off one after the other in a boom-boom-boom-boom-boom of rapidly repeating explosions. This bombing was supposed to clear the area around Saigon of the NLF. After the war was over, it was learned that the NLF had dug a very deep network of tunnels to be safe from this terrific bombardment.

We spoke with GIs wherever we could find them, at the USO, in bars, and at the Long Binh army base outside Saigon. We had many copies of an antiwar brochure for GIs that Fred had written. I remember it had a photo of a soldier eating his rations with a "Bring the troops home" sticker on his helmet. He had crossed out "the troops" and wrote "me" in and added "alive." We passed out a lot of those.

We found that the GIs in Saigon were about evenly split on the war, about half supporting it and half not. We met no hostility from soldiers, including among those who said they supported the war. Our conversations were cordial and reasoned. Many years later we learned from secret government documents that the army had tried to organize soldiers to beat us up, but this didn't happen.

The most common argument soldiers had for supporting the war was that so many

Americans had already died that the war just *had* to be OK. This was not a very powerful prowar stand. Soldiers in Saigon were mostly involved in supply and other support work for the front line troops.

Many told us that soldiers who had seen fighting tended to be more opposed to the war, and we could meet some at the Long Binh army base. We took a taxi about 20 miles out to Long Binh, and walked onto the base. No one challenged us or asked for identification. We walked past a stockade, where GIs were incarcerated for one infraction or another. The soldiers called it “LBJ” for both “Long Binh Jail” and President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

We found out where the PX was, and came upon a group of GIs sitting and talking. We explained who we were, and why we were interested in hearing their views. “You want to talk about the war? Sure! Sit down,” said one soldier.

We started our tape recorder. “Most of us are under 21,” said this same soldier. “We’re over here fighting a war for the Vietnamese, and half of them don’t appreciate it. Back home there are demonstrations, big people getting shot. We don’t belong here in this country; we should be back in our own country. We should be helping to build our own country.” He had been in one firefight, “and as far as I am concerned, that’s enough for me.” Others expressed frustrations about being in Vietnam, and complaints about the army.

It was the monsoon season. Suddenly a terrific rainstorm began, creating a red mud morass, which set off more complaining about being in Vietnam. Some said they had no opinion about the war. We passed out Fred’s brochure, and explained that we thought the war was wrong and that the troops should be brought home immediately.

Another soldier, who had been quiet up to then said, “I suppose all GIs in all wars have complaints like we have been telling you, and they don’t want to go. This was probably true in the Second World War. But the difference here is that there is no *cause* here worth fighting for. If the US was under attack, it would be different.”

“This is no place for none of us,” another soldier said, and all nodded in agreement.

Another said that there was only one thing that would make him sign up for another tour of duty, and that was if his little brother was drafted and was in danger of being sent to Vietnam, because he wouldn’t have to come if his older brother stayed in Vietnam.

Then the GIs began to talk among themselves about what the war was about. One said he thought it was a “political” war. “If they didn’t have this war there would be a depression back home. You know that it is easier to get a job now in the US. That’s because of this war.”

A Black soldier interjected, “But goddamn it, lives are more important than jobs!”



I asked each of them if they thought the objectives the US was fighting for were worth GI lives. Each said “No.”

We repeated that we believed the GIs should be brought home immediately before any more got killed. They grinned and said, “We’re for that!” We shook hands and wished them well, and walked back through the red mud to our taxi.<sup>1</sup>

Back in Saigon, we took a walk one evening into a neighborhood where there were only Vietnamese, no US troops. We suddenly realized that no one was smiling at us, unlike the Vietnamese who were trying to sell you something on the main thoroughfares. There were cold and hostile stares. These people couldn’t know we were on their side — they just saw two Americans, and the Americans had mercilessly bombarded Saigon just months before. We decided to get out of there quickly, especially since we spoke no Vietnamese.

Our only dicey situation occurred in a Saigon bar, where GIs who worked in a nearby depot came to drink. A group of Black and white GIs, came in, some with automatic rifles. I started talking to a tall Black man, who said his situation wasn’t so bad, since he was far from the fighting and had a girlfriend in Saigon. Another Black GI heard our conversation and came over to say he didn’t like the war and he didn’t like Vietnam. He had been in combat on a previous tour in Vietnam, and then stationed in the US. He was convinced he got sent back to Vietnam because he participated in the uprising in Washington, D.C., when Dr. King was assassinated.

Then a big white guy leaned over to ask me in a low voice, “What’s wrong with the niggers back home?” He was referring, I guess, to the ghetto rebellions. No sooner had he gotten those words out, when the tall Black smashed him in the face, knocking him off the bar stool. I still don’t know how he did that without even grazing me. A fight between Black and white soldiers ensued, and Fred and I beat it to a back room where the bar girls had fled. We were thankful that none of the automatic rifles came into play, and soon made our escape.

Our next stop was Bombay (now Mumbai), India. We had a layover for one night in Bangkok, Thailand. On the way through Thai customs, a pretty Vietnamese woman who had been on our flight asked Fred if he wouldn’t mind carrying a small bag of hers through customs. Fred foolishly agreed. He wasn’t searched, however, probably because he was an American, something the woman no doubt counted on. But after he gave the bag back to the woman, he quietly told me that the little bag was very heavy, and he doubted it contained lead. Richer Vietnamese were smuggling gold out of the country, an indication of how they thought the war was going.

We arrived in Bombay at night, very tired. A group of members of the Socialist Workers Party of India met us at the airport with flower wreaths they hung around our

necks. We stayed at a hotel. It was the monsoon season in India, too, and it rained a lot in torrential downpours. The heat and humidity were high. Comrades told us not to drink water that wasn't boiled, and we mostly drank sodas. It was hard for Fred to get enough sodas to quench his thirst, as he suffered greatly in the hot wet weather.

The next day we had an interview for *The Militant* with S.B. Kolpe, the general secretary of the Indian Federation of Working Journalists. The journalists had been on strike for a month, the first such action by this union since independence from Britain. Kolpe was a leader of the Indian SWP and a member of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International.

The SWP had set up meetings at a garment factory and a chemical plant where SWP members were union leaders. Fred spoke to street meetings of a few hundred on these occasions, with translation. The educated in India spoke English, but the workers spoke only the language of the state of Maharashtra where Bombay is located. We learned that there were 14 major languages in India, from three language roots (only one of which is Indo-European), and 60 dialects, and 12 different alphabets.

Fred also spoke at a public meeting of 300 people. We both spoke to meetings of students at Bombay University. At these meetings, people understood English. We talked mainly about the antiwar movement in the US.

It is impossible to describe the impact on me of the poverty, the stench, and the terrible conditions most Bombay people lived in. We had a meal at the home of a comrade who was an official in a bank, and was considered middle class. He drove an old car from the 1930s, which he switched off at every stoplight to save gas. He lived in a tenement that reminded me of slums in Harlem, but was considered a relatively good apartment by Indian standards.

What the Indian comrades called slums was something else altogether. These were small shacks made of grass, canvas, tar paper or pieces of corrugated iron, by people who couldn't afford housing. They were all over Bombay, next to apartment buildings, on vacant lots and even near the airport runways. We visited one large encampment where there were no sanitary facilities, and only one water pipe for every few hundred people. These people were mainly from the countryside, ruined peasants forced into the city to try to survive.

Below the slum dwellers were those who lived on the sidewalks. Families would stake out a section of sidewalk by laying out small stones that defined their area. I remember a heartbreaking scene of a very small girl sleeping on the sidewalk, her face pressed against the pavement. The toll that British imperialism inflicted on India for centuries was made sharply obvious.

The people were very friendly towards us, sometimes too much so, as old habits

of groveling before whites were still evident. We got to know the people in our hotel, and one time when Fred was getting ready to down another coke, a hotel worker ran up to him and insisted that he must open the bottle, and not Fred. Fred explained (the worker spoke English) that workers in the US by and large didn't have servants, and weren't used to such treatment, but that we understood he was only trying to do his job, and we would put in a good word for him with the boss.

We ate mostly at our hotel, where we got to taste Indian food. For me, it was the first time. I remember one vindaloo dish that was so hot that Fred, who would eat jalapeno peppers straight without anything else, was sweating and eating bread and salt to put the fire out.

Our next stop was Cairo. We went there because we had heard of a Palestinian movement based in Egypt that had become more prominent after the 1967 war, called Fatah. We went to the major newspaper in Cairo, explained who we were, and asked if they could set up an interview with the Palestinians.

We waited a few days, but according to our schedule, we had to fly to Rome to meet the Italian comrades. We decided that Fred would fly on to Rome, and I would stay one more day. I wasn't feeling too well, and needed a day of rest. That day, there was a knock on the hotel door, and there was a representative of the information bureau of Fatah, which was the leading organization of what became known as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

He gave me a long interview. Their movement began in 1958, but started to grow in the period from 1965 to the June 1967 war, and especially after the war. He explained the goal of Al Fatah was the liberation of Palestine from Zionist control through armed struggle. "But we must make it clear that there is a difference between Zionism and Judaism. Our aim is not to eliminate the Jewish people. Before 1948 we lived in peace with the Jewish people, and they will have equal rights without discrimination in a liberated Palestine." This idea was later concretized in the PLO slogan, "for a democratic, secular Palestine."

When this interview appeared in *The Militant*, signed by both Fred and myself, I believe it was the first time anyone in the United States had explained the Al Fatah position.<sup>2</sup>

I had wanted to visit the great pyramids, but was too sick. I left for Italy the next day. At the Rome airport, I telephoned the number we had been given as a contact. A woman answered, but she spoke no English. I was able to catch enough of her meaning to understand that no one was home who could speak to me in English. Throughout the trip, we would use the offices of American Express around the world as mail drops where we would get letters from home. I went to the American Express office,

and there was a plaintive note from Fred, along with my other mail, saying he could reach no one and would be staying in his hotel room until I contacted him.

What we had run into was the vacation period in August, when most Italian workers are gone for weeks. As Americans, we had never heard of such a luxury. So we looked around Rome a bit, at the Coliseum and so forth, visited a beach and ate Italian food that was much better than that served in most “Italian” restaurants in the US. Finally, at our contact number, a man we knew as Sirio, who spoke good English, arrived home from his vacation, and we arranged to meet him. He was a leader of the Italian group, and a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

We were scheduled to go to Paris next, but we had heard of big student demonstrations that June in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. We decided that Fred would go on to Paris and I would go to Belgrade to see what I could find out about the student movement there.

I took a Yugoslav airlines flight and was surprised to see male “stewardesses” on the plane, something that was never seen on US airlines at the time. I took a taxi from the airport, and later learned that the driver charged me much more than what an average worker made in a day. There were other indications of growing inequality.

The next day I went to the University of Belgrade’s department of philosophy, which I had heard was the center of the student movement. Classes hadn’t started, so there were few students. I came across a student leader. He spoke English. He gathered a group of activists, including a woman who spoke English, and we went to a student lounge for a discussion over thick, sweet, black Turkish coffee and plum brandy.

I found out that the student movement had begun in December 1966 over the issue that was propelling student activism worldwide — Vietnam. A demonstration was planned to march from the campus to the US library. But the cops intervened, and there was a battle. “This was the first time we realized what the true nature of the police is,” one of the students said. “We saw that our police is not a true militia, the armed people, but a repressive force.”

“And,” said the woman, “we saw them protecting American imperialism.”

There were other student actions in 1967 and early 1968, in solidarity with West German students and with Polish students demanding democracy. In June, cops attacked thousands of students trying to get into an outdoor show, and many were hurt. The students regrouped the next day, and decided to occupy the university.

Some 24,000 participated. Action Committees to organize the occupation were elected in each department, as well as a Central Action Committee. The demands of the students soon escalated to take up social questions the country faced. Meeting in an assembly, the students renamed the university the “Red University of Karl Marx”

and put forward the slogan of “down with the red bourgeoisie!” By the latter the students were referring to the privileged bureaucracy that ruled the country, although not as brutally as in the other East European countries.

They called for the reduction of the growing inequality, and the end of special privileges. Capitalist enterprises, which were growing in number, should be nationalized. They called for replacing bureaucratic structures by self-management at all levels of society. All social and political organizations, including the Yugoslav League of Communists, should immediately adopt internal democratic reforms, and there should be democratization of the public means of communication. Decisive steps must be taken, they said, to prevent or roll back the tendency for social property to become the property of stockholders.

A student summed up, “What we are for is self-management of the whole economy, a centrally planned, socialist society with the whole working class participating in planning the economy through a ‘parliament of workers’ representatives.’

“The state apparatus would be subordinate to this workers’ parliament, and this is how the state would begin to wither away.”<sup>3</sup>

The idea of the “Red University,” in which students fight to turn the universities into centers for political action in the society as a whole, began with these Belgrade students and the French students. This concept was to arise in many student struggles throughout the world, including in the United States in the great student strike against the war in 1970.

The publication of this interview in *The Militant* was another coup for us.

When I flew back to Paris, I called Ray Sparrow, the SWP representative to the United Secretariat, who was in Brussels, Belgium, and he told me how to get in touch with Fred. Fred took me to a restaurant he had found, and introduced me to the “greatest beef dish you have ever eaten,” *boeuf bourguignon*, or beef burgundy. I later learned how to cook it from Julia Child’s book.

Most of the French comrades were also on vacation, and we didn’t have much to do in Paris. Pierre Frank, one of the leaders of the French Trotskyists and of the Fourth International, along with his wife and others, took us out for a real French meal, a many-course affair. I became hooked on French food.

We then went to Brussels to meet Ray Sparrow and his wife Gloria. They lived just off the *Grand Place*, a spectacular square surrounded by the old feudal guild houses and a palace, all with gold leaf on their ornaments, illuminated at night. Jeanette Habel, who had come back from Japan and was in Brussels on JCR business with Ray, took me to another great French restaurant near the *Grand Place*. It was magnificent. I was becoming aware of what an American hick I was.

We gave a report on our trip to a meeting of the United Secretariat, held in a small dank apartment in Brussels, and then flew to Frankfurt, West Germany, to attend a conference of the SDS, the German Socialist Student Union. The conference was held at Goethe University, and there were hundreds in attendance.

Fred got to speak to the conference. I wrote, "Halstead explained to the conference that the central purpose of our world trip was to go to Saigon to talk to US soldiers there about the Socialist Workers antiwar campaign. He pointed to the importance of spreading revolutionary and antiwar ideas within the US Army, and called upon the German socialist students to aid in this effort among the US troops stationed in Germany.

"Strong applause greeted Halstead's appeal to the students to help promote antiwar sentiment in the US Army rather than simply urging individual soldiers to desert, indicating a shift in opinion among many of the German students, who have been engaged in the desertion campaign."<sup>4</sup>

We also met some GIs who came to the conference. They told me about a rock concert that was to be held the next night, that a lot of US soldiers would go to. I went with them to that concert, and all of us passed out Fred's brochure addressed to the soldiers.

We also met Lothar Boepel, who was the main leader of the German FI group at that time. He was a young man, full of energy, who put out the group's paper *Was Tun?* (What Is To Be Done?) and distributed it to the various cities himself. I invited him to come to the YSA convention scheduled for later that fall, which he did. I also talked to him about the need to build a team of leaders so that everything wouldn't fall on his shoulders.

Before we flew back to the US we stopped off in London, where Halstead spoke to a public meeting organized by the International Marxist Group. There we met Ernest Tate and Jess Mackenzie. Ernie was a Canadian, originally from Ireland, who had worked with the early YSA in New York. Jess had originally come from Scotland. They had been "loaned" to the IMG by the Canadian section of the FI to help strengthen the British group.

We also met an old former SWP leader, Sam Gordon, who had been in Europe in the 1940s to work with the Fourth International. Sam fell in love with an English woman, Millie, and they got married. She and Sam stayed in London. He used to write a column for *The Militant* called "Letter from London." Asher and Ruth Harer, SWP members from San Francisco, also were in London, and joined us for a time.

When we arrived back at Kennedy airport in New York, a customs official found revolutionary literature we had picked up on our trip in my luggage. One thing

especially caught his eye, copies of *Was Tun?* with a front-page drawing of Lenin. This was a reproduction of a poster popular in Prague after the Soviet invasion, showing Lenin with tears running out of his eyes — a comment on the anti-socialist character of that invasion. The official saw only that it was of Lenin. We were taken to a room, and held for some time as the officials photocopied everything we had, before they finally let us back into the good ol' USA, the center of the "Free World." This was the first of many problems I had with US immigration and customs over the years.

Shortly after Fred and I got back from our trip, there was another important international development. Hundreds of students in Mexico City's "Plaza of Three Cultures" were massacred on October 2. Students had been on strike since July 26, and there had been clashes with the military security police and the army. The military had occupied the university but the students were winning popular support.

On that day, without warning, armed men opened up with automatic gunfire from all sides on the peaceful rally of thousands of students. It was clear that the central government of President Díaz Ordaz had ordered the attack in order to suppress the students before the Olympics, which were to be held in Mexico City.

It wasn't until years later that the full truth about the massacre became known. But while the attack was a severe blow to the student and popular movement, it also reverberated back on the government, discrediting it in the eyes of many, and was the beginning of the weakening of the dictatorial one-party regime in Mexico.

At the Olympics, two American Black athletes echoed Muhammad Ali's stand. They had won medals, and at the award ceremony gave the Black power salute, raised fists, as the "Star Spangled Banner" was playing. This was televised internationally, much to the displeasure of Washington and racists in the United States.

While Fred and I had been on our trip, a police riot took place at the Democratic Party convention in Chicago in August, 1968, ordered by the corrupt and notoriously racist Democratic Mayor Richard Daley. Thousands had gathered outside the convention. Some were there to protest the war. Others, especially from the disintegrating SDS, thought they could provoke an uprising. Some wanted the Democrats to nominate a "peace" candidate. The SWP and YSA participated with antiwar banners.

The police attack was televised throughout the world. The police violence was answered by a massive march of 25,000 Chicagoans on September 28, the broadest antiwar rally yet held in that city. A pro-Daley march the next day had only 78 people marching to a rally of some 300.

The Democrats rebuffed their "dove" wing and nominated Johnson's Vice President, Hubert Humphrey, who was staunchly for the war.

Meanwhile SDS was collapsing, splitting into warring groups. One group, the Weathermen, called for a street battle with the cops on October 11, 1968, in Chicago. They were very open about the character of what they were planning. They said they didn't want too many people to show up, only those who were specially trained and committed to the action. "SDS is recruiting an army right now, man," its call said, "a *peoples* army, under black leadership, that's gonna fight against the pigs and *win!*" A poster they put out showed a drawing of a grimacing young man with his booted foot raised and aimed at the viewer, with the slogan "Up against the wall, ruling class!" Another slogan was, "Kick the ass of the ruling class!"<sup>5</sup> On the fateful day, they were brutally smashed by the cops. Later they would go underground, and carry out some bombings.

Clashes between the Black community and the police continued throughout the country. There was a reactionary teachers' strike in Brooklyn, New York, against demands by Black parents for control over the schools in their communities. Some teachers opposed the racist strike, including teachers who were supporters of the SWP, who crossed the racist picket lines. Jeff Mackler, an SWP member, emerged as an important leader of the left wing in the teachers' union in this struggle.

Student strikes took place throughout the year, often led by Black students, with the most important being at Columbia University in New York and at San Francisco State in California.



## 34. FARRELL DOBBS AND THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE

I'm not sure if it was before or just after the world trip that the PC made the decision that Caroline Lund and I would go to Brussels, and I would replace Ray Sparrow as the SWP representative to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. I remained a member of the Political Committee while in Brussels, although no longer involved in the day to day work of the committee.

Before I begin to discuss my work in these new circumstances, it would be useful to step back and explain what the Political Committee and National Committee were like from 1962 to 1968. I was a member of both bodies, first as the YSA representative and then as a regular member. The central leader was Farrell Dobbs, who was the National Secretary.

He became National Secretary after James P. Cannon, the founding central leader of the current that became the SWP, retired from the post and moved to Los Angeles in 1953. Cannon then became the party's National Chairman, and remained on the NC.

Around this time Murry and Myra Weiss had moved from Los Angeles, where they had been party leaders in the branch, to New York, and Tom Kerry became the Los Angeles branch organizer. Murry and Myra were on the PC and NC when I was first elected to it by the YSA National Executive Committee.

Tom Kerry later was brought into New York to be on the PC, and was still a member of it in 1962. Bringing Tom to the center was Farrell's idea, as he gradually put together a stronger team. Tom became the party's National Organization Secretary, and he and Farrell, as the two national officers in New York, made a division of labor. Farrell concentrated on overall leadership of the party and Tom on the party's orientation to the labor movement and other tasks.

Joe Hansen, the editor of *The Militant*, was also on the PC when I was first on it. He and Reba Hansen soon undertook to lead the effort to reunify the Fourth

International. They took a trip through Latin America, and talked to comrades there, encouraging them to join the reunification. They left for Europe after the 1963 convention to work on the new United Secretariat. They produced a mimeographed news bulletin called *World Outlook* that contained official statements of the International and articles by leaders of the International that the sections could use in their own publications.

Joe became very ill in 1965, and had to come back to the US. He told Caroline and I that he was on a stretcher in the airplane, and was surprised to see a lot of press when he was carried off after landing. It turned out the French actress Brigitte Bardot was also on the plane.

When he recovered, Joe and Reba started publishing *World Outlook* in New York, and mailing it to the sections of the FI from there. A church group, unbeknownst to us, had been putting out a publication by that name. They threatened to sue, so the name was changed to *Intercontinental Press*. The IP staff grew in the years ahead, including comrades from other sections who would stay for six months or longer. Working on IP meant learning a lot about revolutionary journalism from Joe, who was a great teacher.

Ray Sparrow replaced Joe on the United Secretariat. Ray was quite a character and a very friendly, witty and insightful conversationalist. He had been part of the SWP fraction in the seamen's union before the government took away his seaman's papers during the witch-hunt. He had various jobs on ship, including bos'n and ship's carpenter.

When the architect Frank Lloyd Wright was building the Guggenheim museum in New York, he was looking for someone to lead the carpenters in building wood molds for the reinforced concrete that made up the building's structure. The Guggenheim has no right angles, and is a long spiral that gets wider at the top.

Wright couldn't find anyone willing to take the job. Ray applied, although his only credentials were that he had been a ship's carpenter. Ray had the gift of gab, and convinced Wright to hire him. He was highly intelligent and skilled and figured out how to do the job. Ray was one of the older working class comrades I always felt close to.

Murry and Myra, whose role I have described in earlier chapters, dropped away from SWP activity in 1965.

George Weissman, who became the acting *Militant* editor in Joe's absence, was on the PC, too, as was Ed Shaw, who replaced Tom Kerry as National Organization Secretary in 1962. Clifton DeBerry, who became the party's Presidential candidate in 1964, was added. Farrell also asked George Novack, the party's leading intellectual,

who was living in Los Angeles, to come to New York to strengthen the team. Farrell took me for a ride on the Fifth Avenue bus to explain to me the importance of bringing George to New York. Two important later additions were George Breitman and Frank Lovell, who came in from Detroit. Fred Halstead was also added, as was Nat Weinstein before he moved to San Francisco to take part in the militant Local Four of the painters' union, and Harry Ring and Carl Feingold for a time.

While the central team was being built up by including these older comrades, younger leaders were being brought onto the National Committee and the PC. I was joined on the PC by Jack Barnes when he became National Chairman of the YSA in 1964. Together with Peter Camejo and Betsey Stone, we were the first layer of young people to come onto the party's leading committees.

In 1968, Lew Jones, who had been the YSA National Chairman, graduated from the youth group, and was elected to the NC and PC. By 1970, Mary-Alice Waters, Gus Horowitz, Doug Jenness, Larry Seigle, Charlie Bolduc and Joel Britton were added. These eleven people were the core of the leadership of the younger generation in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The younger generation was playing the central leadership role in the party branches by the end of the 1960s. Election of younger comrades to the National Committee lagged behind the real leadership the young members were playing in the branches. One reason for this was that there was resistance among some of the older comrades on the NC against stepping back to make room for the younger leaders.

Throughout this period Farrell was the central force in carrying through the leadership transition to the younger generation. One problem was that James P. Cannon felt he was still needed on the NC. With Cannon balking, it was harder for Dobbs to convince other long-time leaders to step down. Cannon did indeed have a range of historical experience — from the Wobblies and Socialist Party, through the Russian revolution, Communist International, the fight against Stalinism and so on — that was absolutely unique. But it was time for him to lead the way for other veterans in the transition to leadership by a much younger generation. Eventually Cannon agreed to leave the NC and become National Chairman Emeritus.

Farrell liked to quote Engels to the effect that a Marxist revolutionist had to strive to become a citizen of the world and a citizen of time. The latter, he would say, included recognizing that you were born into the time you were born into, and that couldn't be changed. It was also a fact that you were going to die. What this means for a revolutionary party which seeks to maintain itself over a period of time is the inescapable necessity of a transition in leadership to a new generation.

The youth radicalization, and the consequent recruitment of a layer of younger

leaders, made this necessity actually realizable. Without this development, there is no question but that the SWP would have died out.

The other side of the coin, Farrell would point out, is that it would be best if this transition were carried out while the older generation were still around. Then the younger generation could be trained working with the older, and not have to reinvent the wheel. A smooth transition would prevent a Young Turks rebellion that could have wreaked havoc in our small organization.

By a "citizen of time," Farrell meant more than realizing your own mortality. He meant placing yourself in the great movement of humanity revealed by history, and by anthropology, especially the history of capitalism and the workers' movement that capitalism generates. Knowing your own place in that history helps make you more realistic in intervening in the present. Knowing the historic aim of the workers' movement — socialist revolution — makes more meaningful your day to day work that is preparatory to achieving that goal. This vision has guided my own life. The Weiss group held the opinion that Farrell was not too bright, a bit of a plodder. I've heard the same view from various quarters over the years. It is true that Farrell was not the main writer of documents that presented our positions on new developments like the Cuban revolution, the rise of Black nationalism, the antiwar movement and new youth radicalization. But he played a central role in the collective thinking through of these new developments.

Farrell went to Cuba with Joe in 1960, and they came to agreement that the revolution and the Castro leadership were the genuine article, even if they developed in a way different than our theory had predicted. Joe then thought through the Cuban question in greater detail.

While Joe was our point man in the International, Farrell paid close attention to this area, too.

George Breitman and Robert DesVerney did most of the work on developing our views on the rise of Black nationalism, but it was in conjunction with the whole of the NC and PC, and in consultation with Farrell. Similarly, Tom Kerry helped develop our tactics in the antiwar movement, but Farrell was at the center of that development, too, together with the younger leaders, especially Jack Barnes and myself. Frank Lovell helped extend and deepen our work in the unions, an area where Farrell was also quite knowledgeable, to say the least.

Farrell drafted the resolutions on the political situation in the United States which were discussed in the Political Committee, and subsequently presented to the National Committee and the party's conventions in this period. Thinking through and writing such draft resolutions is not a task that can just be tossed off, as I began to learn as the

YSA National Chairman, when I took on this task for the YSA, and in subsequent years when I did this for the SWP.

The drafter of such resolutions had the benefit of all the discussions in the Political Committee and National Committee for the past period and political articles in the party press. But it also takes stepping back from day to day work, and trying to understand the domestic political situation as a whole in the international political context.

In these and subsequent years George Novack blossomed as a writer of important philosophical books. One was *The Origins of Materialism* in ancient Greece, which I wrote a long review of in *The Militant*. Other books of his defended Marxism against competing humanist philosophies, such as pragmatism and existentialism.

Fred Halstead was our main person in the antiwar movement. Harry Ring played an important role in this work in the late 1960s.

The generation represented by Halstead, Shaw and DeBerry was younger than Dobbs' but older than mine. For a period in the middle to late 1960s, these three were brought into the work of leading the party, and Dobbs consciously began to step back. He moved into *The Militant's* editorial office where I worked, while Ed Shaw worked in the national office, and together with DeBerry and Halstead formed an administrative committee of the PC.

Farrell's main strength was shown in assembling a team. This team worked together, and no one was a star. Farrell had authority earned through his leadership, but neither he nor anyone else on the PC or NC dominated discussion. Leadership discussions were discussions among people with different strengths and weaknesses, but discussions among equals. No one was humiliated or put down. The rule was to encourage everyone to do the best they could, not to discourage. Farrell also was a kind of watchdog over our program, together with Tom. This helped us keep our Marxist bearings as we navigated new waters.

It was under the Dobbs-Kerry leadership that we not only made new political conquests, but built the YSA into the strongest socialist youth organization in the country, and brought a whole new levy of youth into the SWP.

Farrell was able to play this role because of his political and moral leadership. He was absolutely incorruptible. He never had an exaggerated view of himself, and was able to learn from others and encourage them to make contributions. He wasn't jealous of Joe Hansen or George Breitman or George Novack for making the contributions they did — he was proud to be their supporter and collaborator. He didn't seethe with resentment when something didn't go his way.

Bringing this team together and making it function as a thinking machine was no

small task. These were all very independent-minded people. Someone like George Breitman could be downright cantankerous. On the NC were other similar strong-willed people, like Larry Trainor in Boston and Nat Weinstein in San Francisco. This team was not a collection of friends or a mutual admiration society. They were not hand raisers or blind followers.

Farrell Dobbs, together with James Cannon, Tom Kerry and the other party leaders of Farrell's generation, including Larry Trainor who was especially important in my life, kept the party together through the difficult days of the witch-hunt. The Dobbs team was able to recruit a new layer of young people as that became possible beginning in the mid-1950s, and especially in the 1960s. They were able to educate us, and give us room to develop and demonstrate our own leadership capabilities, and to gradually take over the reins. The transition in leadership became complete in the early 1970s.<sup>§</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> There are lessons in the way Farrell handled the Weiss group. This grouping, which had a considerable following in the party, was contemptuous of the Dobbs-Kerry team. A real mutual admiration society, they thought they could do better. Of course many of them had important talents, beginning with Myra and Murry. Some were not so talented but thought they were, and found solace in the group.

Dobbs welcomed every contribution any of them made. When Murry and Myra came to New York, he asked Murry to become editor of *The Militant* and Myra to become a writer on the paper. When Murry and Myra left, those of their group who decided to stay and contribute were encouraged. An example was Fred Halstead, who played a major role for the party.

I had my own experiences with Farrell's attitude. One I've already recalled in Chapter Five, concerning the Weiss people on the YSA National Executive Committee, after I was elected YSA National Chairman in 1962. Another was how Farrell advised me to relate to Murry while I was in the YSA. Murry had had a severe stroke in 1960. He made a supreme effort to recover and regain his faculties. When he recovered enough, Farrell and Murry had a long discussion about collaboration, according to notes by Dobbs for a book he intended to write.

I had always enjoyed Farrell's willingness to sit down with me to discuss YSA problems when I was its National Chairman. From time to time, Farrell would have to go out of town, and after Murry had sufficiently recovered, on those occasions he asked Murry to become acting National Secretary. He told me to deal with Murry exactly as I had done with him, which I did, and I found Murry to be helpful and thoughtful.

Some in the party didn't agree with Farrell's approach to the Weiss grouping, as I indicated in Chapter Five. But there is no doubt in my mind that Farrell was right. He put the interests of the party above his personal interests as the target of the Weiss group's scorn. This was an important lesson for me, which I tried to live up to.

Another aspect of the Weiss group was that they tried to cover themselves with the mantle of Cannon, taking advantage of conflicts between Cannon and Dobbs that developed during the 1950s. Notes by Dobbs for the book he was planning on the history of the SWP indicate there were some differences between the two leaders in the early 1950s, not mainly over basic

political line, but organizational questions. Dobbs never wrote this book before he died, which is a pity, because if he had, important gaps in the party's history would have been filled. In Volume Two I will go into why he did not write this book.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Cannon and Dobbs were the most respected leaders of the party. Cannon had been a prominent figure in the IWW and the Socialist Party of Debs. When the Socialist Party split after the Russian revolution, he helped the left wing through some difficult days, and helped found the Communist Party. He was a leader of the new CP, and was a delegate to the Communist International.

Cannon had been the founding leader of the movement when he and a handful of others were expelled from the Communist Party for "Trotskyism" in 1928. He was the central leader of the party subsequently until 1953.

The respect for Dobbs grew out of his leadership role as a young man in the Minneapolis Teamster battles in 1934, and his subsequent leading role in the drive to organize the over-the-road truck drivers into the Teamsters, transforming it into a powerful union. After the approach of the Second World War made it impossible for Dobbs to continue his leadership role in the Teamsters, he became part of the national party leadership as National Labor Secretary.

Dobbs became the party's first Presidential candidate in 1948. In recognition of his leadership accomplishments, the party elected him to be National Chairman, while Cannon was National Secretary. In 1953, the two switched titles, with Farrell taking over the central executive post in New York, and Cannon moving to Los Angeles.

Cannon had not retired when he left New York for Los Angeles in 1953. And of course, he was under no obligation to "retire." But he did not give Farrell the support I am convinced Farrell richly earned in his job as chief executive officer of the party. Cannon supported some of the Weiss group's criticisms.

Cannon had been the main leader of the party through the struggle and split in 1953, especially on its international aspects. He subsequently played an important role in the reunification process in the Fourth International. He also was key to the regroupment process following the crisis in the CP in 1956. It was in 1959-60 that Joe Hansen became the party's main person in international work, and the real transition from the Cannon-Dobbs leadership

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to the Dobbs-Kerry leadership took place.

Carl Feingold was a member of the Weiss group, but his main allegiance was to Cannon. Cannon wanted Feingold to become the next National Organization Secretary, according to Dobbs' notes. The reader will recall Feingold's maneuver at the 1961-62 YSA convention to try to get Jack Barnes elected YSA National Chairman instead of myself, when the Weiss group's choice, Arthur Felberbaum, was disqualified because of age. Jack rejected the proposal.

What Feingold was trying to do was put someone in the post he thought he could influence because of his past connection with Jack at Carleton College. Similarly, Cannon was trying to get someone in the post of party National Organization Secretary whom he thought he could influence, as a stepping stone to Feingold replacing Dobbs as National Secretary when it became time for Farrell to step down from the post.

But the June 1962 meeting of the National Committee, which I attended, elected Ed Shaw National Organization Secretary.

Ed Shaw was an unassuming but very intelligent person. He was recruited as a sailor, and worked in other industrial jobs. He became a leader of the party's work in the Midwest in support of the Cuban Revolution. He used to fly from city to city in a small airplane he piloted, to speak and help organize this work. He was hauled before the witch-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee, but they got nowhere with him as he made them look foolish with his sharp wit.

What I experienced in the early 1960s were attempts by Cannon to establish what amounted to a dual center in Los Angeles that challenged the authority of the Political Committee in New York.

One aspect of this was holding frequent meetings of the NC members residing in L. A. to discuss and adopt positions on national political questions and then using this leverage in the party as a whole. Later, these meetings included NC members from the San Francisco Bay Area as well.

What was involved was not comrades with opposing political views to the majority of the party getting together in a tendency or a faction, based on a common political position. Such political formations can be helpful in clarifying political debates.

But the meetings in L.A. had no political basis. Sometimes their proposals were helpful, sometimes not, but that was not the point. These meetings undercut the authority of the center in New York and cast doubts on its capabilities.

Farrell told me, probably in 1963, that Cannon "wouldn't get his dead hand off the steering wheel." After Peter Camejo moved to Berkeley, he was invited as a member of the NC to one of these meetings in Los Angeles.

Peter told the meeting why he didn't think it was right to have these meetings of a geographical subset of the National Committee. He said he was leaving the meeting, and wouldn't attend future ones. This put a stop to the practice.



## 35. BRUSSELS

After the September 1968 party convention I moved to Brussels to be the SWP's representative to the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. I left on Thanksgiving evening on Icelandic airlines, the cheapest way to get to Europe. The airline didn't yet have jets, but jet-driven propeller engines. We stopped in Keflavik airport outside of Iceland's capital city of Reykjavik. The airplane was packed, as usual, and the passengers sat crammed into narrow seats. So it was a long and arduous journey. But it was a typical route to Europe in those days for budget travellers like us.

We were supposed to go on to Luxembourg, where I would catch a train to Brussels, but Luxembourg was fogged in, so we went to Cologne, Germany, instead. Lugging a huge suitcase and another large bag with suits, jackets and coats, I made my way to the train station, where I caught the next train to Brussels. I walked from Central Station to Ray and Gloria Sparrow's apartment near the center of the city. I was exhausted and hungry. The trip had taken 24 hours from the time I left my parents' house in New Jersey. Ray took me around the corner to Chez Leon, a famous Brussels restaurant, for a big pot of mussels steamed in white wine and vegetables.

My companion Caroline Lund had been financial director of the SWP Presidential campaign, and had to stay behind to finish up financial reports to the government. She arrived a few weeks later.

Ray and Gloria had a son, David, who was five years old. I was amazed that he was becoming bilingual, learning French at school and from his playmates, as well as English at home. Childhood is the best time to learn languages, and I remember his excellent French accent. Twenty years later I knew him in the San Francisco Bay Area, and he had forgotten all his French, even the memory that he was once learning it.

Ray had come to Europe to replace Joe Hansen after Joe had gotten sick in 1965. But Ray had agreed to stay for only for a few years. He and Gloria were anxious to get back, and I wasn't given much time for a transition. Their apartment, which would

soon become ours, was right above that of Jean and Doudou Nuyens, who were members of the Belgian section of the Fourth International. They owned the apartment that Caroline and I would be staying in.

The next morning Ray and I embarked on a long journey — to nearby England — again by the budget route. First we took a train to Belgium, and then a ferry to Dover, England. From there we took a train to London. One of Ray's main assignments on the United Secretariat was to keep in touch with the British group.

At the time of the reunification of the Fourth International in 1963, the Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy, was the largest of the Trotskyist groups in Britain. Since the SLL rejected the reunification, the new United Secretariat worked with two small groups that had supported the International Secretariat at the time of the 1953 split.

One of these, led by Ted Grant, would become the Militant Group, after the name of its publication. Years later it grew quite a bit, but it had moved away from the International. The other group became the International Marxist Group, with ties to the Fourth International. It was the IMG that Ernie Tate and Jess Mackenzie joined and helped build, and that Ray worked with. I got to meet some of the main leaders of the IMG on this trip.

In October, before I arrived, the Vietnam Solidarity Committee, which was a broad-based antiwar group, had organized a demonstration of 100,000 against the war in London, the largest demonstration in the history of Britain up to that time. The VSC had been set up with the help of the IMG and the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. This Foundation also organized a war crimes trial of the US.

The most well-known leader of the VSC from the IMG was Tariq Ali. Tariq was from a prosperous family in Pakistan, and became well-known as a student at Oxford University where he was president of the debating society. He had once spoken with Malcolm X at Oxford during one of Malcolm's international trips.

A few days before the huge demonstration one of the major British daily newspapers tried, to no avail, to put the kibosh on the action by printing pictures of three "reds" on the front page. The three evil subversives behind the VSC were members of the IMG, including Tariq. The great actress Vanessa Redgrave also supported the march. (Later, however, she rejected the IMG and joined the Socialist Labour League.)

Soon after our return from London Ray, Gloria and David went home to the Bay Area. So I was on my own. One of my first political activities was to debate a representative of the US embassy in Belgium at the university in Ghent. At the time, the Belgian section was part of a left split-off from the Socialist Party. The youth section of the SP, called the Young Socialist Guards, had been won over to the

Trotskyists. It was they who had set up the debate at the university, together with other groups.

Ghent is in the Flemish-speaking part of Belgium. Flemish is a dialect of Dutch. I found the Flemish-speakers, especially students, generally fluent in English, in contrast to those in the French-speaking part of Belgium. We debated in English, without translation. There were hundreds of students present. Most were against the war, and the rationalizations of the embassy spokesman, who was about my age, sounded as false to them as they did to American students at the teach-ins three years before.

Caroline soon came over, and we set up our household. We became friends with Jean and Doudou Nuyens, our downstairs landlords. However, it was difficult to become socially involved with other members of the Belgian group. For security reasons, we did not join the group, as we didn't want the authorities to accuse us of interfering in Belgian affairs and deport us. Thus we had no direct contact with the Belgian group. We were somewhat isolated.

Another depressing aspect about our first months in Brussels was that the sun didn't come out even once from the time I arrived in late November until March. That is how I remember it, at least.

Both Flemish and French were official languages in Belgium — Flemish in the region known as Flanders, and French in Walloon. Brussels was considered a special third area, with both languages in use. Actually, however, most transactions in Brussels were conducted in French.

I knew no French at all. Caroline had learned some by reading her sister's French textbook in high school. So we started going to Berlitz to learn French. Caroline made swift progress, but I found it more difficult. We had to learn the numbers first, in order to shop.

We were living in the center of town and there were a lot of good restaurants, although we usually ate at home. Having some time on my hands, I started to learn French cooking, using the famous book by Julia Child. The food stores were excellent. We found a good wine shop, and a bakery that sold some of the best bread I've ever had. My friends have told me that I became a good cook.

We were near the *Grand Place*, and could see some of the gold-leafed decorations of its buildings from our windows which overlooked surrounding roofs. Nearby and visible below from one of our windows was the dance studio of Maurice Bejart, Belgium's most famous choreographer. We could hear the music as the dancers practiced. Once during our stay there we heard the strains of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring," and the tramp of the dancers' feet in some of the most rhythmical parts. We bought tickets to the performance.

Jean and Doudou had become close to Ray and Gloria, so it was natural for us to get to know them. Doudou was the editor of *La Gauche* (The Left), the paper of the left socialist party, and she and Jean worked hard to put it out. They both spoke English. They were quite angry with the section, explaining that the left socialists had dwindled to a shell, little more than the section. They thought that the section should have fought harder to win them over to the full revolutionary socialist program immediately after the split with the SP, and thought they could have won many people if they did. We got the impression that Ray had encouraged them in this view, which did indeed reflect the views of the American SWP.

We had little social contact with Ernest and Gisela Mandel, although I would meet with Ernest and Pierre Frank once a month as part of my assignment. An exception was a New Years Eve party at the Mandels' house, with Jean and Doudou.

The once a month meetings with Ernest and Pierre were meetings of a subcommittee of the United Secretariat called the Bureau, which would help prepare the agendas for the meetings of the United Secretariat. Livio Maitan, from Italy, would also attend some of these meetings of the Bureau.

The SWP wasn't formally a member of the Fourth International, because of witch-hunting laws in the US. So, we did not pay dues to the FI. We did, however, contribute substantially to the work of the International in various ways. All of the costs of SWP members in carrying out work with the International, including travel and living expenses were picked up by the SWP. We also paid for the production of *Intercontinental Press*, which Joe Hansen edited in New York. We also helped Ernest Mandel and other individuals who needed assistance.

Every month Caroline and I would travel to Paris to visit Peng Shu-tse and Chen Pi-lan. Shu-tse had been a founding member and central leader of the new Chinese Communist Party after the Russian revolution. Pi-lan was a leader of the CP's work among women. They would enthrall us with their stories of the tumultuous development of the class struggle in the 1920s, which culminated in the defeated revolution of 1925-27.

The defeat was not inevitable. The Communist International under Stalin had proposed and foisted on the relatively young Chinese party a disastrous policy of subordination to the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek. As a result, the party was not prepared when the Nationalists turned on them. The Nationalists were able to crush the revolution in blood, killing millions of workers. Trotsky had fought against Stalin's course, and when the leaders of the Chinese party learned of Trotsky's position, many of them became supporters of Trotsky, including Peng Shu-tse and Chen Pi-lan. The Chinese Trotskyists were able to survive in the cities as underground workers'

organizers.

When Mao Zedong's peasant armies defeated the Nationalists in 1959 and opened the Chinese revolution, Shu-tse and Pi-lan were in great danger from the Maoists, because they were well-known supporters of Trotsky. They were forced to flee.

They eventually found their way to Europe. They suffered a great deal, surviving by taking in laundry and sewing. It was a scandal that none of the Trotskyist groups came to their aid. One reason Caroline and I would make sure to visit them each month was to help them out. Another young member of the SWP, David, was living in Paris learning French at the time, and he was a great help to the Chinese couple. A big treat for Caroline and me during our visits were the wonderful meals Pi-lan would cook. This was real Chinese food.

Shu-tse and Pi-lan spoke English with heavy accents. We soon learned to understand them, however, and this skill in listening for the words under unfamiliar accents helped me many times in the ensuing years as I met people from many different countries who spoke English with strong accents.

In December 1968 or January 1969, Caroline and I drove down to Paris with Gisela Mandel to attend a meeting of the young French leadership. After the JCR was outlawed, they took on a new name for legal reasons, the Communist League. But more was involved than a simple change in the name. The section of the Fourth International was called the Internationalist Communist Party, or PCI for its French initials. It had about 150 members, and had been eclipsed by the JCR in the May-June events.

Some of the young leaders of the JCR who were also becoming leaders of the PCI were highly critical of the PCI membership, accusing them of "not showing up" during the upheaval. Some were even hard on the old-timer Pierre Frank. Ray Sparrow tried to calm down these Young Turks, and largely succeeded.

However, the JCR had grown in size and reputation, and would soon surpass 2,000 members. So the PCI and JCR decided to merge to form the Communist League. The subject of the discussion we attended was whether the CL would become the new section of the FI. I remember that Daniel Bensaïd, who did not come from the Trotskyist tradition but was a central leader of the CL, had strong doubts about the usefulness of taking this step. But the CL did decide to join the FI a short time later.

After the meeting, which went late into the night, a group of young leaders of the CL, including Jeanette Habel, took Caroline and me out for a late-night meal and conversation in the famous market area known as *Les Halles*. There we had French onion soup for the first time, at three in the morning, with cheese, bread and wine. Unfortunately, the *Les Halles* market no longer exists.

Driving with Gisela was wild. She had a tiny car, I believe it was a memorable Citroen 2CV (“deux chevaux”), but she went quite fast on the winding back roads, in spite of the winter ice. I was terrified.

On the trip she also told us something of her life. She was German, and remembered the fire-bombing of Dresden during World War II (another war crime committed by the US and its allies). The bombing created a fire-storm that engulfed the whole city, killing tens of thousands. Gisela was ten years old. She and her parents were in a train that happened to pull into the Dresden station when the bombing began. Panic ensued as the passengers realized that the train station was a likely target, and she became separated from her parents.

She survived, and was brought up in East Germany. Somehow she made contact with the SDS in West Germany, and met Ernest Mandel when he spoke at an SDS meeting.

Our relations with the French comrades had become much closer as a result of the enthusiastic support we gave them during the May-June events. But these relations cooled as the result of a dispute that soon broke out in the International.

## 36. THE 1969 WORLD CONGRESS

As I flew over to Brussels in late November, I carried an article by Joe Hansen for the International discussion bulletin. Joe's article presented the position of the SWP leadership on a resolution that was being proposed for adoption by the International at its next World Congress, scheduled for the spring of 1969.

The resolution was drafted by the European leaders and Bolivian and Argentine Trotskyists. It proposed that groups supporting the Fourth International in Latin America begin preparing for, or begin engaging in, rural guerrilla war throughout the continent for an extended period.

This strategy was derived from an analysis of the explosive situation in Latin America following the victory of the Cuban revolution. It predicted that most of the countries of the continent, under ruthless military dictatorships, would be able to effectively outlaw dissent, except for protests directly backed by armed guerrillas. The rise of what was termed a "classical" mass movement, successfully challenging a dictatorial regime on the streets, in the rural areas, and in the factories was all but precluded. Any such movement, the resolution said, was sure to be mercilessly suppressed from the start. It also indicated that Latin American peasants now had socialist consciousness as a result of the Cuban revolution. (This was not true even of the workers, much less the land-starved peasants.)

In this situation, it concluded, the only way to fight back and win was to launch rural guerrilla warfare, even if only a handful of fighters were available for this task. The technical preparation for or opening of guerrilla fronts was the central task that lay before Trotskyists in Latin America.

Part of the pressure to adopt this course came from young revolutionists in Latin America who wanted to emulate the Cuban victory. Identification with armed struggles in Latin America ran high among youth who had been won to the Fourth International in the course of the worldwide youth radicalization, particularly reinforced by street battles with the cops in France, Italy, and Germany. Many of these young people, buoyed by the great success of the French comrades in the 1968 upsurge, were impatient

for the International to make a breakthrough and take power in some country, or at least be seen as leading a major guerrilla force, which could demonstrate the leadership and combat capacities of the Fourth International to revolutionary youth in Europe and elsewhere.

This hope was most clearly expressed in a separate article by Livio Maitan, one of the main leaders of this turn. He claimed that the country where the breakthrough for the Fourth International would be made was Bolivia.

This line of starting guerrilla warfare in Latin America with even very small forces had been promoted by the Cuban leadership for a decade. They differentiated themselves from the reformist positions of the Latin American CPs that followed Moscow by counterposing “armed struggle,” by which they meant guerrilla war, to peaceful coexistence and the election of liberal or mildly reformist governments.

This was an oversimplification of the Cuban revolution itself. Guerrilla war had played a key role in the Cuban victory, but the July 26 movement was much more than the guerrillas. It had underground organizations in the cities. It had grown out of a political struggle that gained mass support against the dictatorship. And after the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship, it was the mobilization of the masses in the cities and countryside that overthrew landlordism, imperialist domination, and capitalism and established a workers’ state.

The Cubans campaigned to win over the Stalinized Communist Parties in Latin America, which they gambled would come over to the side of the revolution once the “armed struggle” was launched. This ignored the complexities of winning over the mass base of these parties through united front tactics of struggle, and underestimated the treachery of most of the leaderships.

Throughout the 1960s, idealistic and heroic young people in many countries in Latin America sought to carry out this strategy. In the battle between the Stalinists and the Castroists, we supported the revolutionary line of armed struggle. But the fight with the CPs went far deeper. In this fight, the Stalinists took the position — opportunistically, it is true — that a Leninist party had to be built with the support of the masses. But what they said on the surface made sense to many, especially as the guerrilla efforts made little progress and put down few roots in most countries. The Castroists were pushed into small minorities. The result was defeat after defeat in the attempt to wage guerrilla war.

A key defeat was the attempt by Che Guevara in Bolivia to import a small force from the outside and simply start a guerrilla campaign without sufficient preparation and close enough attention to the complex political situation in the country. A brutal rightist dictatorship was in power, but the situation was alive with developing, but



still modest at that point, revolutionary possibilities. An element in Che's defeat was the betrayal of his guerrilla force by the much larger Bolivian CP, which turned its back on Che and his band, ensuring their isolation. Those in the CP who supported Che had to break away as a small minority.

Che was a great revolutionist, a superb human being, and made real contributions to Marxism in word and deed. He was also a proven master of guerrilla war. So his defeat in 1967 was an important test of the Cuban line. After 1967, the Cubans began to reduce their emphasis on guerrilla warfare. But the Fourth International headed in the opposite direction.

Hansen's article did not reject guerrilla war at all times and in all places. He acknowledged that history had shown that guerrilla warfare as part of a peasant movement against a repressive regime could be a useful tactic if the conditions were right, as part of an overall strategy of building up a revolutionary party with roots in the working class. (Later, guerrilla warfare forged the leadership of the Nicaraguan revolution, while an urban insurrection brought a revolutionary victory on the Caribbean island of Grenada.) But the attempt to impose the strategic orientation of rural guerrilla war on a continental scale for an extended period meant ignoring the crucial problem of tactics geared to the specific stage of the class struggle in a each country, the size of the forces available and their degree of implantation in the workers and peasants movements.

This dispute in the International over Latin America became intertwined with other differences.

The SWP leadership had been asked to write draft resolutions for the World Congress on the Cultural Revolution in China and the worldwide radicalization of the youth. On China, the majority of the European leaders in the United Secretariat now agreed with us that a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucratic regime would be necessary, an idea they had formerly opposed. Livio Maitan joked that Mao himself had come to this position in the Cultural Revolution. Livio's joke — which assumed that Mao's call for an army-backed "revolution" against rival factions in the bureaucracy, meant that Mao was now an advocate of antibureaucratic political revolution — was a harbinger. We really didn't have much agreement. Our draft was amended by the majority to the point where the draft and the edited version were really counterposed resolutions.

We did have agreement in the United Secretariat on the document about the youth radicalization. It projected that the sections of the International should in the next period sink deeper roots in the massive layer of radicalizing youth, which many sections had already begun, especially in France and the United States.

In the discussions leading up to the World Congress, I represented the positions of the SWP leadership in the United Secretariat. We had requested that Caroline Lund, a member of the YSA National Committee, be seated as an observer at the United Secretariat meetings, as a representative of the YSA. There were objections raised to this, so we didn't push the point, although that meant Caroline was even more isolated. When I came back from these meetings I would give her a blow-by-blow description.

The World Congress itself was held in Rimini, Italy, on the Adriatic Sea. In the summer, Rimini became a vacation beach city, but since we were there in early spring, the Congress delegates were pretty much alone.

Caroline drove to the World Congress with Ernest and Gisela, across the Alps. Joe Hansen came over to Brussels early to meet with Hugo Moreno, one of the principal leaders of the Argentine Party, called the Revolutionary Workers Party, or PRT in its Spanish initials. The PRT had recently split. The two groups continued to call themselves the PRT, but they were distinguished by the names of their respective newspapers. One was the PRT(Combatiente) (Fighter) and the other the PRT(Verdad) (Truth). It turned out, once the dust settled, that the issue that caused the split was guerrilla war. Moreno, who led the PRT(Verdad) had been for the guerrilla war orientation as a way of joining in what had looked like a major effort of the Cubans beginning with the 1967 conference of the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) in Havana. Unfortunately, OLAS never became a real international organization and, as this became clear, Moreno began to pull back and the organization split.

Hansen showed Moreno his article critical of the turn to guerrilla war proposed by the United Secretariat majority. The three of us met in the kitchen of our apartment. Joe and Hugo did most of the talking. Hugo supported our position. We three went by train to Italy.

At the World Congress itself, a tendency was observable to transform the turn toward guerrilla war in Latin America into a deeper ultraleft turn that affected many sections in the International. The promise of a "breakthrough" in Bolivia was heady stuff for many of the young delegates, especially the French. The young French leaders, together with Livio Maitan, Hugo Moscoso of the Bolivian group and Daniel Pereyra of the Argentine PRT(Combatiente) led the charge. Even some younger delegates who had come to the conference supporting our position, including from the British International Marxist Group, were won over to the guerrilla war line.

One of those who supported our position was Peng Shu-tse. He spoke in his heavily accented English, and I translated for him into a more understandable English.

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The atmosphere was such that when the discussion on the youth radicalization took place, where we thought we had agreement, the French delegates began to speak against the resolution. The majority leaders on the United Secretariat who had previously supported it, backed off. We had hoped that in the framework of a united, decisive turn to the radicalizing youth, the debate on Latin America could remain a secondary issue and be overcome in part by common work in other areas. But by the end of the Congress, it was clear that the opposite had happened: the line on Latin America shaped the orientation for the work of the International throughout the world.

## 37. ANOTHER WORLD TRIP

Soon after the 1969 World Congress, the French Communist League launched an election campaign, with Alain Krivine as its candidate for president. I went down from Brussels to Paris to cover the windup campaign event, a meeting of 10,000 people. The spirit of the May-June 1968 events was still evident in the huge arena where the rally was held. The talks were repeatedly interrupted by revolutionary chants. A number of times the crowd would spontaneously break out singing the International, the revolutionary anthem of socialism. The highlight was the speech by Krivine, who had superb delivery and cadence, so I could understand him better than other French speakers, although I couldn't understand it all.

But my personal relations with the younger French leaders had cooled as a result of the political division that opened at the World Congress. They did arrange accommodations for me — a tiny room in a garret — but there was no social contact. Krivine did assent to an interview, and I wrote up a story on the election campaign for *The Militant*.

The SWP leadership decided that I would make another circuit around the globe, in the summer of 1969, to give our views on the World Congress to Fourth Internationalists in Asia. Caroline flew back to New York while I was on this trip.

My first stop was Bombay, India. Kolpe, whom I had met with Fred the year before, met me and I was able to talk to the leaders of the small Indian section of the FI. Kolpe, who had been at the World Congress, and the others were sympathetic to our views. But they had great respect for Ernest Mandel, Pierre Frank and Livio Maitan, leaders of the turn to guerrilla warfare. They were nervous about the possibility of a split.

In Calcutta in Bengal on the east coast of India, there was even more poverty and worse living conditions than in Bombay. I met Silan Banerjee, the leader of the group there, and we traveled around the city by taxi. I was astounded when we went around a huge traffic circle around a park, the centerpiece of which was a statue of Queen Victoria seated on her throne. There she was in all her regal splendor in the midst of

so much squalor for which the British were responsible.

Banerjee had arranged for me to speak in a small town some 40 miles from Calcutta, and we took a train. At the train station I saw people who lived on the platforms next to the tracks. The engines were steam powered, and were filled with water from overhead spouts, so there were puddles of water between the tracks. I saw people washing clothes and themselves in these puddles.

Silan insisted that I go first class, while he went third class. In dollar terms there wasn't much of a difference and the price was low. I went into third class with him, but there was no room to sit. People were packed in, many jammed together, sitting on the floor with goats and chickens. I convinced him to come into first class with me.

Along the way, at each station there would be people selling milky sweet tea in cups made of thin red clay, which were designed to be disposable.

We arrived at Shantipur station in a rural area that seemed to me like part of the Bengal jungle. It brought back memories of reading as a child about "man-eating tigers" of Bengal. I was told on our way from the train station to the town, a trip of about a mile on a road through the jungle, that indeed there were tigers there. When I got back to my hotel in Calcutta, I read in an English-language newspaper that a number of people had been killed by tigers so far that year. Most were workers on rubber tree plantations.

In the center of the town of Shantipur, there was a small city hall. As an honored guest, I signed a registration book. An old man came up to me, and greeted me as "Comrade Sheppard" in a perfect Oxford English accent. I was slowly learning some of the history of the Indian SWP, which explained the political background of this person and others I was to meet.

This history is linked to the island country of Sri Lanka (called Ceylon by the British and at this time as well), off the southern tip of India. Ceylon had also been a British colony. In the 1930s, a Trotskyist party developed in Ceylon, which became stronger than the Stalinist party. It was called the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) which roughly translates as Lanka Socialist Equality Party. The LSSP founded the union movement in Ceylon.

When World War II broke out, the LSSP, unlike the Stalinists, refused to give up the struggle for independence from Britain. The British arrested LSSP leaders, and imprisoned them in India, as they were too popular in Ceylon. But they escaped, and began to organize a Trotskyist party underground in India.

The Indian CP called off the struggle for independence for the duration of the war, but the Bolshevik-Leninists, as the Trotskyists called themselves, continued the independence struggle. They attracted militants who wouldn't go along with the CP's

stand.

They emerged from the war as an important group. In 1953, they followed the orientation of the International Secretariat wing of the Fourth International favoring entry into broader reformist parties, with the intention of remaining in them for an extended period. This orientation was one of the issues involved in the 1953 split in the International, with the International Committee being opposed to entryism *sui generis* (of a special type) that was championed by the International Secretariat.<sup>§</sup>

The “deep entry” strategy was a disaster in India. The old man I met in Shantipur was one of the casualties. I met others in Bombay, some still “deep-entered” in various small socialist parties. The Indian SWP was trying to salvage something from this debacle.

About 40 people from this small town attended the meeting I addressed. I gave,

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<sup>§</sup> A word is in order on entryism *sui generis*. Back in the early 1950s, there was real danger of war breaking out between the Western bloc of imperialist countries and the Soviet bloc, which included China at that time. The majority in the International Secretariat thought that this was inevitable.

With the outbreak of war assumed, they then theorized that the result would be that the Stalinist parties in the capitalist world would be forced to adopt a line of struggle against their own capitalist governments, in order to defend the Soviet bloc. This turn to the left would pressure the social democratic parties to turn left as well.

Since our forces were held to be too small to affect this situation, the conclusion was that we should join Stalinist or social democratic parties (depending on the concrete situation in each country) in order to prepare for this left turn, and to influence the masses who would join these parties under the conditions of war.

This orientation was also called “deep entry,” which meant that the entry would be a long-term one. In most cases, the Trotskyists would have to be virtually underground to avoid being expelled, and often there would be no public Trotskyist organization or activity. A few leaders kept up a public face through publishing magazines.

When neither the war nor the expected left turns occurred, other reasons were found to maintain the deep entryism policy. Some members were won over to the Stalinist or social-democratic parties. Others became demoralized and dropped away. As a result, instead of influencing radicalizing masses as was projected, the sections who followed this course were weakened.

Entryism in a larger party with a promising left wing has sometimes been a valid tactic, as the Trotskyists’ entry into the American Socialist Party in the 1930s showed. But it is dangerous, if the leadership is not strong enough politically to hold the cadres together or if the entry is carried on too long after the conditions which gave rise to the tactic no longer exist.

The method used to justify deep entryism was similar to the one used to justify the guerrilla turn at the Ninth World Congress. A schema of what *must* necessarily happen is created, then a general strategy is deduced from that schema, which rigidly imposes the same tactic in many countries, regardless of the actual, changing situation in each country.

with translation, a general talk about capitalism and socialism, the Vietnam war, and the situation in the United States. There was great interest and incredulity when I explained that the income gap between workers and the big capitalists in the US was greater than the same gap in India, even though the workers and peasants in India were much poorer.

The main industry in Shantipur was the mining of a very pure red clay, and using it to produce ceramics. The people at the meeting gave me a clay sculpture as a token of appreciation.

I had picked up an intestinal ailment in Bombay. (Most of the comrades there had it also). A young man in Shantipur told me to drink some coconut milk. He cut the top off a large coconut with a whack of his machete and I drank the liquid inside. This was not the ordinary type of coconut I was used to with a hard spherical shell surrounding the milk and meat, but seemed to contain liquid only.

But I was still sick when I flew south to Sri Lanka. I was met at the Colombo airport by Bala Tampoe, the leader of the section there, who whisked me through customs. He was the head of the Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU), which organized the customs workers, among many others, in the port and airport. I stayed at a kind of cabana, where I had a cabin to myself. Bala got me some antibiotics, which, along with a diet of tea, toast and scrambled eggs, cured me.

The old LSSP group, which had the leadership of much of the labor movement, had been expelled from the FI in the early 1960s. Their parliamentary group (they were strong electorally as well as in the labor movement) voted to support a left-capitalist government, and joined it as junior partners. This placed them in the position of having to justify anti-working class measures that every capitalist government must carry out.

Reversing a proud tradition they had of defending the Tamils, an oppressed minority on the island, they began to adapt to the chauvinism of their coalition partners. The dominant nationality were the Sinhalese, who were Buddhist. The Tamils, who were mainly Hindu, were from two groups. Some had settled in Sri Lanka from Tamil-Nadu in southern India centuries ago. The others were imported by the British to work the tea plantations the British established on the island. The British were having difficulty forcing Sinhalese peasants off the land and into the proletariat. The Tamils were treated as second-class citizens by the British and Sinhalese upper classes alike.

The old LSSP defended the rights of the Tamils, and organized them into unions on the tea plantations or into mixed-workforce unions elsewhere. Bala Tampoe is a Tamil.

But the LSSP swiftly moved to the right, as the logic of joining a capitalist

government dictated.

Bala Tampoe and a few others resisted the LSSP's course, and left it when it joined the government.

I attended an executive committee meeting of the CMU. When I asked if I could go to a meeting of the section, I was informed that I already had done that. It turned out that the "party" was the union executive committee! This explained a great deal about how the LSSP had been organized. It had only a few thousand members, but led the major trade unions and had a big enough electoral following to have a strong presence in the parliament. The leaders did not build the party among the rank-and-file workers it led, and Bala was carrying on that tradition.

The LSSP leaders came from the educated classes, and some from the capitalist class itself. This isn't unusual among left groups in the exploited countries of the "third world." Many of them lived lives far removed from the workers and peasants. Pierre Frank told me that once when he was visiting Sri Lanka, he was given a sumptuous dinner in a palatial house of an LSSP leader. The dinner was served on gold plates!

A strong worker base could have resisted the LSSP's derailment more effectively, or the working class cadres could have rebuilt the party. But Bala Tampoe, the recognized leader of tens of thousands of workers, with revolutionary socialist and Marxist politics, didn't have a clue about utilizing his prestige to build a real workers' party. Bala lived in a small but nice house on a small lot — better off than most, but not luxurious.

Bala had been at the World Congress, and sided with the majority largely because of loyalty to Ernest Mandel. He wasn't following the majority line in Sri Lanka, however, (i.e., moving toward organizing guerrilla warfare) and really didn't want to discuss the matter.

Bala invited me to his house for dinner, which was a very hot coconut-based curry. We were sitting in his backyard at nearly sunset, when a giant bat flew across the sky. I wondered if I was dreaming, as it looked like a Doberman Pincher dog with wings. Amused at my shock, Bala told me it was a fruit-eating bat.

Sri Lanka is very near the equator. That means the sun rises and sets all year long on nearly a twelve-hour day, twelve-hour night schedule. And when it rises it comes straight up the sky and is quite strong in an hour or two. At night it goes straight down and darkness comes quickly.

The island has a central plateau which is at a much higher altitude than the coast. Bala and I drove from Colombo, which is on the coast and tropical, up the slopes leading to the plateau. The British built their tea plantations on these slopes. The air



gradually got cooler as we climbed. On the way we stopped for some fresh bananas. I had never tasted bananas picked when they were ripe before, and they were delicious. There are many kinds of bananas on the island and before I left I sampled as many types as I could.

We passed a number of union headquarters on this drive, mostly small shacks. I was startled to see painted on them the hammer and sickle with a “4” — the symbol of the Fourth International. The LSSP-led unions kept their old symbol.

As we drove we also saw elephants picking up logs and loading them on trucks. Our destination was Kandy, the ancient capital city, up on the plateau. There the climate was a temperate summer all year round.

We went to the university in Kandy, where we met a professor who had been in the LSSP. Bala wanted me to meet this person, I believe, to help recruit him. Bala knew that he himself wasn't much of a party-builder, and hoped people like this fellow could help put out a publication that could attract people to help build a real group. I don't know if anything ever came of these efforts.

I flew from Colombo to Hong Kong. I had telephone numbers that Shu-tse and Pilan had furnished me for the comrades there. Those Trotskyists who remained in China fled to Hong Kong after the Maoist victory fearing repression. They were underground, as they were also illegal under British colonial rule of Hong Kong.

Many years later when Britain agreed to give back Hong Kong to China, the capitalist press gushed about how democratic the British rule was in Hong Kong. Actually, the British introduced a few trappings of democracy only a few years before the turnover. In 1969 the situation was different. There were no elections, no civil rights.

The British policy was to turn over Trotskyists they thought were troublesome to Peking, resulting in imprisonment or execution. Two Trotskyist leaders in Hong Kong were saved from this fate only by a local campaign, but they were deported to Macao, a small enclave held by Portugal on the south China coast not too far from Hong Kong. I took a hydrofoil speedboat from Hong Kong to Macao to visit them.

As Peng Shu-tse told me before I left, Hong Kong had all the different cuisines of China. And having Chinese comrades take me to some restaurants away from the tourist traps was a treat.

We held political discussions in places the comrades felt were secure. They generally agreed with the SWP about the discussion in the International, as they were influenced by Peng. Once, we went for a swim in the ocean and talked in the water, out from the beach so as not to be overheard. But I learned some years later that one of the comrades out in the water with me was a Maoist agent. When he got very sick

with liver cancer, he went back to China for treatment.

In Japan, the comrades were friendly, but decidedly for the majority line, with the exception of two older comrades, whom I knew as Nishi and Okatani. Like most of the far left in Japan, the younger cadres had come out of the student movement, and proved their militancy in street fighting with the police. In the next few years, they carried out more and more ultraleft actions, which resulted in many of their members being imprisoned for long terms.

The main leader of the group was known as Sakai. We became friends despite our differences, and we would go out with other comrades to different types of restaurants where we would discuss. He introduced me at a tempura shop to an older man who was the first Trotskyist in Japan, Eishi Yamanishi, a very cultured person who spoke excellent English.

Yamanishi had been in London in 1932-33 during the fascist drive to power in Germany. He was radicalized by this experience, and got hold of issues of *The Militant*. The paper was coming out twice a week campaigning against the fascist danger, with articles by Trotsky calling on the leaders of the German CP to form a fighting united front with the social democrats to smash the fascist threat in the streets. This is what won Yamanishi to Trotskyism.

He returned to Japan where he kept his mouth shut under the military regime. After the war, he was the first to translate Trotsky's works from English to Japanese, and had them published. He became well-known as the translator of the works of Norman Mailer, which gave him a living.

Yamanishi introduced me to a young man who was the president of Zengakuren during the big 1960 struggles, and was a leader of the Trotskyist group at the time, the Japan Revolutionary Communist League. He became disillusioned when the JRCL subsequently split into warring groups. We had an interesting discussion, and then played a game of Go. He wiped the board with me, even though he gave me the maximum handicap.

My next stop was Sydney, Australia. I had a stopover in Manila, where it was warm and tropical, and then flew on to Sydney. We were over a desert in Australia, when the pilot played the live radio report of the first manned moon landing over the public address system. Looking down, I could almost imagine I was looking at the moon.

I know some astronomy, and knew I was going from the northern hemisphere to the southern, where it was winter, but neglected to pack any warm clothes. Sydney is not as cold as Europe or New York in the winter, but it was chilly. I had on a thin summer suit.

I had written to Bob Gould, the only Australian who had recent contact with the Fourth International, and I was expecting him to meet me. I was looking around the airport waiting room for someone who looked like they were looking around for someone. I noticed that there was a group of hippie-ish young people who seemed to be milling around. When all the other passengers had left, I was alone with them. Finally, I walked over to a young man with a red beard and asked him if he was looking for Barry Sheppard, and he was. They thought I was CIA or something, what with my suit and short hair.

What I found was a very pleasant surprise. These young people had organized a youth group called Resistance. Resistance was in the thick of the antiwar movement in Australia.

One of the first things these young comrades did was provide me with some warm clothes.

I was invited to a conference held in their headquarters and bookshop, which were quite impressive. It wasn't just for members, but included a lot of young people around their group, and the room was packed. They gave reports on their political work. I gave a report that covered the antiwar and Black power movements in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party, the Fourth International, and the World Congress.

The main leaders of Resistance were brothers, John and Jim Percy. It was Jim Percy, with his red beard, that I had approached at the airport. The Percy brothers were in a group called the International Marxist League, along with Gould. The Percy brothers were attracted to the SWP's party-building perspective, and had been in a struggle with Gould over the direction of the group. In a private meeting, they asked me to intercede, backing them against Gould. I told them that as I had just gotten to know them and Gould, I thought it would be wrong for me to do that. I explained that experience had made the SWP very wary of jumping into internal disputes among groups in other countries. They were disappointed, but knew I agreed with them on the necessity of building a party in Australia.

The result was the beginning of a close relationship between the American SWP and the party they went on to build. They had to break with Gould to do it.

In Brussels, the Bureau was also in contact with a person in Wellington, New Zealand by the name of Hector MacNiell. I had thought that Australia and New Zealand were pretty close, but found they are 1,500 miles apart when I flew to Wellington. I stayed with Hector and his wife in their small home. I remember that they had a whole bowl of butter on their table, and we ate a lot of lamb, both of which were cheap in New Zealand.

As in Australia, I found that Hector had a group of youth around him interested in socialism. This wasn't as big a group as in Australia, but they were campus leaders involved in the antiwar movement. I encouraged them to go in the direction of building an organization. The main young leaders I met were the Fyson brothers, George and Hugh. They did go on to build an organization, and had to break with MacNiell to do it. As was the case with the Australians, the New Zealand group developed close ties with the American SWP in the years following my trip. They would jokingly refer to me as the "father" of their group.

I flew back to Sydney for more discussions, and then headed back to the United States. At the immigration station, they were routinely checking the names of all passengers in a fat book. When they got to me, they evidently found me listed. I was hauled into a small room, all my belongings and papers were searched, and the papers were copied.

I stayed in New York for the SWP convention, held in early September. I gave a report on the international political situation and the discussion that had begun in the Fourth International. After the convention, Caroline and I flew back to Brussels.

## 38. GROWTH AS THE RADICALIZATION DEEPENS

While Caroline and I were in Europe in 1969 our main contact with what was happening back in the United States was *The Militant*.

In the spring of 1968 student strikes at Columbia and San Francisco State, led by Black students with the support of the student body as a whole, marked a step forward for the student movement. Both struggles saw massive police violence designed to break up student demonstrations and occupations of campus buildings but the police attacks only spurred on student resistance.

These strikes demanded that Black studies departments be established, and that the racist curriculum be revised to include the real history of Blacks in America. The students also demanded ending the schools' complicity with the war machine, abolishing the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and barring CIA recruiting on campus.

The SF State strike lasted into 1969. An interesting feature of that struggle was the inspiration the students' strike gave to teachers, who struck for union recognition. The administration got a court order barring the teachers' strike, which was followed by a brutal police attack on the teachers.

The spring of 1969 saw a wave of student strikes and occupations sweep the country, with many of the same demands and features as at Columbia and SF State, including the leadership of Black students. These too were met with police and sometimes National Guard repression.

The upsurge spread to the high schools. In Los Angeles thousands of Black and Chicano high school students challenged racism in the school system. In New York, 4,000 marched on the offices of Governor Rockefeller demanding that cuts to the education budget be undone.

These student actions represented a challenge to the institutions of bourgeois education. The students had moved from passive acceptance of the way higher

education was run to demanding a voice in decisions. The political issues revolved around Black rights and the fight against the war, the key issues fueling the radicalization of the youth. The concept of the “Red University” in the form of the “Antiwar University” and schools fighting racism was beginning to become a reality.

Republican Richard Nixon had been elected President in 1968 against the pro-war Democrat Hubert Humphrey, and replaced the discredited Johnson administration. Nixon’s promises that he would bring peace through the negotiations in Paris with North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front, and his token withdrawals of US troops, were soon recognized as nothing but an attempt to buy time for the continuation of the war. Antiwar sentiment among young people and the population as a whole — and in the army in Vietnam — was growing. As a result, the Student Mobilization Committee took on new life, reviving on campuses and high schools where it already existed and spreading to new ones.

The SMC was key to building actions called for April 6, 1969, which were led by contingents of active-duty GIs. To make it easier for GIs to participate, the marches did not include any civil disobedience or confrontations. The largest march, of 100,000 people, took place in New York. There were 50,000 in San Francisco, 30,000 in Chicago, and 6,500 in Los Angeles. The movement gained a foothold in the South, and 4,000 people from all over the South marched in Atlanta, Georgia, with 50 GIs in the lead.

The growth of the SMC occurred in spite of the fact that the radical pacifists and the Stalinist youth had walked out six months earlier. The YSA was in the leadership of the SMC, but was careful to reach out to include activists from as broad a layer as possible in the SMC national leadership. If the YSA had attempted to impose its own program on the SMC, this growth would not have happened. Instead, the YSA built the SMC as a broad antiwar organization that welcomed all young people who wanted to fight against the war. The great majority of SMC members were not in the YSA, and many local SMC chapters had no YSA members at all.

Antiwar forces had been by and large won over to the perspective of seeing soldiers as potential allies.

At Fort Jackson, South Carolina, a group of mostly Black soldiers began getting together to discuss the war. One of them was Joe Miles, a Black member of the YSA. Another YSA member in the group was Joe Cole, who was white. The brass came down on the group with threats, trumped-up courts-martial, and the transfer to other bases of those they considered the leaders.

The GIs fought back, with the help of the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee. They formed GIs United Against the War in Vietnam at Fort Jackson, which drew in

many Black, Puerto Rican and some white soldiers.

Then the brass indicted nine members of GIs United and threw them in the stockade. A defense campaign led to victory for the defendants. One of the original nine defendants turned out to be an Army agent, but that didn't affect the fight.

Andrew Pulley was one of the accused. He was charged with not going to bed when ordered to do so, even though he was already in bed when the order was given. This charge backfired, and made the brass look vindictive and a little stupid. Pulley joined the YSA and later became a national leader of the Socialist Workers Party.

Opposition to the war among soldiers in Vietnam began to be reported in the daily press. On returning from six months in Vietnam *Chicago Daily News* reporter Georgie Ann Geyer wrote that "fully half of the US troops in Vietnam" are "against the war to some extent." Then the Associated Press reported that an entire company temporarily refused to continue fighting. We didn't know the extent of such resistance at the time, but it snowballed in the next years to the point that the US Army's fighting capacity declined sharply.

The YSA was growing. In June a meeting of the YSA National Committee was held. Larry Seigle, the YSA Organizational Secretary, reported that YSA chapters had been formed in 13 new cities in the past year, and that there had been a pickup in the recruitment of Black, Latino, and Asian youth, as well as high school and even some junior high school students. At some campuses, YSA members were being elected to student governments and even as president of the student body.

A factor in the growth of both the SMC and YSA was the collapse of Students for a Democratic Society. SDS had once been openly scornful of the potential of the working class to fight for social change, as were other members of the self-styled "new left." Now, however, their rhetoric took on a Marxist coloration. The French events of 1968 had a big impact on radicalizing youth, including SDS. But the newly found "Marxism" of the SDS national leadership unfortunately turned into Maoism, splits and absurd and disastrous ultraleft actions.

The Maoist Progressive Labor Party had entered SDS some time before, promoting a crude workerist orientation. The SDS leadership was unable to mount an effective opposition to PL, and SDS was now faced with an internal war of two nearly equal factions. PL was expelled in the summer — putting an end to SDS's "consensus" method of organization, which had been a hallmark of the new left. Those who expelled PL themselves soon split.

Both wings of SDS also counseled radicals, sometimes with the use of physical force, to repudiate the antiwar demonstrations scheduled for the fall.

Many local SDS chapters, repelled by this direction their national leadership had

taken, transformed themselves into SMC chapters. Others kept the name SDS but joined in helping to build the antiwar movement. Some individual SDS members joined the YSA.

Those who identified with the SDS nationally, and hadn't gone with the wildly ultraleft Weathermen group, had broken into factions, which would be around for some time as two mutually hostile Maoist parties. But the old SDS, which had reached a high point of some 100,000 members, was finished.

The growth of the YSA naturally led to the growth of the SWP. The September 1969 convention of the SWP registered this fact. About 700 people attended, from 49 cities, including, for the first time, sizable groups from the South. In addition to elected delegates from the party branches, many members of both the YSA and SWP attended as observers.

The report on the political resolution was given by Jack Barnes, who had been elected to the post of National Organization Secretary. The report was optimistic about the prospects of the current radicalization becoming deeper in the years ahead. I spoke on the international situation and the debate in the Fourth International.

There were reports on our antiwar work, given by Gus Horowitz; on the YSA, given by Larry Seigle, the newly elected YSA National Chairman; and on the Black struggle, given by Clifton DeBerry.

DeBerry presented an important programmatic resolution adopted by the convention, *The Transitional Program for Black Liberation*. This sought to link the immediate struggles Blacks had been engaged in to the need to form a Black political party independent of the Democrats and Republicans that could tie together and lead the struggles. It showed how this process could lead to the raising of new and more anticapitalist demands arising out of real struggles.

"Numerous [Black] revolutionaries see the necessity and desirability of breaking away, once and for all, from both the Democratic and Republican parties," the resolution stated, "and forming an independent black party which will not only enter candidates in election campaigns but mobilize the Afro-American communities in actions to attain community demands.

"However, they do not yet see clearly how to link struggles for the pressing immediate needs of black people with the revolutionary goal of overturning the whole racist capitalist system. In their search for an answer to this difficult problem they swing from one extreme to the other without finding a logical and practical connection between the two ends. Thus at one time they talk about armed struggle by small, highly disciplined, and trained groups of militants as the only really revolutionary method of action. When they run up against the unrealism of guerrilla-type actions in



the United States, where the scale of revolutionary struggles demands huge and much more complex commitments of forces, they fall back to spasmodic and uncoordinated activities associated with the largely spontaneous struggles that flare up in the community over issues that often do not appear to be far-reaching.”

The resolution recognized that white workers remained basically quiescent politically. While the Black masses had demonstrated great militancy, including in massive uprisings, they could not *win* power in the United States as a whole by themselves, although they could begin the fight for this by forging an independent Black party. The current situation was what the resolution called a preparatory period.

A program for participating in the present struggles, with a view to advancing toward the socialist revolution, and connecting immediate issues with intermediate or transitional steps, was needed. “The solution lies in formulating and fighting for a program that can help transform the general discontent and general militancy of the black masses into an organized, cohesive, consciously revolutionary force. By presenting and fighting for such a program, a small vanguard can transform itself into an influential power among the masses.”

The resolution went on to make suggestions for the planks of such a program. “Most of the proposals listed above have been brought forward at one time or another in the course of the black liberation struggle over the past years; others are taken from the experiences of the masses elsewhere in fighting against capitalist domination. A program of this sort cannot be fully finalized or frozen. It has to remain flexible and open-ended with plenty of room for additions and improvements as the struggle develops and new problems come to the fore.”<sup>1</sup>

The dilemma facing Black revolutionists was evident in the evolution of the Black Panther Party. The BPP was increasingly turning to ultra-revolutionary rhetoric about armed struggle. The FBI and police in cities around the country were carrying out a campaign of repression against the Panthers. BPP leaders were facing many crude police frame-ups, and assassinations of their leaders. In 1968 and 1969, 28 Panthers were murdered by the cops.

On the night of December 4, 1969, Chicago police broke into the apartment where BPP leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were sleeping and executed them in their beds in a horrendous fusilade.

We, along with many others, campaigned against the repression of the Panthers. The Black Panther Party’s greatest contribution, DeBerry told the convention, was to bring the idea of an independent Black political party from the realm of the abstract into the concrete.

He noted their ultraleft rhetoric and their abstention from ongoing broader struggles.

They tended to deride the Black students leading the campus struggles and strikes as “cultural nationalists.” While remaining all-Black, they began to adopt their own version of the anti-Black-nationalist position of the Communist Party.

The convention discussed the formation of Black caucuses in the unions. In 1968, growing out of a series of struggles at one of the Dodge auto plants in Detroit, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) was formed. Other plants in the area soon saw the formation of “RUMs.”

This affirmed the proletarian revolutionary potential of Black nationalism. The great majority of Blacks were workers. In the Detroit auto industry there was a high concentration of Blacks. These Black workers were struggling not only against racist discrimination by the employers and the United Auto Workers union, which was rampant, but against the conditions all auto workers faced. These struggles pit them not only against the auto companies, but also against the sell-out leadership of the United Automobile Workers headed by Walter Reuther. Reuther’s line was to seek peace with the auto companies and to silence the Black workers.

The battles these RUMs waged intertwined their struggle as Blacks with their struggle as workers. They were objectively fighting for white workers, too, and they got some support from many whites.

Students in Detroit, Blacks and others, supported these workers. At Wayne State University in Detroit, a young Black revolutionary, John Watson, became the editor of the student newspaper, *the South End*. The paper became an organizer not only of student support to DRUM and the other RUMs, but of the Black struggle as a whole and the antiwar movement. The *South End* became an important paper in the Black community and the auto plants.

The reaction of local politicians and other spokespersons for the ruling class was to strive to remove Watson. The UAW leadership joined in the chorus condemning *the South End*. Support for the paper in the Black community and among students thwarted these efforts.

An important workshop, led by Mary-Alice Waters, was held at the convention on the new women’s liberation movement. The National Organization for Women had been founded in 1966. New organizations were being set up by younger women. Many of these young women came out of the student radicalization, particularly SDS and the anti-draft group Resistance. The workshop helped the party and YSA to get more involved in women’s groups. We supported initiating and joining struggles around concrete issues, and participating in the discussions and debates within the movement in order to help clarify our own views with the perspective of eventually developing a program of transitional demands for women’s liberation.

Evelyn Reed wrote articles for *The Militant* and *International Socialist Review*, the party's theoretical and political monthly, on the historical background of the oppression of women from the days of early class society up to the present. We sponsored forums and panel discussions, which included women from the many new feminist groups.

Inspired by the movement for Black liberation, other oppressed nationalities began to struggle. Chicanos, as the longstanding US communities of Mexican descent began to call themselves, fought for their rights. The largest concentration of Chicanos was in the Southwest. In 1969, there were big Chicano struggles in Denver, Los Angeles, Texas, and New Mexico. Native Americans stepped into the national spotlight, exposing the historical crime done to them by the European colonists and the United States, and protesting their oppression.

Joe Hansen was one of the first in the SWP to see the importance of the struggles against destruction of the environment, and ran a regular column in *Intercontinental Press* called "Capitalism Fouls Things Up."

Inspired in part by the Black struggle, the nationalist Catholic community in British-controlled Northern Ireland launched a new movement against discrimination and oppression fostered by British rule. One of the early leaders of this new movement was the young Bernadette Devlin, leader of People's Democracy. We were fortunate to have as a writer Gerry Foley, who was of Irish descent. He was very knowledgeable about the history of British domination of the island and the long resistance to it.

In Canada, the nationally oppressed French-speaking population began to raise the banner of their language rights and independence for Québec.

The situation nationally and internationally promised a hot autumn politically, and the SWP convention geared the membership up for a fall offensive.

## 39. THE 1969 FALL ANTIWAR OFFENSIVE

The central campaign the September 1969 SWP convention launched was to make the fall antiwar actions as big as possible.

As the school year started, meetings of the SMC around the country were becoming large. The SMC called for an international student strike for November 14, and the National Mobilization Committee had called for mass demonstrations in San Francisco and Washington for November 15.

In September at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, antiwar activists distributed leaflets at a football game calling on fans to join an antiwar march after the game was over. Some 15,000 joined the march! *The Militant* ran a picture of ex-Pvt. Andrew Pulley of GIs United and Prof. Sidney Peck of the Mobilization Committee leading the march.

New forces began to join the movement. In September, more mainstream elements called for an October 15 "Moratorium" on business as usual for October 15, to protest the war. Over 500 student presidents and student press editors signed an advertisement in the *New York Times* calling for students and faculty to leave classes that day and go out into the community to talk about the war to their fellow Americans.

The Moratorium quickly mushroomed, drawing widespread support, not only on campuses but in the broader public. The fact that the Moratorium was initiated by figures associated with the "dove" wing of the Democratic Party opened the way for many who had not yet participated in antiwar actions to join them.

While some of its initiators sought to counterpose the October 15 Moratorium to the November 14 and 15 actions, the SMC and the Mobilization Committee jumped into support of the Moratorium, and it became a building block for November.

There were significant actions a few days before the Moratorium. Two were noteworthy for their connection with GIs. On October 11, there was a march against the war in Fayetteville, North Carolina, of some 600. This was significant in and of

itself, in a smaller city in a Southern state.

This protest was not only led by 75 active duty GIs, mainly from nearby Fort Bragg, but was organized by GIs. In an attempt to neutralize the GIs United at Fort Jackson, the brass had sent GIs United leader Joe Miles to Fort Bragg. This didn't slow down antiwar activity at Fort Jackson, but soon there was a GIs United group at Fort Bragg, too. It was this organization that brought in GIs from Ft. Meade, Maryland, and Pope Air Force Base. They also contacted area colleges, and groups from nine of them participated.

The Fort Bragg GIs United were holding weekly meetings, and published a newsletter, *Bragg Briefs*.

The next day, some 10,000 people marched to Fort Dix, New Jersey, led by a contingent of 100 women. Their goal was to demand the release of GIs who had been thrown in the stockade for their antiwar views, as well as to tell the soldiers that they wanted all the troops brought home from Vietnam immediately. They got inside the base, but were met by Military Police with rifles and unsheathed bayonets. Elite troops were brought in from other bases, and the demonstrators were dispersed. But some 350 prisoners were released from the Fort Dix stockade in the days immediately preceding and just after the demonstration.

On October 15 millions across the country, from the big cities to the little towns, participated in the Moratorium. Mary-Alice Waters, writing in *The Militant*, summarized, "As Oct. 15 drew to a close, Americans across the country attempted to comprehend the meaning and impact of the historically unprecedented day of action. Millions went into the streets to express their overwhelming opposition to the Vietnam war. From New York, Chicago and San Francisco to Pocatello, Idaho, Juneau, Alaska and Memphis, Tennessee, as one news analyst commented, 'The mood of the country was O-U-T!'"

She also wrote, "The scope, size and variety of the day's events almost defies the attempt to cover them.

"In New York, for example, hundreds of thousands took part in rallies all over the city — many of them occurring simultaneously — 10,000 at Columbia, 3,000 at New York University, 7,000 on Wall Street, 5,000-10,000 high school students in Central Park, over 1,000 in Brooklyn, 4,000 at a rally of people who work in New York's publishing houses, thousands in candlelight marches originating in half a dozen different neighborhoods. Late in the day over 100,000 massed in Bryant Park in midtown Manhattan, producing a traffic jam of monumental proportions.

"New York's board of education estimated that high school absenteeism was 'well over 90 percent.'"<sup>1</sup>

While the range of speakers at the rallies necessarily reflected the broad range of sponsors and views, the left wing of the movement was strong enough to be represented. In Boston, for example, the first speaker at a rally of 100,000 on the Boston Common was Senator George McGovern, the Democratic Party dove. But it was also addressed by Peter Camejo and by Professor Howard Zinn, an antiwar leader.

The mass circulation daily, the *Boston Evening Globe*, which endorsed the Moratorium, two days before had “exposed” Peter Camejo as a member of the SWP. (Peter was one of our most widely known public spokespersons.) The paper wrote, the SWP “flies Vietcong flags and roots for a Cong victory in Vietnam.” The first of these assertions was generally not true, but the second one certainly was — and we were now far from alone in this opinion among opponents of the war.

We had to fight for Peter’s spot on the speakers list. He was put last, at a time when it was expected that the crowd would start to wither away. Ken Hurwitz, one of the Moratorium leaders, later wrote a book in which he described the scene:

“Still a step or two away from the microphone, [Peter] started on his speech. He didn’t want a single person to leave the Common before he had a chance to work his spell. The words came in a high pitched staccato cadence, and his whole body vibrated to the rhythm.

“Vietnam, he said, isn’t a mistake but an absolute inevitability of the system.

“And to those politicians who are joining the bandwagon, he continued, this antiwar movement is not for sale. This movement is not for sale now, not in 1970 and not in 1972....

“People were listening and responding. Certainly the majority wasn’t agreeing entirely with the revolutionary stance, but they were listening ... It didn’t matter whether we were socialist revolutionaries or not. He made us hate the war perhaps more than we ever thought possible ...

“Camejo ended his speech at the peak, and the crowd applauded until their hands were weary.”<sup>2</sup>

Betsy Stone, writing in *The Militant*, said that Peter “militantly reaffirmed his stand in support for the liberation forces in Vietnam. The crowd cheered as he declared, ‘Who are the people from this little nation, who are holding off the mightiest military power in the history of the world? The fighters of the National Liberation Front are the most beautiful people in the world — they are young people, giving up their lives for all of us, so that some day we can end the oppression in this world.’

“More cheers and applause came when Camejo put up a challenge to the many politicians that are coming out against the war. ‘Now that we are a majority, they make statements against the war and want to get on the bandwagon,’ Camejo said.

‘And what we say to them is, if you want to support our movement, we are marching on Washington Nov. 15. Are you coming with us? Yes or no?’”<sup>3</sup>

This latter point, how to deal with the capitalist politicians who began to speak out against the war, pitted the SWP against various sectarian groups, including Progressive Labor and the Spartacist League led by former SWP member James Robertson. They were for excluding such politicians from antiwar actions, with the argument that their participation would turn the movement into a pro-capitalist front.

The participation of politicians in supporting the independent antiwar movement meant that they were supporting us, and not we supporting them. In addition, their participation helped legitimize the movement and helped antiwar fighters reach out more widely to the American people.

Not many “dove” capitalist politicians wanted to be associated with the militant mass actions. Almost none of them were for the immediate withdrawal of the US troops from Vietnam. There were a few, however, and when they spoke at antiwar conferences and demonstrations, PL, the Spartacists and others attempted to throw them out by force.

In organizing security at these actions in the later years of the movement, the antiwar movement most often had to counter these physical threats from the ultraleft than from the ultraright, who were more and more isolated. The SWP’s Fred Halstead, along with the pacifist Brad Lyttle, took the lead in organizing security for the big demonstrations.

In addition to Peter Camejo, SWP speakers, either as recognized antiwar leaders or as socialists or both, were in great demand around the country during the Moratorium. In the New York City area, speakers from the SWP New York election campaign were invited to 22 different campuses. Carol Lipman, the executive secretary of the SMC, spoke at a big rally at Wayne State University in Detroit.

At the University of Texas in Austin, a 6,000-strong rally sponsored by SDS and the SMC was addressed by Melissa Singler. When she got up to speak, the school administration blared the “Star Spangled Banner” from loudspeakers in the campus tower. The crowd responded by standing up and raising two fingers in the “V” peace sign or clenched fists, and giving Singler a standing ovation. There were many such incidents.

As momentum for the Moratorium built up, the response of the Nixon administration was to redbait the movement. Vice President Spiro Agnew (who would later resign in disgrace along with his boss) “exposed” the fact that members of the Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party were in the leadership of antiwar groups. The administration demanded that the New Mobilization Committee and the

Student Mobilization Committee repudiate a message of greetings from the Vietnamese people. The movement was unanimous in repudiating this demand and other redbaiting.

Caroline and I were back in Brussels when the Moratorium occurred. It was big news around the world. We were taking French lessons at the *Alliance Française*, and when we showed up for class the day after, the hot topic of discussion was the Moratorium. As the only Americans in the class, questions about it and the war were directed to us, and most of our classmates were pleasantly surprised to hear our antiwar views.

Early in November, the SMC published a full-page ad in *The New York Times*, with 1,366 signatures of active-duty servicemen opposed to the war. The armed forces officialdom tried to move against those who had signed the ad, and the GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee filed suit to stop the harassment. This was successful.

On November 14, on campuses and cities across the country, the student actions called by the SMC were joined by hundreds of thousands, many who got on buses to go to the November 15 demonstrations in San Francisco and New York.

A few of the Moratorium leaders opposed the November 15 action. They thought that a march on the nation's capital demanding immediate, unconditional US withdrawal from Vietnam was far too radical to win the support of millions of Americans. But one million people marched in the two cities that day. That was one out of every 200 Americans. Many more millions who couldn't attend were now strong supporters.

The speakers in Washington ran the gamut from Senators Goodell and McGovern, to Carol Lipman of the SMC. Comedian and Black activist Dick Gregory had the crowd in stitches with his satirical lambasting of Agnew.

In San Francisco, West Coast New Mobilization Committee cochairs Terrence Hallinan and Donald Kalish fought to put the movement at the disposal of Democratic Party forces. They called for having only one speaker, a pro-Democratic Party moderate. The rest of the rally would be a "Woodstock West," referring to the gigantic outdoor rock concert held in Woodstock, N.Y., the previous summer.

Their views were thoroughly defeated in local meetings of antiwar activists. After one such meeting, Hallinan, who was either in or around the CP, was so frustrated that he slugged the representative to the meeting of Painters Local Four who had disagreed with him. Hallinan was an amateur boxer. The person he punched was my brother, Roland.

The speakers list was broadened to include some militants, although it was not as broadly representative of the whole movement as the Washington rally. Nevertheless, the fact that 300,000 turned out for the march was more important. Many people on



these huge demonstrations couldn't hear the speakers anyway or didn't listen closely. The mass protest itself spoke louder than words.

In response to the calls for international actions for November 14 and 15 issued by the SMC and the National Mobilization Committee, there were important mobilizations in other countries. I attended the one in Copenhagen, and Caroline went to Paris, to cover these actions for *The Militant*.

I stayed with a young leader of the Revolutionary Socialists, the Danish section of the FI, who were among the most active builders and leaders of the Danish Vietnam Committee. The DVC called a student strike for November 14, and a mass demonstration for November 15. The universities in Copenhagen and Aarhus were shut down, and some high schools were affected. These campuses "featured teach-ins, discussions and films about the war in Vietnam, NATO, etc.," I wrote.

The Communist Party and the Social Democrats called their own action for the evening of November 14. They didn't want to be associated with the militant slogans for the DVC march, which called for Denmark to get out of NATO as well as demanding that the US get out of Vietnam. Some 7,000 turned out for the CP-SD rally, many of whom "marched with 'USA out' posters pinned to their jackets, advertising the much more massive and militant DVC action scheduled for the following day," I reported.<sup>4</sup>

On November 15, some 20,000 marched, in a country of four and a half million. I was in the front row of marchers, with the Revolutionary Socialists. Copenhagen was the farthest north I had ever been, and it was eerie when dusk began about 2 or 3 p.m. and the streetlights came on. The march began at the US military mission, proceeded to the US Embassy, and then to parliament. It was spirited, with colorful flags and banners.

A sidelight gave evidence that the situation in the FI was becoming factionalized. The young comrade I was staying with left a letter on a table while he was out. I believe he left it on purpose for me to read. The letter was from Gisela Mandel, the wife of Ernest Mandel, instructing the Danish comrades not to mention during the demonstration the role of the Student Mobilization Committee in calling for the November 14 international student strike. This was petty, and probably reflected more her lack of political maturity than any plot by the majority, but this could not have happened without growing tensions in the International.

Shannon Pixley, an American exchange student, was also on that march. She and a group of students traveled from Denmark to France, where they met Daniel Bensaïd of the Communist League. He steered her in the direction of SDS, and didn't mention the YSA. However, she did join the YSA when she returned to the States and later became my sister-in-law, marrying my brother Roland.

In Paris, Caroline reported, the Communist League and Red Committees (broader groups supporting the CL's newspaper *Rouge*) called for a demonstration on November 14. The Communist Party called for its own demonstration for November 15. "The CP apparently decided on this demonstration in an attempt to increase the little support it now has among youth. But they did very little to actually build the November 15 action," Caroline wrote.

"The CL and CR issued a leaflet explaining their attitude towards the CP-sponsored demonstration:

"Revolutionary militants will participate, with their own slogans, in the demonstration scheduled by the CP ..."<sup>5</sup>

The CL-led demonstration on November 14 was a target for the cops. Indeed, leaders of the CL were arrested that day and were accused of "reconstituting" the organizations banned by DeGaulle after the May-June 1968 events.

The CP action was supposed to take place in the *Les Halles* market area in the center of the city. In a last-minute decision the CP called off its demonstration there, and instead held three smaller demonstrations away from the city center. Unaware of this change, the militant youth came to *Les Halles*, and, isolated, they were attacked by the police. The CL wisely decided to disperse the demonstration. The cops left the CP demonstrations alone.

A month later, a demonstration of 3,000 was held in Sydney, Australia, "the most militant street demonstration ever held here to protest the war in Vietnam," wrote *The Militant's* Australian correspondent.<sup>6</sup> It was organized by the Vietnam Mobilization Committee, in whose leadership were the young militants I had met some months before.

A feature of this action was a speech by Allen Myers, formerly a GI stationed at Fort Dix. Myers was a member of the SWP and YSA who had his own fight with the brass over his right to organize against the war. At the time, he was editor of the *GI Press Service*, a news service for the more than 50 GI antiwar newsletters that had sprung up at bases around the country.

Myers went to Australia as part of a world tour organized by the SMC. When he came through Europe, he stayed at our apartment in Brussels, to talk over what he could expect in the various countries he would be visiting. While in Australia, he met the love of his life, Helen Jarvis, and later returned there to live, playing an important role in building the Australian group in the following decades.

Caroline flew back to the states at the end of December to attend the convention of the YSA, held in Minneapolis December 27-30 in freezing weather and plenty of snow. There were over 800 young people present, including 60 high school and junior

high school students.

International guests came from revolutionary organizations in six countries: France, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Switzerland.

“The mood of the delegates reflected the significant growth of the YSA in the last year,” Mary-Alice Waters commented, “the successes registered by the YSA in its many fields of work. Those attending included many of the key organizers of the million-strong antiwar demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco on Nov. 15; leaders of some of most successful Black and Third World student actions of the last year; leaders of many other campus struggles; organizers and leaders of the growing women’s liberation movement.”<sup>7</sup>

Caroline reported on the resolution that SWP leaders had drafted and which the United Secretariat had presented to the 1969 World Congress, “The Worldwide Youth Radicalization and the Tasks of the Fourth International.” It was this resolution which the young French comrades had objected to at the World Congress. I have never been able to make head or tail of the French objections.

Catherine Samary, a young leader of the French Communist League, presented their view on the resolution.

Caroline’s report centered on the transitional method that underlay the resolution, which projected a program of democratic and transitional demands for the student radicalization, designed to tie student struggles into those being waged by working people and other sections of society and lead them in an anticapitalist direction.

Larry Seigle, YSA National Chairman, reported on the American political situation; National Field Secretary Tony Thomas reported on the Black struggle; and National Secretary Susan Lamont reported on the antiwar movement. Nelson Blackstock, the National Organization Secretary, projected the YSA’s organizational tasks.

There was also a workshop on women’s liberation.

A feature of the convention was the tribute paid to surviving participants of the great 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strike at a public rally after the end of the convention. The main city newspaper, the *Minneapolis Tribune*, reported “old militants met young militants at the University of Minnesota Saturday night, and there was no generation gap.”<sup>8</sup>

One result of the convention was that Randy Furst, a young writer for the *Guardian* newspaper, which at that point was attempting to orient to the fragments of SDS, joined the YSA. Sixty other youth did likewise.

A session of the convention open to the press was covered by NBC and CBS television, as well as local TV and newspapers. This session concerned stepped-up attacks by extreme rightists against the YSA and SWP in Chicago. The report was

given by YSA National Committee member Lee Smith. A group calling itself the Legion of Justice attacked the YSA and SWP Chicago headquarters on November 1.

On December 6, Legion thugs broke into an apartment and attempted to beat up six YSAers. When they were repulsed, they gassed the YSAers, who had to be taken to the hospital. On December 10, Richard Hill, the SWP organizer, received a death threat from the group. The police appeared to be cooperating with the Legion. They did nothing to apprehend the fascist-minded thugs. Laura Miller, a YSA member who was gassed, reported that a cop who was questioning her about the attack asked if Fred Hampton was in the apartment. Hampton was the Black Panther Party leader who was gunned down as he slept by the Chicago police two days before the attack on the apartment. The cop's question to Miller was a clear threat. In the following months, the Legion also attacked other groups in the city.

Not all YSA members were able to go to the YSA convention. In Los Angeles, a New Years Eve party sponsored by the SWP and YSA to celebrate the eleventh anniversary of the Cuban revolution was firebombed by Cuban counterrevolutionaries.

Our response to all such attacks on ourselves or others in the movement was to build as broad a public counter-mobilization as possible.

## 40. THE DEEPENING FACTION FIGHT IN THE INTERNATIONAL

The ultraleftism exhibited by the Weather Underground and other factions of SDS was not a trend confined to the United States. The turn towards the strategy of guerrilla war on a continental scale in Latin America made by the 1969 World Congress of the Fourth International reflected a related current in Europe. Like ourselves in the US, the parties of the FI in Europe and elsewhere had made gains in recruiting youth. By the end of the 1960s, strong ultraleft and adventurist currents had appeared in the worldwide youth radicalization. This pressure took its toll on the parties of the FI.

Why were we, the YSA and the SWP youth, able to avoid, by and large, the pitfalls of ultraleftism? How did we become educated in political positions that armed us against adventurism and sectarianism, the two manifestations of ultraleftism? I believe it was the influence of the older comrades, the working-class leaders of the party who had had real experiences leading workers in struggle. The prestige of the SWP with comrades in Canada, as well as the influence of their older leaders, had a similar result among the younger Canadian comrades.

Until the 1969 World Congress, the SWP and the Canadian League for Socialist Action had excellent relations with the International Marxist Group, the fledgling FI group in Britain.

For language reasons, it had fallen to the American and Canadian organizations to help build the FI in Britain after Healy's Socialist Labour League broke with the movement. The Canadians had sent Ernie Tate, originally from Ireland, and Scottish-born Jess Mackenzie, to London to work with the British comrades. When Tate and Mackenzie made plans to move back to Canada following the 1969 World Congress, Connie and Alan Harris, who were English and had been recruited in Canada, returned to Britain and replaced Ernie and Jess in helping build the IMG. They built up a literature service that relied heavily upon books and pamphlets we published through Pathfinder Press. Eventually, this would become the British outlet for Pathfinder.

After the 1969 World Congress, with the sharp division between the majority and minority, this political cleavage extended into the IMG. The Canadian LSA, along with the SWP, supported the minority position. Connie and Allen, members of the British section, also decided for the minority. So Caroline and I, and Connie and Allen, became pariahs to some extent among the majority of IMG comrades. This got worse as time passed.

In the fall of 1969 and the early part of 1970, relations with the comrades of the majority became more strained. In Britain, we worked mainly with Connie and Allen, and a few people they had attracted around them. We usually stayed at their apartment when we were in England, in the Brixton area of London, and we became close friends.

Shortly after I arrived in Europe at the end of 1968, I happened upon a discussion between Ernest Mandel and a member of the German Socialist Students (SDS) in Ernest's apartment (I was early for a meeting with Ernest). They were speaking English, and the German student was belittling the huge October 1968 march in London against the war in Vietnam. I was somewhat taken aback — since the IMG had spearheaded the action — when Ernest seemed to agree with the student's criticism that the march should have included violence.

Later in 1969, after the World Congress, I was witness to an abject capitulation by the majority of the IMG that turned my stomach. Gerry Healy, who had become a bitter enemy of the Fourth International, was denouncing the London march as "petty bourgeois." So he put on a "proletarian" march and meeting, to show how it should be done.

I went over to London to observe the action. A few thousand took part. The march was led by a contingent of youth carrying red flags, which were very colorful. Connie, Alan and I marched along with the crowd and attended the meeting of about 1,000. Healy asserted the October 1968 march of 100,000 was meaningless since it consisted mainly of students, while the march of a few thousand that day struck a real blow to the warmakers because it was allegedly working class in composition.

Actually, there were many young workers on the October march, and there were many students on Healy's march. The huge crowd of 100,000 very likely included many more workers than Healy's march.

I had expected such crude "workerism" from Healy, but not what came next. Tariq Ali, a leader of the majority of the IMG, was also scheduled to speak. Instead of defending the October march, he agreed with Healy! Naturally, the crowd of Healy supporters were elated.

The only other thing I remember about the meeting was the actress Vanessa Redgrave giving the fund appeal, a breathy proposal "to give our all for Gerry!"

Healy was emerging as a cult figure in the SLL.

I was a member of the Bureau of the United Secretariat, and that became important in helping to keep the factional struggle in bounds, since we could help set the agendas for meetings of the United Secretariat and the International Executive Committee. We found Ernest to be an ally in keeping the FI together. While disagreeing politically, we would work together with him on agendas and on the minutes of the meetings, making sure that neither side was misrepresented.

For important meetings of the United Secretariat and of the International Executive Committee, other leaders of the SWP on the IEC would come over. In this first year, these were mainly Jack Barnes and Joe Hansen. After one of these meetings during the 1969-70 winter, Jack, Joe and I went to London. There, among other things, we visited the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, where some supporters of the FI worked.

I was so cold on that trip that Jack and Joe insisted I get some warm woolen British clothes, including heavy pants, a jacket and an overcoat, paid for with party funds.

The delegates of the majority left the April 1969 World Congress full of enthusiasm for the projected launching of rural guerrilla warfare in Bolivia. In their view, any kind of a democratic opening, any kind of retreat, even temporary, by the native ruling class and the army in the face of mass struggles was excluded. Any mass actions would be ruthlessly suppressed. The only way out was rural guerilla warfare. This would turn into a civil war and lead on to victory.

Within a few months of the close of the World Congress events shifted sharply in a direction opposite to the one predicted. Actually, the first manifestation of this new mass upsurge began on May Day 1968, a year before the World Congress, when there were militant mass demonstrations and meetings against the military dictatorship in cities across Bolivia. The dictatorship mobilized the armed forces and police, but the power of the mass mobilization forced them to back down and allow the demonstrations to continue.

The name of the martyred Che Guevara, who had been murdered the year before, and references to the guerrilla force he led, were prominent in these actions. The comrades of the Bolivian POR (Revolutionary Workers Party) mistook this sentiment as a call for immediate rural guerrilla warfare. These actions opened a new phase of advance by the mass movement and a retreat by the military.

Bolivia has had many military coups, but the one that took place in September 1969 led to a military government which recognized the necessity of making concessions to the masses. The trade unions began to function openly once again, and

the workers' movement emerged from the underground. The Bolivian Workers Center (COB by its initials in Spanish), the union coordinating group, rebuilt its strength.

From April to June 1970, workers took advantage of this opening to stage another wave of mass mobilizations. Students, teachers, part of the urban middle class, and some peasant groups joined. The ruling class split. One sector was for a bloody crackdown and closer ties to Washington. The other sought to utilize the mass mobilizations to gain some independence in relation to the imperialist behemoth to the north. Within the military, General Rogelio Miranda favored a crackdown, and General Juan Torres sought to win the confidence of the mass movement.

The mass actions deepened, and the military regime was badly shaken. In October, the military ruler stepped down, turning the government over to the rightist Miranda. Masses of students and workers exploded into the streets to block the rightist takeover. Torres declared his opposition to the new junta. Students began to build barricades in the streets to stop forces loyal to Miranda, and the COB ordered its members to block the streets and prevent troop movements in the capital, La Paz.

“Armed detachments of peasants joined the action. Armed civilians freed political prisoners. The homes of ultrarightist military men and civilians were assaulted. The buildings of three leading newspapers were occupied. Jubilant tin miners seized the police stations.” The mass uprising enabled Torres to take power, reflecting “a situation in which neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie could gain the upper hand for the time being.”<sup>1</sup> Torres made concessions to the masses, while blocking attacks on the ultrarightist forces — attempting to keep both the working people and the right in check.

The ultraright attempted another coup in January, 1971, but was beaten back by another mass mobilization. But the working class lacked a resolute revolutionary leadership determined to carry the masses' fight to victory.

The class-collaborationist Communist Party and reformist or wavering trade union leaders put their faith in Torres to hold back the ultraright. As a result, the forces which could have been mobilized behind the workers in a bid for power began to weaken. The workers became confused and hesitant. The counterrevolutionaries began to regain confidence. The CP and reformist trade union leaders did nothing to prepare the workers, peasants and their student and middle class allies for the inevitable confrontation, which came in August.

The counterrevolutionaries staged a mass demonstration in the city of Santa Cruz, under the guise of a religious event. Torres attempted to arrest the rightist generals, which triggered a military attempt to seize power backed by 150,000 soldiers. Torres did nothing. The CP and the other fakers did nothing, waiting for Torres to act. The



army ranks began to go over to the counterrevolution. The working class, which had not been armed to any significant degree, responded to their desperate misleaders' last-minute call to resist the heavily armed foe and were quickly defeated. The coup was successful.

There was no revolutionary party, no revolutionary leadership of the masses. Our comrades of the Trotskyist POR had joined with other forces as far back as July 1969, just as the mass movement was rising, in an attempt to set up a guerrilla band in the countryside. They had abandoned the mass movement in both the city and countryside, which they believed was doomed without a successful guerrilla war, to establish an isolated band that the army easily hunted down. By October 1969, the army had killed all but six of the heroic but misguided band, and captured those six.

In spite of this experience in Bolivia, the majority leadership in the Fourth International pressed on with the guerrilla orientation in Latin America, now turning their attention to Argentina.

After the 1969 World Congress, a semi-insurreccional mass movement against the Argentine military dictatorship arose in two important industrial cities, Rosario and Córdoba. These two explosions set off a long period of renewed working class struggle.

The Argentine section of the FI, the Revolutionary Workers Party (PST) had split before the 1969 World Congress into the PRT(Combatiente) and the PRT(Verdad). The reaction of the PRT(Combatiente) and of the FI majority leaders to this new period of urban working class struggles was to shift from emphasis on rural guerrilla warfare to urban guerrilla warfare, at least for the time being. The PRT(Combatiente) became the official section of the International while the Verdad group was given the status of a sympathizing organization.

The PRT(Verdad) sought to build their current in the unions and other mass organizations, advancing slogans and proposals to push the mass movement forward. When the masses forced a democratic opening, the PRT(Verdad) quickly moved to establish a legal party to fully exploit the possibilities of reaching workers and youth.

The factional struggle in the FI would take some years to resolve. I would continue to play an important role in the FI, even though Caroline and I returned to the states in May 1970.

## 41. MAY 1970, THE GREAT STUDENT STRIKE

The YSA convention in December 1969 decided to go all out to build the national conference of the Student Mobilization Committee set for mid-February, 1970, in Cleveland. This conference was attended by 3,500 participants, including many high school students. This was the largest decision-making meeting of the entire antiwar movement, and indicated that a broad new layer of student antiwar leaders had arisen across the country.

Fred Halstead, who was there, estimated that about two-thirds of the participants were not former members of SDS or any other organized radical tendency. Of those in socialist youth groups, the majority were in the YSA, reflecting a changed relation of forces in the radical movement.<sup>1</sup>

Besides the YSA, representatives of most of the radical youth groups were there, including the International Socialists (whose origins went back to the old Young People's Socialist League and the Shachtmanites); the Young Workers Liberation League, as the youth group of the Communist Party now called itself; Youth Against War and Fascism, associated with Workers World; and one of the derivatives of the disintegration of SDS, the Revolutionary Youth Movement.

The main debate at the conference was the same one that existed since the 1965 National Coordinating Committee conference in Washington — single issue vs. multi-issue. Or more exactly, should the antiwar movement continue to focus on the war or become a new radical organization.

At the very bottom of the dispute lay the issue of mass action methods of struggle versus less mass-oriented forms of protest. At this conference most of the arguments against a focus on the war were ultraleft. But in the real world outside, the alternative to mass action against the war was the same as in the past: yielding to the pressure to support the Democratic Party doves. 1970 was another election year.

SMC executive secretary Carol Lipman introduced a proposal called the "Mass

Action Focus for Spring.” All the other organized groups were opposed. So an aspect of the conference discussion was a battle between all these other groups and the YSA.

While opposed to the mass action perspective, these groups could not agree among themselves on what multi-issue perspective to support, and could come up with only an unclear counter-proposal. Frustrated, they began to redbait the YSA, something that did not endear them to the independent antiwar fighters. C. Clark Kissinger (the same person who led the initial SDS 1965 march on Washington) was elected the conference parliamentarian, and became alarmed at the redbaiting. Although he was from the Revolutionary Youth Movement, he said, “We don’t want anyone voting for our proposal out of opposition to the Young Socialist Alliance. We are firmly opposed to anticommunism and it’s been manifested greatly at this conference.”<sup>2</sup>

Leading up to the conference, there was a debate between Nelson Blackstock, the YSA National Organization Secretary, and David Friedman of the International Socialists, published in *The Militant*. The IS had put its proposal for the conference in the *Student Mobilizer* published for all SMC members.

Friedman boasted, “We are not alone in recognizing the impotence of the single-issue, mass march approach.” This sentiment was common among the other groups opposed to the SMC. In part, this expressed widespread frustration that Washington didn’t stop the war as a result of the demonstrations. Johnson and Nixon always adopted a public pose that they didn’t care at all about the mass protests. Later, when the *Pentagon Papers*, secret documents about the war, were published, it was revealed just how much Johnson and Nixon feared the protests and took them as personal affronts.

The IS proposal was for the SMC to adopt “a whole program of working class demands,”<sup>3</sup> including opposing all candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties. This would not only have meant excluding the majority of SMC members, but even some of the other groups at the conference the IS blocked with. The IS claimed that this approach would lead to building a mass working class break with the two capitalist parties.

The debate at the conference was full and democratic. The *Cleveland Press* reported, “Despite the emotional fervor with which most of the students embraced their ideas, an overwhelming democracy prevailed. Nearly everyone who wished got a chance to speak.”<sup>4</sup> The Lipman proposal was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

Keeping the focus of the SMC on the war did not mean the conference did not take up other issues. It adopted many positions, among them against racism, for women’s equality, against the oppression of homosexuals, for defense of the Black Panther Party, in support of a current nationwide strike against General Electric (in

many areas SMC supporters joined the strikers' pickets) — stressing the relationship between these issues and the war in Vietnam.

But the SMC did not project itself as an organization with a program for these struggles. It was a non-exclusionary movement that welcomed all young people who wanted to fight against the war, whatever their views on other political issues.

The SMC support to the GE strike highlighted the ground gained by the antiwar fight. In previous wars, the government insisted that all citizens had to get behind the war effort, which meant that the unions should call off their struggles during the war. But the war in Vietnam had elicited so much opposition that even the union bureaucrats didn't feel much pressure to do that, and the union ranks weren't ready to make sacrifices for the war.

In the first months of 1970 many were fooled into thinking the war was "winding down." This sentiment helped explain that most socialist or radical left groups, with the notable exception of the YSA and SWP, were casting about for some new issue or issues on the theory that the war was gradually going away.

A plenum of the SWP national committee was held at the end of February. I gave the report on the international political situation and the discussion in the Fourth International. The war was central to my report, and to the report on the American political situation given by Jack Barnes. In spite of Nixon's talk of bringing down the number of US troops in Vietnam, the reality was moving in the opposite direction, that of widening the war into Cambodia and Laos.

Gus Horowitz analyzed the state of the organized antiwar movement. The broad national coalition, the National Mobilization Committee, in contrast to the SMC, was in disarray, although the coalition in Cleveland was cited as a bright spot and would soon become the base for building a new national coalition. However, the report and consensus of the NC meeting was that all indications pointed to antiwar sentiment deepening among Americans.

The Moratorium had called for demonstrations to be held on April 15. The SMC conference had voted to mobilize for April 15, and to call for a student strike April 14. The SMC became the central driving force for actions on both dates. Even the Moratorium Committee backed off its original commitment to building April 15.

Given the situation in the antiwar movement, and the widespread belief that Nixon was winding the war down, the April 14 student strike and April 15 demonstrations were not as big as the Moratorium of the preceding October. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands turned out.

In a front page feature article in *The Militant*, Gus Horowitz summed up the situation and the tasks of the antiwar movement, under the headline "Nixon escalation

will accelerate mass opposition.”

“What are Nixon’s real intentions in Vietnam? What is the real mood of the American masses? What course of action should be taken by a serious and responsible antiwar leadership?” he wrote.

“These three questions have been brought into sharp focus by events of the past weeks, in particular the mid-April antiwar protests, Nixon’s April 20 troop ‘withdrawal’ speech, and the April 19 announcement by the national Vietnam Moratorium Committee that it is disbanding.

“The answers are clear: Nixon’s policy is designed to continue and expand the war; mass opposition to the war continues to grow and deepen; the national antiwar leadership must be rebuilt with the goal of mobilizing for larger and more effective mass antiwar actions.”<sup>5</sup>

On April 29, there were news reports that US forces had invaded Cambodia from Vietnam. The next day Nixon confirmed the invasion, and resumed bombing of North Vietnam. He justified the escalation by claiming it would shorten the war. Feeling suckered by the administration’s previous promises the war was winding down, students and others jumped into action.

The first big actions started right while Nixon was giving his speech. Students at Princeton University met and called for a student strike the next day, May 1. Throughout the day, there were mass meetings at hundreds of campuses and the strike caught on, spreading across the country. Fred Halstead reports, “a strike information center was set hastily set up at Brandeis University ... over the weekend, and the SMC as well as the National Student Association also spread the strike call. But in truth, no national groups initiated, controlled or directed the strike. It simply exploded with unprecedented force across the country, organized by whatever local antiwar activists there were.”<sup>6</sup>

Caroline and I were following these events in the *International Herald Tribune*, and listening to the English language broadcasts of Radio Luxembourg and the US Army station, in our apartment in Brussels. Then, on May 5, we heard the news that the Ohio National Guard had been called out to confront demonstrators at Kent State University, and that the Guard had opened fire. Four students were shot dead, and many others wounded.

We called the SWP national office, and agreed to come back to New York immediately to give a hand as the party and YSA mobilized to participate in these historic events.

Coming into New York from the airport, we saw banners flying on different campuses. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was occupied by artists, with powerful

banners and large posters by the entrance.

The Kent State killings were like gasoline thrown on a fire. Hundreds of campuses, more than one million students, were on strike.

At the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Illinois, and others, strikers introduced and urged others to adopt a new tactic. The strikes at first sought to shut down campuses. But now the strikers began to open up the schools, take them over and use them as centers for antiwar organizing among the population as a whole. The “Antiwar University” engulfed many of the most important campuses.

*The Militant* became one of the most important sources of news about the strike nationally, and for a time we were publishing twice a week.

This movement became the greatest student strike in world history.

The organization of the strikes at most campuses had two levels. One was the mass broad decision-making meetings. The second was the election of steering committees to make hour-by-hour decisions. The day after Caroline and I landed in New York, we participated in the steering committee at Columbia University, where back in 1965 Caroline had helped organize the Columbia Committee Against the War in Vietnam in preparation for the first SDS march. The steering committee meetings were open, and this one was typical in its freewheeling debate and discussion. The committee functioned virtually 24 hours a day, with new people participating as others got tired, had to eat, and so forth.

When the news of the invasion of Cambodia first broke on April 29, the leaders of the New Mobilization Committee met and decided to call a demonstration in Washington for May 9. Even though this didn't leave enough time to organize the buses and trains to bring people to Washington on the scale of previous demonstrations, 100,000 participated. By May 9, the Nixon administration pulled back from threatened use of police and troops against the action.

The Washington demonstration was part of a wave that rolled across the country. These were even larger and more sweeping than the October Moratorium, and much angrier.

“The upsurge tore an open rift in the ruling class,” Fred Halstead wrote. “Powerful sections made it clear to the administration that it was too dangerous to try to handle opposition to the war with the kind of public approach [of redbaiting the protesters and threatening the use of force] Nixon and Agnew had been using. This schism was manifested even within the Nixon cabinet. On May 6, for example, a letter was released to the press in which Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel warned President Nixon that ‘youth in its protest must be heard.’”<sup>7</sup> Articles and editorials in the major capitalist newspapers made the same point.

The Nixon administration was silent for three days. It seemed that no one was running the country as the antiwar forces continued to mobilize. Then the administration began a tactical retreat from its open confrontation with the movement.

While the Washington demonstration was being held on May 9, in Augusta, Georgia, a 16-year-old mentally retarded Black man was beaten to death in the county jail. Demonstrations in the Black community demanded an investigation. On May 11, police fired on a gathering of Black youth, who erupted in response.

Georgia Governor Lester Maddox saw a "Communist conspiracy," and sent in state troopers and the National Guard. Maddox told reporters they were "going in with live ammunition. We're not going to tolerate anarchy in this state," according to *Militant* reporter Randy Furst. In addition to Randy, we also sent Clifton DeBerry, who was running for governor of New York, and Linda Jenness, the party's candidate for governor of Georgia, to Augusta.

The state's armed forces killed six Black men that night and wounded many others. "From eyewitnesses, I learned that all six men were shot in the back," Jenness wrote.<sup>8</sup>

On May 15, two students were shot dead at a predominately Black college in Jackson, Mississippi. Randy Furst went from Augusta to Jackson to get the story. He wrote, "the grass in front of Alexander Hall at Jackson State College is stained with blood. There is blood on the walls and floor inside the [women's] dormitory.

"Two unarmed Black students were shot to death here by state troopers and city police May 15. Fourteen others were wounded. The murders came on the second night of antiwar demonstrations at Jackson State."<sup>9</sup>

The cops came onto the campus "with a machine gun and high-powered rifles," according to a statement put out by students. "They marched to Alexander Hall, the girls' dormitory. They forced about 50 students into the yard in front of the dormitory. Minutes later, the cops began shooting the students. Then the cops shot into the girls' dormitory. Many girls were wounded, some in the head."<sup>10</sup>

The national press downplayed the Augusta and Jackson shootings. While racism played a part in this, fear of the antiwar movement taking an even more massive form in the Black community played a bigger part. The press was on a campaign to dampen the student upsurge, and wanted to bury the stories. The SMC, however, featured Kent State, Augusta and Jackson State in its antiwar agitation across the country.

One effect of the Jackson State massacre was that many predominantly Black campuses now joined the student strike.

The May 1970 student upsurge did not ignite the working class to take similar action for their own demands, including opposition to the war, as the May 1968 student rebellion in France had. But it did deal a blow to support for the war in the unions and

in the union bureaucracy.

David Thorstad, writing in *The Militant*, reported: “The labor monolith has begun to crack. For the first time since American imperialist aggression in Indochina escalated into full-scale warfare more than five years ago, the solid front of support for the war ... has begun to crack.”<sup>11</sup> This was evidenced by the fact that many union leaders across the country were speaking at the mass meetings on campus and off during the antiwar upsurge.

In New York, unions for the first time sponsored their own antiwar demonstration on May 21. This drew 25,000, in response to an organized physical attack on antiwar demonstrators by construction trades unions, whose leaders were close to the Nixon administration. In San Francisco, 452 union leaders signed their names to a full-page newspaper advertisement calling for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam.

The national convention of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, held on May 7, passed a resolution against the war. Jacob Potofsky, president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, blasted Nixon and the war at the union’s convention May 25. Patrick Gorman, secretary-treasurer of the Meatcutters, wrote in an editorial in the union’s newspaper, “No rational segment in the makeup of America puts a stamp of approval on our war involvements.”<sup>12</sup>

Walter Reuther, head of the United Auto Workers, on May 7 (two days before he was killed in a plane crash) sent a telegram to Nixon endorsed by the UAW’s top officers critical of the war. He said, “However this dangerous adventure turns out militarily, America has already suffered a moral defeat beyond measure among the people of the world ... At no time in the history of our free society have so many troops been sent to so many campuses to suppress the voice of protest by so many Americans ...”<sup>13</sup>

Soldiers from many bases also held their own protests around the country on May 16, traditionally Armed Forces Day. But the brass at many bases felt it the better part of valor to seal their bases to prevent soldiers from demonstrating.

The *New York Times* reported, “What had only been a trickle of mail and telegrams to Congress in the days following the president’s announcement of the Cambodian invasion, swelled to a flood shortly after the shootings of four Kent State students May 4.”<sup>14</sup>

The student strike and antiwar upsurge began to ebb by the end of May. Fred Halstead cites a number of factors that led to this ebb. One was the fact that the strike hadn’t spread to other sectors of the population. “There was only so far it could go so long as it was confined to a student base.” Also, the students had won important concessions at many campuses, and forced a change of stance by Nixon. And, where



schools were closed as a result of the strike, students dispersed.

Nevertheless, the upsurge changed the political atmosphere in the United States. Halstead wrote, "Henceforth the mood in the country would not be quite the same. Antiwar referenda in the scattered places where the movement could get them on the ballot would carry by majorities rather than just receiving large minorities. Significant trade union endorsement of antiwar activities would become the rule rather than the exception. The great bulk of the young soldiers going to Vietnam as replacements would be opposed to the war even before they got there. And the ruling class lived in fear of another upsurge which might go further than that in May, 1970."<sup>15</sup>

## 42. NEW ASSIGNMENTS

On our return from Europe, Caroline was assigned to *The Militant* as a staff writer, while I became part of the national office.

After Caroline and I came back to the US, there was no one at the FI center in Brussels who supported the minority in the International. A young couple from Canadian League for Socialist Action filled the gap. But it soon became apparent from their letters that the woman comrade was experiencing mental and emotional problems. I flew to Brussels to help them, and they decided to go back to Canada, where she obtained treatment.

After that, I was often called on to aid people in the party or the YSA who suffered from mental/emotional illness to find appropriate treatment.

In the summer of 1970, during the week of August 9-16, the SWP and YSA held a national educational conference. We rented Oberlin College in Ohio for the affair. We used the dormitories to house the participants, the cafeterias in the dormitories to feed them, and recreational facilities during breaks in the educational schedule.

Classes and workshops were held in the college classrooms. Many of these were held at the same time, and people chose the one they were most interested in for each time slot. Major talks and a public rally were held in Finney Chapel, which had a large seating capacity.

About 700 members of the SWP and YSA attended, as well as invited guests, including comrades from other countries. This was the largest national gathering our movement had ever held up to that time.

The town of Oberlin, where the college is situated, was a quiet grassy place during the summer, when the students were gone. But the arrival of so many people meant that for a week, the stores, movie theater and other establishments were quite busy. The newspaper distributor was inundated with requests for copies of the *New York Times*.

There were six major talks throughout the week, under the general heading "Towards an American Socialist Revolution." I gave the first lecture, discussing the

historical and economic roots of the radicalization. As I approached the pulpit in Finney Chapel, I was somewhat nervous before the large audience, and I knocked over a glass of water put there for the speaker. Flustered, I gave Nixon's well-known salute with both arms raised and each hand flashing the "V" signal. The crowd laughed, and that made me relax.

I had written my talk out, and read it. Nothing is more boring than a read-out speech. Normally, I did not write out my talks, but used brief notes, and made up the talk as I went, so that I could see the reactions in the audience, and adjust my talk accordingly. Afterward, Farrell Dobbs gave me some pointers.

The other speakers were Peter Camejo, Derrick Morrison, Mary-Alice Waters, George Breitman and Jack Barnes. A theme that went through all of these talks was our support for struggles of the oppressed nationalities, of women, gays, of students and the antiwar movement. We saw these struggles as part of, not counterposed to, the historic struggle of the working class to take power and begin the construction of socialism. This stance put us in a small minority among the parties claiming to be socialist.<sup>1</sup>

George Breitman compared the radicalization with those of the early twentieth century and the thirties. Caroline wrote the article in *The Militant* summing up the conference. She wrote, "The central conclusion coming out of the 1970 Socialist Activists and Educational Conference was summed up by George Breitman.... Breitman said: the present radicalization is as genuine and authentic a radicalization as any this country has experienced in this century; it is the biggest, deepest, broadest and most dangerous to the ruling class."<sup>2</sup>

Was it the deepest and broadest radicalization of the century? I believe the answer is yes. At no time in the history of the United States had such a movement against an imperialist war waged by our own government been seen. In fact, the radicalization of the thirties was cut short by the cooptation of the newly radicalized workers into the imperialist war effort during the Second World War.

This radicalization saw the emergence of the Black liberation struggle, the Chicano movement, the Native American movement, and other oppressed or discriminated-against peoples. National oppression wasn't eliminated, nor was institutionalized racism. It will take a socialist revolution to do that. But the Jim Crow system of racist segregation in the South, in place since the counter-revolution following the Civil War, was smashed. This struggle had huge repercussions in the rest of the country. Racism among whites was dealt a big blow. This was unprecedented.

During the early years of the century, there was a radicalization of workers reflected in the rise of the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. Another

aspect was the upsurge of the women's movement around the right to vote, which was won. The new wave of the women's movement in the 1970s, coming out of the new radicalization, stood on the shoulders of the previous suffragettes. This new movement raised far deeper questions of women's role in the family, in the workplace, and in society as a whole.

Sexual taboos were breached. Until this time the words "abortion" and "contraception" were usually not talked about in public. Yet here was a movement that made the legalization of abortion one of its central demands. The idea that women have the right to control their own bodies and reproductive life, and that without those rights women cannot be free of their oppression was a new and startling one, even blasphemous for some.

The new radicalization was more profound than those before because it went deeper into these social questions, into the roots, which is the original meaning of the word "radical."

But what made us so confident at this Oberlin conference was our belief that the radicalization would extend to the working class as a class. We knew that workers were greatly influenced by the different movements of the radicalization, but they had not yet begun to move as a class. Our hopes that this would soon happen proved to be wrong. If we had had the advantage of hindsight then, Breitman's generalization would perhaps have been more tempered. But better to err on the side of overestimation of the objective situation, than to be left behind. We were on the cutting edge.

The enthusiasm of the conference was expressed in a foot-stomping, cheering rally, where the participants donated \$38,000 over and above what they paid in dues and financial pledges the year round. Some of this money came from young people from middle-class families (and a few from wealthy families) who came into inheritances and wished to put this money to use in the enterprise of building a revolutionary party. This source of funds expanded in the next years.

In the following years we continued to grow. National meetings at Oberlin College would become part of our life as a party and youth organization. We would usually hold SWP conventions one year, and an educational conference the following year. For some time, each year saw "Oberlins," as we called these gatherings. The number in attendance kept growing

## 43. CHICANO MORATORIUM AND MASS MARCHES FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Within two weeks after the end of our Oberlin conference, two events indicated that we had read the situation correctly. On August 26, the anniversary of the victory of the suffragettes' fight to obtain the right to vote for women, the new women's liberation movement took to the streets across the country. On August 29, 20,000 people, mostly Latinos, joined the Los Angeles Chicano Moratorium against the war, and were viciously attacked by the police.

During the preceding months, beginning around mid-1969, the women's liberation movement had been coming together and becoming more visible. Certain key demands and concepts were emerging from the grassroots discussions of many different "consciousness-raising" groups. These often began as group discussions of personal problems arising from women's oppression but became increasingly political as the basically social character of the individual problems was thrown into sharp focus by collective discussion.

One of the demands emerging from the discussions, the demand to repeal reactionary laws prohibiting abortion, became a focus for sizable protests with sharp demands on the government.

On March 28, 3,000 marchers, mainly women, demonstrated in New York City for the repeal of the state anti-abortion law, as the state legislature was considering a bill to do just that. The march was organized by a broad coalition of various groups. Ruthann Miller chaired the rally following the march, which was addressed by representatives of the National Organization for Women, New York Radical Feminists, Women's Health Collective, High School Women's Liberation, and others.

The blows that had been dealt to redbaiting were evident in the fact that Ruthann Miller was well-known to all the organizers as the SWP candidate for Comptroller in

the state elections.

Shortly after the march, the legislature passed the bill repealing New York's anti-abortion law, and it was signed by Governor Nelson Rockefeller. The *New York Times* reported that Rockefeller commented, "Women's liberation played an important part in the passage of this bill."

The largest of the August 26 demonstrations was the march of more than 35,000, mostly women, in New York City. There were men on the march, too, and I was one of them. Most SWP and YSA members, both men and women, participated. Ruthann Miller was the coordinator of the event, which the party and YSA strongly supported. She was also one of the broad range of speakers.

Another speaker was Jo O'Brien, who brought greetings from the British women's movement. She also was a member of the British IMG, and was part of the minority in the IMG that was critical of the turn made by the Fourth International in 1969. Many of those in the International who agreed with the SWP on the turn to guerrilla war were also looking to the SWP for leadership on other questions, including women's liberation.

At this time, the FI majority in the main tended to adopt a "workerist" orientation, seeing women's liberation as a diversion from the real class struggle. Soon, however, the power of the movement created an uprising in the ranks of women in the majority, and they were won over. In fact, some in the majority became ultra-feminists, influenced by anti-Marxist trends in the movement that counterposed feminism to the class struggle. Similar trends appeared spontaneously in the SWP and YSA as well, but were overcome by experienced leadership (including that of Marxist women like Evelyn Reed, Mary-Alice Waters, Betsey Stone and Caroline Lund), Marxist education, and democratic discussion.

We were not only out ahead of many in the International in recognizing the revolutionary role of the fight for women's rights, but were in the forefront among socialist organizations in this country.

Jo O'Brien, who was the editor of the British *Socialist Woman* magazine, had just finished a national speaking tour organized by the SWP and YSA. When she was in New York, she stayed with Caroline and me at our apartment.

August 26 was a working day. In New York, the march and rally were held after working hours, which helped the attendance, but more could have participated on a weekend. In most of the 40 cities demonstrations took place during working hours. Nevertheless, there were impressive actions: 8,000 in Philadelphia, 7,000 in Chicago, 5,000 in Boston, 3,000 in Cleveland, and 2,500 in San Francisco.

Caroline wrote the *Militant* article on the day's events. "The turnout for the 5:30

march and subsequent rally in [New York] exceeded all expectations of the organizers of the demonstration," she wrote. The march started at Central Park and went down Fifth Avenue and over 40th Street to Bryant Park. "The New York cops were planning to herd the women into only one lane of the four-lane Fifth Avenue, but were finally forced by the sheer masses of demonstrators to stop traffic and let them fill the whole street."

Caroline noted three aspects of the action. "One was a commemoration of the courageous women who fought for and won women's right to vote 50 years ago.

"The second thrust was the projection of the three major demands of the strike: free abortion on demand; free, 24-hour child-care facilities controlled by the community; and equal education and job opportunities..."

"The third aspect of the demonstrations was the more general concept of women's liberation ... — the complete liberation of women."<sup>1</sup>

The movement questioned the role of women in society, in the workplace, and in the family. The reflections of the sexist social relations of capitalism in the relationships between individual men and women, long taken for granted, were analyzed, dissected and challenged.

The relations between men and women in the radical movement were being re-examined and changed as a consequence of the new confidence that the women's movement gave to women who had originally become radicalized around other issues. This was true of the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialist Alliance as well. There was some turmoil in our movement as a result; it affected personal relations. But mainly there was a thirst for an understanding of the origins of the oppression of women and the ups and downs of the struggle against it, as well as thinking and debating what we thought the next steps for the new movement should be.



We recruited a capable group of Chicanos, as more militant Mexican-Americans began to call themselves. One of the centers of the movement was Denver, where the Crusade for Justice had been formed. The Crusade's president was Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. In March 1970, the Crusade hosted a Chicano Youth Liberation Conference.

Miguel Padilla covered the four-day conference for *The Militant*. It was the biggest and broadest meeting of the Chicano movement to date, he wrote. It included Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in the United States, as well as other Latinos. Some 2,500 attended.

The conference decided to build a Chicano political party to fight for Chicano freedom and self-determination. One of the participating organizations was an already

existing Chicano party, the Texas Raza Unida Party, which had recently been formed.

Some participants argued for proclamation of a new nation of Aztlan in the areas the US won from Mexico in the 1848 Mexican-American war, rather than the call to build a Chicano party. Antonio Camejo, Peter Camejo's brother and an SWP member in Berkeley, spoke at the conference, expressing the opinion that a political party would be the best vehicle for mobilizing, educating and organizing the Chicano people in a struggle that could win the right to self-determination.

The example of the Texas Raza Unida Party carried the day, and the proposal to build such a party nationally was adopted.

The conference also supported a call that came out of the antiwar workshop, led by Rosalio Muñoz of the Los Angeles based Chicano Moratorium Committee, to call another Chicano Moratorium against the war for August 29 in Los Angeles. The Moratorium committee had organized two previous events, in December 1969 and February 1970, which drew 1,500 and 2,000 participants.

In June, we organized a tour of Aztlan<sup>§</sup> by Antonio Camejo and Froben Lozada, who were SWP candidates for state office in California. Their main object was to gather more information about the burgeoning movement, and to help build the Moratorium.

The impact of the May antiwar student strike and mass demonstrations, and the change in consciousness those events created throughout the US, was indicated on August 29, when ten times more Chicanos turned out than in February.

From the beginning, the march and rally had been advertised as a peaceful and legal demonstration, and that's what it was. But as was often the case, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department had other plans.

Antonio Camejo wrote in *The Militant* that the march went peacefully through the East Los Angeles barrio. In addition to the 20-40,000 people on the march, "thousands lined the march route to cheer. Mass chants of 'Chicano power,' 'Raza si, guerra no,' and 'Viva La Raza' set the march's tone," he wrote.

"Thousands of banners also captured the marchers' militancy: 'Be Brown and Be Proud,' 'Our Fight is in Aztlan, Not in Vietnam,' 'Brown is Together,' and 'Aztlan, Love It or Leave it.'" The latter slogan was a take-off of the right-wing slogan seen on some bumper stickers, "America, Love It Or Leave It," directed against the antiwar and Black power movements.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> Aztlan was the name militants began to use to refer to the area that Washington had conquered from Mexico in 1848, as well as Texas, which also had been taken from Mexico. Aztlan included California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Colorado.



The speakers were to include Rosalio Muñoz, Corky Gonzales, and Cesar Chavez, leader of the United Farm Workers. Muñoz had started to speak when the cops, utilizing a minor incident at a nearby store as a pretext, confronted the crowd. Moratorium monitors “locked arms and placed themselves between the sheriff’s men and the rally,” Froben Lozada reported in *The Militant*. East Los Angeles was not in the city of Los Angeles, but was under the jurisdiction of the county, which is why the Sheriff’s Department was the instrument of repression that day.

“At this point,” Lozada wrote, “about 500 sheriff’s deputies poured out of police buses on Whittier Boulevard, dressed in full riot regalia, and charged the mass rally. They attacked without warning, neither notifying the monitors nor announcing with bullhorns that they wanted the rally to disperse. They brutally clubbed and beat about 50 Chicanos and had the crowd dispersed in about 15 minutes.”

The deputies then turned on the Chicano community as a whole. “As the crowd fled from the area, the deputies gave chase, firing tear gas grenades and guns,” Lozada wrote. They chased people into their homes, and into bars. In one bar, a well-known Chicano journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*, Ruben Salazar, was murdered when a deputy shot him in the head at point-blank range with a gas grenade. Salazar was popular in the community. Rosalio Muñoz was quoted, “The one man who could get our ideas across through the mass media was the one man killed by the sheriffs.” Salazar had reported first hand from Vietnam, from the Dominican Republic during the revolution, and from the big student demonstrations in Mexico City.<sup>3</sup>

Two others died of their injuries in the following days.

Just after the police riot started, other sheriffs had arrested Corky Gonzales as he was driving to the rally to speak. He and a group were in an open truck on their way from Denver. A group of Chicanos crowded into the back of an open truck was “suspicious,” the sheriff said. So they stopped the truck, and then arrested the group on “suspicion of armed bank robbery.” While these phony charges didn’t stick, the cops got what they wanted — to disrupt the rally by preventing speakers from getting to it.

According to the sheriff’s department, “Hundreds of provocative acts were committed by known dissidents who came to the location to incite and foment trouble.” This was his excuse for the murder of Salazar and the police riot. While not very convincing, the cover story showed that his men were looking for dissidents like Corky Gonzales.

I was alone in the SWP National Office that day, so it was I who got the telephone call from Lew Jones, who was in L.A. to help organize our response. He gave me a rundown on the days events, and we planned out how we would get coverage for *The*

*Militant*, and what proposals he would make to the Los Angeles branch for participation in protests against the police riot and murders.

Cesar Chavez, who had been scheduled to speak at the rally, was leading an effort to organize Chicano and Filipino farm workers in the California fields into the United Farm Workers of America. These were some of the most exploited and oppressed workers in the US. The heroic fight that the UFWA was waging against the growers and their official and unofficial armed thugs inspired youth to join the UFWA's boycott of scab grapes. Many of us didn't eat grapes for years, unless they were from some place like Mexico or Chile.

## 44. BLACK SEPTEMBER AND MARTIAL LAW IN QUÉBEC

In the summer of 1970, the United States, with the acquiescence of the Kremlin, sought to impose a settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict that would force the Palestinians to recognize the Zionist conquest of a large part of Palestine, and the expulsion of most of the Palestinian population from their homes. Every Arab country supported Washington's plan, except Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Southern Yemen.

The Palestinians refused to accept the deal. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) stuck to its call for a democratic, secular Palestine. The PLO recognized the Jewish immigration to Palestine, and their proposal was that the Palestinians and Jews live as equals in a single state. The state would neither be exclusively for the Jews nor the Palestinians, but would recognize the equal rights of both peoples in a secular state. This meant rejection of the Zionist idea of establishing a Jewish state in all of Palestine. A democratic, secular Palestine was — and as I write this over three decades later, still is — the most fair and democratic solution. But the Zionists and their sponsors in Washington rejected it.

The population of Jordan in 1970 was 55 percent Palestinian. The PLO had a strong base of support in Jordan, as well as in Syria and Lebanon. The Jordanian monarchy's acceptance of the Washington plan signaled that King Hussein was looking for a confrontation with the Palestinian majority.

In the summer, Hussein, under the prodding of the US, attempted to eliminate the presence of the more radical groups in the PLO, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Military moves against these two organizations were begun by Jordanian troops. The king was banking on the largest organization in the PLO, Fatah, remaining on the sidelines.

Fatah refused to allow any section of the Palestinian fighters to be smashed, and joined the resistance. The Jordanian government launched a massive attack on the Palestinians. Given the demographics, this meant civil war.

The PLO brought tanks it had in Syria into Jordan, but the king's military was better armed, and possessed an air force. While the tank force fought hard against Jordanian armor, the PLO had to withdraw the remaining tanks to Syria for lack of air cover.

The PLO took over much of the capital, Amman, but the king's forces faced lightly armed civilians there, and shelled the populated areas from isolated strong points, inflicting many civilian deaths.

In other areas, the PLO was in complete control. In the city of Irbid, they had more heavy weapons, and they set up elected councils of the citizens to run the city. A *Newsweek* reporter who was there dubbed the central council a "soviet," comparing it to the elected soviets set up in the first phase of the Russian Revolution.

At a number of key points, both Iraq and Syria had opportunities to intervene and give military support to the PLO. But although they claimed to be on the Palestinians' side, they did not become directly involved.

The outgunned PLO was defeated, with heavy casualties among fighters and civilians. This big setback became known among the Palestinians as "Black September."

The daily press in the United States revealed that both Israel and the US were prepared to intervene militarily if it looked like Hussein was in danger of losing the civil war. Both countries were ready to fight to save the reactionary Jordanian kingdom rather than see a democratic and militant government emerge in Jordan. This illustrates Washington's policy of supporting the Arab emirates and kingdoms to safeguard its interests in the oil-rich area. Israel's role as a garrison state set up and maintained by Western imperialism to keep the Arabs in line, was revealed once again.

People who were radicalizing, especially among youth and African Americans, were eager to understand what was happening. Gus Horowitz and I wrote a series of articles for *The Militant*. These articles began with the history of the first moves by Western imperialism, especially the British and French, into the Mideast — and the resistance put up by the Arabs — up through the Zionist conquest and the role of the US in the Middle East.

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In October, repression in the United States' northern neighbor drew world attention to another situation of national oppression, that of the French-speaking inhabitants of Canada. About one in four Canadians lived in Québec, where more than 80 percent of the population spoke French as their first or (in most cases) only language.<sup>§</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> The following historical sketch is by Canadian Marxist Richard Fidler. In 1759, during the Seven Years War, Britain defeated the French empire in a famous

On October 5, a small terrorist wing of the Québec liberation movement, the Québec Liberation Front (FLQ, its initials in French) kidnapped James Cross, a British diplomat. The FLQ made a series of demands as preconditions for his release. One was the publication of a manifesto that outlined the poverty, unemployment, suppression of Québécois culture and attempts to suppress the French language and other facets of the national oppression of the Québécois, and made the case for independence. Another demand was the release of 23 FLQ prisoners convicted of various acts of terrorism, bombings and armed robbery, and their safe passage to Cuba or Algeria.

After some stalling, the authorities decided to publish the manifesto, but rejected the other demands. Perhaps they thought that the manifesto's radical contents would not be well received by Québec public opinion.

If that was their calculation, it backfired. There was wide sympathy with the statement and support to a negotiated settlement. As historian John Conway wrote,

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battle at Québec City, gaining control over the entire northeastern portion of North America. Although they lost their 13 colonies to the south a few years later in the American Revolution, the British continued to rule Québec directly for almost a century. In 1837-38 they brutally suppressed an armed insurrection of their colonial subjects and hanged or exiled the leaders.

In 1867, the recently reunited USA looked to expand north as well as west. The British countered by joining Québec with three largely English-speaking colonies under a new form of home rule to constitute Canada. Making up more than a third of the population of the new white settler state, the Québécois saw their relative weight and influence radically decline in subsequent years as the Canadian state expanded westward and northward. Canada's constitution and laws afforded little protection to their language and culture and gave no recognition to their national character. Québec, as the saying went, was "a province like the others."

Economically and socially it was quite unlike the others. During the first half of the Twentieth century Québec became one of the most industrialized and urbanized provinces in Canada. But even at mid-century the French-speaking population lagged far behind those of British or other ethnic origin in income, employment and other social indicators in this, the one province where they made up the overwhelming majority. Only the aboriginal peoples and very recent immigrants ranked below them. With their distinct language, territory and history and emerging consciousness as a distinct people, the Québécois were an oppressed nation within Canada.

The situation changed in the 1960s. Inspired in part by the colonial revolution and the new stage of the Black struggle in the US, a wave of reform swept the province resulting in a vast expansion of post-secondary education and healthcare facilities, nationalization of public services previously run by the Church or private, largely Anglo interests, and a huge increase in jobs and trade union membership in both the state sector and privately owned industry. This nationalist ferment, commonly referred to as Québec's "quiet revolution," grew more radical throughout the decade and took on an increasingly pro-independence orientation. "Québec libre" — a free Québec — became the rallying cry for hundreds of thousands of Québécois youth.

“Everywhere people from all walks of life — priests, students and professors, trade unionists, randomly selected ‘persons in the street’ TV interviewees — began to draw a clear and sophisticated distinction that was very unsettling to the authorities. They liked the FLQ’s analysis and political message but disliked their terrorist tactics.”<sup>1</sup>

On October 10, the authorities said they would agree to no further demands. The FLQ responded by kidnapping Pierre Laporte, the Québec labor minister.

The two main trade union federations in the province, the Confederation of National Trade Unions, and the Québec Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO), and the teachers union, urged the government to meet the FLQ demands.

On October 14, troops were sent to Ottawa, the Canadian capital. On October 15, troops began to be positioned in Montreal.

The faculty of the humanities and social sciences at the University of Montreal voted to strike to back the FLQ demands. Students at the University voted to join the strike, and on October 15, 5,000 students attended a meeting to hear speakers urging the students to organize support for the release of the FLQ prisoners.

Early the next morning, the federal government invoked the War Measures Act, abrogating all civil liberties throughout Québec and occupying the province with 5,000 Federal troops. (Technically the act covered all of Canada, but it was aimed at Québec.) The FLQ was outlawed, and a regulation issued that for purposes of prosecution, anyone who had even attended a meeting of the FLQ was considered a member and subject to five years in prison. The regulations gave a blank check to the police to arrest anyone without a warrant. Individuals could be held without charges for 21 days, and up to 90 days without trial. Immediately 242 people were arrested — most of them supporters of Québec independence but few with any connection to the FLQ.

Art Young and Penny Simpson, two members of the Socialist Workers League (LSO in its French initials), our sister organization, were among those arrested. They were well known as opponents of the FLQ’s terrorist tactics, but were picked up because they supported an independent, socialist Québec. By the end of the arrests some days later, 465 had been incarcerated, “their homes and offices ransacked and searched, their families and neighbors terrorized.”<sup>2</sup>

We had already sent two reporters, Mary-Alice Waters and Randy Furst, up to Montreal. Mary-Alice was fluent in French.

A government spokesman, in a speech widely played up in the press, claimed that a secret police report demonstrated that the FLQ (which probably never had more than 100 members) “are infiltrated in all the vital places of the province of Québec, in all the key jobs where all the important decisions are made.

“If we had not acted, the separation of Québec would have been a fact, a month or a year from today.”<sup>3</sup>

Another government official referred to the big student meeting of October 15 to show “the whole coming together of an infiltration of FLQ doctrine in certain areas of society in Québec — in the unions, among universities, in the media ...”<sup>4</sup> The FLQ “doctrine” as contained in their manifesto had wide support, and this is what the authorities were attempting to suppress, using the FLQ’s terrorist tactics as the excuse.

A leader of the Creditiste party called for the summary execution by firing squad of all FLQ leaders.

The press and government circulated wildly inaccurate stories, including that the FLQ had 3,000 armed members ready to launch an insurrection to be followed by a bloodbath. Reactionary forces across Canada took advantage of the crisis to crack down on political dissent. In British Columbia, the province’s cabinet issued an order to fire all teachers and professors who, in the opinion of the police, shared the FLQ’s views on separation.

The day after the invocation of the War Measures Act, Laporte’s body was found in an abandoned car on a federal government air base. Later evidence showed that the FLQ group guarding Laporte panicked when the minister tried to escape by jumping through a glass window, and strangled him with a gold chain he was wearing.

The murder of Laporte was a blow to the Québécois’ mobilization, and became another pretext for the government to intensify its crackdown. The mass meetings, demonstrations and student strikes were stopped dead. This was one more example of how terrorist strategies harm the struggle of the oppressed.

The police finally found the FLQ cell that was holding Cross, and he was released unharmed. Sixteen people were eventually sentenced in connection with the Laporte kidnapping and murder but were all released within a decade.

Imposition of virtual martial law yielded exactly nothing the authorities could cite as justification for their crackdown. Nothing was found as a result of the arrests and searches to back up government claims of an “apprehended insurrection.”

Efforts to get the full story behind the government assault on Québec have been unsuccessful, largely as a result of the government’s keeping secret its files on the affair.

But some facts later came out. These were summarized by John Conway: “RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] security service agents have admitted to stealing dynamite; setting off bombs; writing FLQ communiques; breaking into a left-wing news agency’s office; breaking into the PQ [Québec Party, a bourgeois nationalist party] office to steal membership lists and financial information; opening mail; routinely

gaining access to confidential medical files; committing arson to destabilize the FLQ; using kidnapping, unlawful confinement, and threats of violence to frighten FLQ members and associates to become informants.”<sup>5</sup>

The government probably knew of the FLQ’s plans before the kidnappings, if they didn’t have a hand in organizing them. Terrorist groups are easy target for *agents provocateurs*. Whatever the full truth, the authorities utilized undercover agents for a crackdown on the rising tide of Québécois nationalism.



## 45. APRIL 24, 1971

The broad national antiwar coalition, the New Mobilization Committee, split in the summer of 1970.

The issues involved were the same ones that had erupted before, particularly in election years: should the antiwar movement “move beyond” the issue of the war and become a multi-issue formation or should it continue to make opposition to the war its central task, while relating the war to other issues and movements such as the fight against racism and the labor movement.

This time, however, some who had accepted our view during the recent period backed the other approach. The radical pacifists, the Communist Party, and people from the former SDS initiated a conference in Milwaukee to set up a new coalition. The Cleveland antiwar coalition, supported by the Student Mobilization Committee, called a conference to organize the next antiwar actions. Both conferences took place in June.

The Cleveland conference, attended by about 1,500 people, established the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC). We were the only organized left tendency to support NPAC, but new allies stepped to the fore. The conference elected five coordinators: Jerry Gordon of the Cleveland coalition; James Lafferty from the Detroit committee; Ruth Gage-Colby of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom; John T. Williams, vice president of a Teamsters local in Los Angeles and Black activist; and Don Gurewitz from the SMC. Gurewitz was the only SWP member among the coordinators.

The Milwaukee conference was smaller. Some participants wanted to organize physical confrontation with the authorities, pacifists favored non-violent direct action, and the Communist Party continued to seek a “multi-issue” movement oriented toward the left wing of the Democratic Party. The conference called for massive civil disobedience in Washington in May 1971. The meeting endorsed the call by Rosalio Muñoz for the upcoming August 29 Chicano Moratorium.

The coalition that came out of the Milwaukee meeting reorganized itself in early

1971 as the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice (PCPJ).

At its founding conference, NPAC called for demonstrations at the end of October in many cities. Rosalio Muñoz spoke at this conference as well, and NPAC joined in the call for the Chicano Moratorium.

The SMC endorsed these decisions. The October demonstrations were smaller than the antiwar activities a year earlier. Many activists put their energies into supporting "peace" candidates, mainly in the Democratic Party. The Nixon administration campaigned to convince the American public that it was winding down US participation in the war through "Vietnamization" and the withdrawal of some American troops. Congressional "doves" toned down their criticism. Many were lulled into thinking the war was ending.

But Nixon's claim that he was winding down the war only deepened antiwar resistance inside the armed forces. What soldier wanted to be the last one killed in a war that was ending? Soldiers were part of the young generation that was the backbone of the antiwar movement. They had friends, girlfriends and even parents who were opposed to the war. New recruits included many who were against the war before they got to Vietnam. A Marine Corps historian wrote in the June 7, 1971 *Armed Forces Journal*:

"The morale, discipline and battle-worthiness of the US Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.

"By every conceivable indicator, our Army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous.

"Elsewhere than Vietnam the situation is nearly as serious."

He concluded:

"All the forgoing facts — and many more dire indicators of the worst kind of military trouble — point to widespread conditions among American forces in Vietnam that have only been exceeded in this century by the French Army's Nivelle Mutinies of 1917 and the collapse of the Tsarist armies in 1916 and 1917."

The government was trying to whip up a witch-hunt on the campuses. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover released an Open Letter to students, with an approving cover letter from Nixon. Hoover blamed radicals, including the YSA, SDS and the YWLL (youth group of the Communist Party), for campus unrest. The letter attempted to press college administrators to curb antiwar activity.

In an article in the *Veterans of Foreign Wars* magazine, Hoover singled out the

YSA and the SMC. The article was titled “The Red University: Goal of Trotskyist Communism in the US.”

“A college student strode across the university campus,” Hoover wrote in a melodramatic style. “He was a clean-cut young man, his hair cut short, wearing a pair of brown trousers and a white sports shirt. There was nothing of the beatnik or hippie type in his appearance.” Then what was so sinister about this young man? He was carrying a copy of the *Young Socialist!*

Hoover then quotes from an article in that issue of the YS:

“The concept of a ‘Red University’ oriented toward the needs of the working class and the oppressed first arose in Europe,” the YS article said. “The concept means that the university ought to be transformed from a factory producing robots into an organizing center for anticapitalist activities, a generator of revolutionary education, an arena for mobilizing youth in the struggle for the complete transformation of society.”

Hoover gave his readers a little history lesson, explaining that the “Trotskyists are old-line, orthodox Marxist-Leninists, basing their ideology [sic] on the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin,” as opposed to the “Stalinist Communists of the Communist Party, USA.”

The nation’s top political police officer wrote, “The Trotskyists, especially its [sic] youth group (YSA was founded in the late 1950’s), have shown a vast membership growth and resurgence in the last 24 months until YSA is today the largest and best organized youth group in left-wing radicalism. Trotskyist influence is especially strong in the youth field, particularly on the college campus.

“For example, at YSA’s National Convention in Minneapolis last December, roughly 1,000 members and observers were in attendance. Enthusiasm was high. The convention was effectively organized and run. A number of new recruits were obtained.” He noted YSA successes among high school students and GIs.<sup>1</sup>

The redbaiting did not work. The great mass of students saw it for what it was, an attempt to curtail student political rights and activity. The YSA turned the tables on Hoover, effectively using his claim that it was the largest and best organized radical youth group as a recruiting tool.

Nixon’s and Hoover’s attacks on antiwar students had a grotesque spinoff. In response to the murder of the four Kent State students by the Ohio National Guard the previous May, a grand jury indicted — not the Guardsmen who opened fire — but 25 Kent State student leaders. The Kent State student newspaper characterized the indictments as “demented.” This attempt to turn the victims into the criminals sparked condemnation from student bodies across the nation. Only three of the accused were

convicted, of misdemeanors, and got light sentences.

In the November elections, antiwar activists in a number of cities had placed referenda opposing the war on the ballot. A number of these resulted in victories. In San Francisco, a referendum calling for immediate withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam won by 107,785 votes to 102,731. In Detroit, a similar referendum won by 63 to 37 percent. In Massachusetts, there were three options in a state-wide referendum. There were 558,975 votes for "withdraw our armed forces in accordance with a planned schedule"; 347,462 for "withdraw all our armed forces immediately"; and 150,984 (less than 15 percent) for "win a military victory."

Shortly after the elections, Nixon resumed bombing of North Vietnam, which he had halted as part of his peace gambit. This shattered the complacent assumption of many activists that the war was just about over. The National Peace Action Coalition's December conference drew 1,500 people. The NPAC convention called for demonstrations in San Francisco and Washington for April 24, 1971.

The SMC held a national conference of 2,500 in February, at Catholic University in Washington. The FBI sought and failed to derail the conference by covertly encouraging conservative Catholics to put pressure on the university to cancel it.

After considerable debate, the SMC meeting adopted proposals to call for a day of antidraft actions on March 15, and to support the April 24 actions. Supporters of PCPJ had proposed instead support for a planned confrontation with the authorities in Washington, DC on May 1.

Shortly before the SMC conference, Nixon ordered US troops stationed in Vietnam to invade Laos, where a liberation movement with close ties to the Vietnamese anti-imperialist fighters was gaining ground. This escalation was a wake-up call for millions of people who had been lulled by Nixon's peace talk in the autumn.

Hundreds of groups and prominent individuals threw their support behind the call for April 24. For the first time, the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy endorsed an action that called for the immediate withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. Many union officials, active duty soldiers and members of Congress signed on. Representatives Ron Dellums and Shirley Chisolm signed fund appeals for April 24.

Despite their differences, NPAC and PCPJ came to agreement on supporting a peaceful, legal march in Washington on April 24 and held a joint news conference to announce this. The PCPJ called for support to its additional demands for a "\$6,500 Guaranteed Annual Income," and "Free All Political Prisoners." In the days after the march, those who favored civil disobedience would hold non-violent civil disobedience actions.

As April 24 approached, the movement snowballed. Nineteen Senators and 50

Representatives sponsored a bill calling for withdrawal of US forces by December 31. Senator Vance Hartke of Indiana introduced a bill for immediate withdrawal, endorsed April 24, and spoke at NPAC press conferences.

The right wing went bananas. Representative Richard Ichord, head of the House committee that succeeded HUAC, charged that NPAC was dominated by the “Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party” and PCPJ, by the Communist Party. An editorial cartoon in the *Boston Herald* pictured Leon Trotsky shouting “Forward March!”

For five days before the demonstration, veterans held their own actions. The Vietnam Veterans Against the War set up a tent city a few hundred yards from the Capitol building. Some 1,200 took part. They staged guerrilla theater, re-enacting “search and destroy” missions against the Vietnamese people. There was a silent procession past the White House led by legless vets. Some tried to turn themselves in to the Pentagon as war criminals, and scores of GIs threw their medals and decorations on the capitol steps.

The Justice Department obtained a court injunction to disband the encampment, which was quickly upheld by the Supreme Court. But the veterans refused to budge. A clash between the veterans and troops appeared imminent. The Justice Department thought retreat was wiser, and the ban was lifted.

April 24 was the largest demonstration in US history. When the lead contingent of active duty soldiers and wounded Vietnam veterans started to march, buses were still on the road, headed for the protest. They were backed up for 20 miles. Traffic in the capital was at a near standstill. The protest was too big to estimate because no one could see it all from any position, but there must have been at least one million people.

How well I remember that glorious day! Like many others I was overwhelmed with emotion at the sheer power of the action.

Fred Halstead reported: “The breadth of the antiwar forces was manifest not only by the size of the crowds but in the diversity of the organized contingents. . . . There was an all-Black contingent and a Third World section embracing Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, Iranians, and Palestinians, each bearing their own banners. There was also a group of left-Zionists. . . . A delegation of Native Americans; religious groups; students from scores of colleges; political parties and organizations; hundreds of local and regional antiwar committees and coalitions; pacifists; gays; lesbians; Women Strike for Peace; Another Mother for Peace; Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom; the National Welfare Rights Organization; Business Executives Move for Peace; professional bodies of doctors, teachers, lawyers, and law and medical students; multitudes of government workers; a contingent of reservists and national guardsmen; high school students; handicapped people; and others.

“All these groups carried banners against the war. With encouragement from the sponsors many also seized the event to proclaim their own special concerns, grievances and demands. . . .

“Tens of thousands of trade unionists marched, their affiliations identified by placards and banners, in many cases defying top union officials . . .

“Almost from the start the antiwar movement had been agitated by the controversy over ‘single issue’ versus ‘multi-issue.’ Here in gigantic living reality was a practical resolution of that false dilemma.”

In San Francisco about 300,000 turned out, the largest demonstration the West Coast ever seen. The breadth of the participation was similar to that in Washington. “The Chicano, women’s and gay contingents were the largest Northern California demonstrations ever of these groupings under their own banners.”<sup>2</sup>

The *New York Times* said that the “effect of any single outpouring like today’s cannot be measured, but the cumulative effect of the popular protest here over the years is abundantly clear. The marching minority now feels itself becoming a national majority.”<sup>3</sup>

In the following week, there were a series of non-violent civil disobedience protests organized by pacifists of a few hundred each.

The organizers of the May Day actions billed to “stop the government” moved the date from May 1, a Saturday when government offices were closed, to Monday May 3. The PCPJ organized civil disobedience marches on the Pentagon and the Justice Department that day. Another group associated with the PCPJ, which called itself the May Day Tribe, sought to block traffic at intersections and bridges during the morning rush hour.

The armed forces of the state had more or less stayed out of sight on April 24. But the actions of the May Day Tribe were smaller, and their announced objective to shut down the government made them more vulnerable. The protesters were met by 5,000 Washington cops, 8,000 soldiers and Marines, and 2,000 National Guardsmen.

These demonstrations were subjected to brutal attacks. More than 7,000 were arrested that morning, including many bystanders. Clubs, tear gas and even speeding cars were used to break up groups of demonstrators. All told, 12,000 of the 15,000 demonstrators were arrested and many were hurt. The cops attacked medical and first-aid workers who were helping the injured, and destroyed their medical supplies.

NPAC and SMC placed the onus for the violence entirely on the government. Eventually, the brutal and unconstitutional actions of the government against the demonstrators became widely known and condemned.

Debbie Bustin, speaking for the SMC, declared: “The student antiwar movement

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is telling the warmakers: No more Kents! No more Jacksons! Free the Washington, D.C. 12,000! Bring All the Troops Home Now!”<sup>4</sup>

Another SMC spokesperson, Jay Ressler, explained, “May Day showed that civil disobedience will remain as an approach of many people within the movement. The SMC does not organize or endorse civil disobedience actions, but we do support the right of people who feel that their conscience demands they engage in civil disobedience to show their moral commitment. . . .

“In a real sense civil disobedience is an attempt to show a moral commitment to ending the war and thereby persuade the warmakers to end the war. But the warmakers do not understand moral persuasion; they understand only power — the power of the masses of the American people. April 24th did what May Day couldn’t do.”<sup>5</sup>

## 46. A CAMPAIGN PARTY

Following the 1970 conference at Oberlin College, I began taking on important party organizational tasks. Our national officers were James P. Cannon, National Chairman; Farrell Dobbs, National Secretary; and Jack Barnes, National Organization Secretary. Increasingly, Jack took on the duties of National Secretary, and I, those of the Organization Secretary.

One of my duties was to oversee party finances. The financial secretary, Barbara Matson, was responsible for the bookkeeping and for keeping contact with the branches on financial matters. She and I collaborated to project budgets for the different party institutions, review our performance, and set financial goals for branches and members.

Our finances were improving with growth and the inspiring political developments. The bedrock of our financial system was the party members. Each member paid nominal dues, at that time \$2 a month. Members made voluntary weekly pledges to their branches, which were much higher than the dues. While the leadership encouraged higher pledges, we didn't stand in judgment over what party members felt they could give.

Each branch had a financial secretary, who would keep track of branch finances, and propose branch budgets to the branch executive committee for approval by the branch. The branch budget included a pledge to the national party. This pledge to the national party was a dollar amount per capita. The remainder of the membership's pledges was used for branch expenses.

Most branches had rented headquarters where branch and YSA meetings were held, as well as forums. The headquarters served as a place for organizing sales and other branch campaigns, and for meetings of comrades assigned to particular areas of work, such as the women's movement or the antiwar movement. The headquarters usually included a bookstore. They were also gathering places where members and supporters discussed informally, and where branch dinners and parties could be held. By the late 1960s, most branches supported a full time organizer.

Developing awareness and a sense of responsibility among the members about



financial contributions and the party's financial needs was necessary to meet the new opportunities.

There were special fund drives, usually twice a year. Members would make contributions to these fund drives over and above their regular pledges. These fund drives were publicized in *The Militant* and appealed to readers who were not members to contribute.

At the 1970 Oberlin conference, we went one step further, following the initiative of George Novack. George not only wrote books on philosophy from a Marxist standpoint and many political essays, but was also a highly skilled and imaginative fund-raiser.

We held a rally for all conference participants, and took pledges for a special fund. All members and supporters at the rally participated. A new element was the appeal to some of our recruits, who came from well-off, and occasionally wealthy, families, to contribute all or part of windfalls, such as inheritances, or trust funds that came due.

Before the rally, we knew of some comrades ready to make such larger pledges. The rally was organized like an auction. George first asked if anyone could make relatively large pledges, and then worked down in stages to smaller pledges, so everyone could participate. The effect was a cumulative enthusiasm, rhythmic foot-stomping, and applause and yells of astonishment at how much was being pledged. At times, the foot stamping sounded as though it might bring down the balcony of Finney Chapel where the rally was held. That's how we came out of the conference with \$38,000 pledged, which was augmented later by pledges from members and supporters who were not at the conference.

Such special fund drives became a part of our yearly gatherings at Oberlin. There were members and supporters who were able to make substantial donations from windfalls during the rest of the year. Some would be in the range of tens of thousands of dollars, and a few one hundred thousand or more. The rallies and special donations became a part of our budget, and enabled the party to increase *The Militant's* staff and number of pages, print more books, modernize our print shop and carry out other projects.

Our financial strength was an intrinsic part of our emphasis on organizational details. It's not enough to have good ideas. Those good ideas have to be translated into effective action, and that takes competent organization.

I believe we were the best organized socialist party in the US, including in the area of our finances. Many others in the broader movement thought we must be getting help from abroad — the speculation was that Cuban gold or maybe sugar was involved,

but that wasn't the case.<sup>§</sup>

The Oberlin conference projected a campaign in the fall of 1970 to win 15,000 new subscribers to *The Militant*. I worked with Helena "Flax" Hermes, the paper's business manager, in organizing this campaign through the branches. Helena's nickname was "Flax," for the color of her hair.

The subscription campaign was a big success, with new readers surpassing our goal by 776 subs. Most of our subs were sold on campus and in the Black community.

Each week in *The Militant* a scoreboard listed how many subs were sold in each city. I wrote an article in the paper summing up the accomplishments of this campaign: "The target of 15,000 new readers was the highest of any *Militant* subscription drive since [the strike wave in] 1945, when over 22,000 were sold. Last spring, for example, *Militant* supporters sold 7,500 new subscriptions, which itself was then the largest such campaign since 1945.

"In 1945, there were 23 cities where *Militant* salespeople functioned. In [the fall of 1969] subscription drive, people in 41 cities accepted quotas. During the spring of this year, 55 cities were listed on the scoreboard. In the just-completed drive, there were 87 cities" listed. This geographical expansion reflected some expansion of the SWP into new areas, but primarily the rapid growth of the YSA.

The SWP was a *campaign* party. We set goals and then mobilized the whole party and YSA to achieve them. This was the legacy of the older generation of working class party leaders and members which the new generation had absorbed. When "there is a big job to be done like this drive," I wrote, "it is important to approach it on an organized, highly centralized *campaign* basis. The fact that this was done, especially in the final weeks of the drive, assured its success."<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1971, we scaled back our subscription goal to 7,500 renewals or new readers. One reason was that the party and YSA were mobilized to build the April 24 antiwar demonstrations. A more important factor was that the party entered into an intensive discussion period leading up to its convention in August.

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<sup>§</sup> Years later, the Communist Party experienced a major split after the Soviet Union collapsed. Those who were expelled or broke away formed the Committees of Correspondence, which I was a member of for a time after my departure from the Socialist Workers Party (see Volume 2). I saw first hand that the financial consciousness of these ex-CP members was very low. The reason became apparent with the disclosure of letters between Gorbachev and CP head Gus Hall. These letters indicated that the Soviet government had been backing the American CP with huge subsidies.

## 47. THE 1971 SWP CONVENTION

The Young Socialist Alliance held its convention December 27-31, 1970 in New York City. There were 1,220 registered participants from 34 of the 50 states.

One indication of the emergence of the YSA as the strongest socialist youth group in the country was the presence of other organizations which observed the gathering and sought to meet and influence participants. The Young Workers Liberation League (youth group of the Communist Party), and Youth Against War and Fascism (youth group of the Workers World Party) attended. The CP paper, the *Daily World*, was sold from a table, and Socialist Party people also sold their literature.

Others set up literature tables, including the New York Women's Strike Coalition, Boston Female Liberation, the Red Women's Detachment, the Irish Republican movement, and representatives of the Palestine liberation movement. Personal greetings were delivered to the gathering by representatives of sections of the Fourth International from Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy, Belgium, Israel, Australia and New Zealand.

A panel on the Palestinian struggle included representatives from the Organization of Arab Students in the US, the Israeli Socialist Organization, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Committee Against US Intervention in the Middle East, the Washington-based Palestine House and the YSA.

Twenty-one high school and underground newspapers covered the convention.

The mainstream media paid far more attention to this convention than to any gathering of ours since the 1940s. New York's three major TV stations covered the five-day gathering, and the *New York Times* ran two lengthy news articles. Both UPI and AP wired stories that were picked up by newspapers around the country.

The *Daily World* claimed that only 300 people attended and, as usual, slandered the YSA as "objectively" counter-revolutionary. At one time, the CP was able to get away with such dishonest reporting, but this time it made them look foolish.

Elected delegates came from all the YSA chapters, but all YSA members who were not delegates were also invited to attend the convention sessions and to participate

in the many workshops. Five hundred non-members came as well, and 125 joined the YSA at the convention. Others joined soon after.

Reports and resolutions were presented on the international class struggle; the political situation in the United States especially as it related to youth, the antiwar and women's liberation movements; the struggle of Blacks, Chicanos and other Latinos, and Native Americans.

There were discussions of defense of democratic rights in the face of the Nixon administration's red-baiting, and of ultra-rightist attacks. Candida McCollum from the US Committee for Justice for Latin American Political Prisoners, gave a report on a trip she and I had just made to Mexico City, where we met with political prisoners, including Trotskyists.

A small group of delegates questioned the majority positions on the depth of the youth radicalization as revealed in the May 1970 student strike, and the emphasis on deepening the YSA's roots on the campuses. They proposed shifting the axis of YSA activity toward the trade unions. Most of these delegates were members of the SWP, so we knew there would be a challenge to the party's course in the upcoming SWP convention in the summer of 1971.

We aimed to prepare a draft political resolution as soon as possible. The Political Committee and National Committee could then discuss the document, propose changes, and adopt the general line of a resolution which could be distributed to the party membership before the opening of the three-month discussion period leading up to the convention. There would be discussion in the weekly branch meetings and special additional meetings, and all members could submit articles or resolutions to the party's *Discussion Bulletin*.

Jack Barnes was assigned by the PC to write a draft of the political resolution. While he worked on the draft at home, other party leaders including me kept the ship afloat. A few weeks went by, and we heard nothing from Jack. Then Farrell Dobbs approached me. He said Jack was having difficulty putting words onto paper, and asked if I could give him a hand. I agreed, and for the next few weeks I would walk the two miles from my home to his, arriving at 9 a.m. sharp, to work on the draft all day.

The first day I found that Jack had not written a single thing. He had a form of writer's block. He was a good editor, but couldn't for the life of him make a first draft. On that first day, we attempted to put something down, with both of us trying to write together. By 6 p.m., we had managed to squeeze out one tortured paragraph of a few sentences. We were so discouraged that we decided to splurge on a meal at O'Henry's Steak House, preceded by a few martinis.

I thought about the problem that night, and came up with a proposal that I put to Jack the next morning. I told him to start off talking about what he thought the general character of the resolution should be, since he had been thinking about it for weeks. This gave us a structure. Then I proposed that he talk about how the resolution should begin. He did so, and then I drafted that part in my own words. Then he would give some ideas of what should come next, and I would again dig out what I thought was pertinent and write it down.

While I wrote, Jack would go over what I had written, making changes. When I was finished with the next part, he would start editing that; I read and rewrote what he had finished editing. We went back and forth like this. By the end of the second day, we knew we had a procedure that would work, and we soon had a completed draft, which we gave to the Political Committee.

The members of the PC discussed the draft, and made oral and written suggestions. Since the PC included talented and experienced people like Joe Hansen, Farrell Dobbs, George Novack, George Breitman and Tom Kerry, the resolution became a powerful statement of our collective thinking. It then went to the members of the National Committee, who made more suggestions, and after the NC adopted it, we distributed an updated version to the membership as a whole on time for the start of the preconvention discussion.

The minority tendency also submitted a counter-document at the beginning of the discussion called "For a Proletarian Orientation."

Due to the fast moving developments in the US and the world, we were up to our necks in political activity while also making time for discussion. We were leaders on every level of the antiwar movement leading up to April 24, 1971, for example. But the intense activity spurred on the discussion. More articles by members were printed in that year's discussion bulletin than in any previous, and the discussion in the branches was lively and controversial.

For the first time in the SWP's history, a resolution on women's liberation, prepared by Mary-Alice Waters, was presented for discussion and adoption at the convention. This discussion was stimulated by the demonstrations in many cities on March 8, International Women's Day. Demonstrations at state capitals demanded the right to abortion.

In June, a meeting of different women's organizations in New York called a convention to establish a nation-wide coalition to fight for repeal of anti-abortion laws in each state. These laws had been adopted by overwhelmingly male legislatures, some even before women had the right to vote.

"On July 16-18, the 123rd anniversary of the first women's rights conference in

Seneca Falls, N.Y., more than 1,000 women gathered in New York City to work out a united plan of action aimed at winning total repeal of all laws restricting the right of women to abortion," Caroline Lund wrote in *The Militant*.<sup>1</sup>

The conference founded the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition, and called for demonstrations in the fall. This campaign became a focus of our women's liberation work until the Supreme Court legalized most abortions in 1973.

Another first for the party was a resolution on Chicano liberation, prepared by Antonio Camejo.

The Third National Chicano Liberation Conference was held in June in Denver. The movement had grown, and independent Raza Unida parties had been formed in Colorado, Texas, Arizona and California.

In the spring, Caroline and I took a short vacation in a cabin on the wooded estate of Flax Hermes' parents in Connecticut. We were relaxing outside, when I saw Joel Britton walking up the driveway, from the train station. I knew my vacation would be interrupted. He had Antonio's draft, and I had to edit it, which took a couple of days.

The discussion on the two counterposed political resolutions was fundamental. The dispute was not limited to whether to organize a campaign to send our young comrades into industry at that time. It revolved around a key concept of Marxism.

For Marxists, the struggle between the two major classes in capitalist society, the capitalists and the wage workers, is the central driving force of the development of modern society. What then to make of the fact that movements of Blacks and other oppressed nationalities, of students, and of women had come to the fore, while the basic organizations of workers as workers, the trade unions, had lagged behind or even been hostile to these developments?

We placed all these struggles in the framework of the class struggle between capitalists and workers. We saw them as manifestations of the working-class struggle, not as alien or counterposed to the working class. We saw the antiwar movement, for example, as an expression in the US class struggle of the international confrontation between US imperialism and the workers and peasants of Vietnam. The movement expressed the fundamental interests of the exploited workers of the United States in blocking the expansion and strengthening of our imperialist rulers.

The history of capitalism in the United States is completely intertwined with slavery, the Civil War, and the creation of the Black oppressed nationality after the failure of Reconstruction. Their revolt was not only the movement of a section of the working class (by the 1960s most Blacks were wage workers) but a cause which the workers movement must champion if it is ever to achieve unity and be successful in overthrowing capitalism.

The oppression of women goes back much further, to the origins of class society and patriarchy in antiquity. Capitalist society continued that oppression in new forms. All women from every class are oppressed by the patriarchal institution of the nuclear family, and are discriminated against in the major institutions of society. Women workers are routinely paid less than male workers, are excluded from many job categories, and suffer sexual harassment on and off the job. Women cannot be liberated short of a socialist revolution; and a socialist revolution led by the working class could not hope to succeed without championing women's liberation and without a broad upsurge of women, especially working women.

The majority's political resolution drew together these threads of the new radicalization, and reaffirmed in a new way a fundamental idea of revolutionary Marxism: To lead the class that would lead humanity to freedom, the revolutionary working class party must become the fighter against every form of oppression and exploitation. In Lenin's words, the revolutionary working class party must become the "tribune of the people," leading not just the working class in the overthrow of capitalist exploitation of wage labor, but the whole of society against every injustice.

The lessons of the movements of the new radicalization had to be incorporated into our program, and this is the vital work that the 1971 convention accomplished.

The rest of the organized left rejected this approach. A common view was that the movements of the new radicalization were not part of the key struggle. With the exception of the Black struggle, they were looked on, usually with a withering sneer, as "middle class" because of the large middle class as well as student components of these movements, or as secondary questions to be solved in passing by a socialist revolution. Even concerning the Black struggle, most other socialists rejected our view that a socialist revolution would be a *combined* revolution for Black self-determination and a revolution by the whole working class to overthrow capitalism. The idea that the movements of the new radicalization were part and parcel of the road to power for the working class was for the most part rejected.

This "workerist" approach of our opponents on the left was reflected inside the SWP. While not so crass as many of our competitors, the "For a Proletarian Orientation" supporters moved toward these views.

Based on our long involvement in the labor movement and our conviction that only the working class as a class could lead a revolution in the United States, we responded to the rise of new forces in the unions such as the development of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the auto union in 1969-70, and of the Miners for Democracy in the coal industry, and the United Farm Workers. At the convention, we held a panel discussion on our work in 20 different unions.

Our resolution reaffirmed the central role the working class must play in a socialist revolution. But it recognized that the working class as such had not yet thrown its weight into the struggle. We were over-optimistic, however, in projecting that this would begin to occur in the next period.

The Fourth International and the SWP had a history of opposition to Zionism and the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel. We reaffirmed and extended this tradition in a resolution adopted at the convention, "Israel and the Arab Revolution," prepared by Gus Horowitz.

The imperialists sponsored, and the Zionist movement organized, colonization of Jewish people from Europe and later Middle East countries into Palestine. They expropriated Palestinian lands and homes in wars backed by imperialist countries. This plunder is still taking place and even intensifying today.

We recognized that the large Jewish immigration and the rooting of subsequent generations in the territory of Palestine was a fact. The Palestine Liberation Organization, which developed a mass following by waging a militant struggle against the occupation of Palestinian lands after the 1967 war, rejected the demagoguery of some Arab rulers who called for the Israeli Jews to be driven out of Palestine. The PLO, and particularly Fatah (its leading organization founded by Yasir Arafat), initiated the call for establishing a democratic and secular Palestine in which Jews and Arabs would live as equals. Within this framework, the Palestinian Diaspora could return to their country, and affirmative action measures to overcome the oppression of the Palestinian nation could be instituted.

Many European leaders of the Fourth International opposed this Palestinian slogan. They insisted that Israeli Jews had the right for self-determination, that is, the right to set up a separate Jewish state in Palestine as part of a socialist revolution. This position cut across the rights of the Palestinians to overcome their historic displacement and oppression by the creation of Israel. The Israeli Jews were the oppressor nationality, and calls for a Jewish state in Palestine, even if only in the future, could only have a reactionary meaning. It also represented a utopian dream that perhaps a smaller Israel could be forged that would not oppress the Palestinians. If and when Israeli Jews renounce that oppression, why wouldn't they want to live together as equal citizens with the Palestinians, as the PLO was offering?

A small minority in the SWP supported the majority in the FI on this issue and presented documents and oral arguments in the debate. Later we published both sides of the dispute in an educational bulletin.

After the convention ended, an educational conference was held at Oberlin College, somewhat like the one we held the year before. There were lectures and discussions



on Marxist theory, the history of the YSA and SWP, debates in the women's movement, the history of the US labor movement, and many other topics.

I gave a talk on the sexual revolution that was taking place among youth, and the contributions of the German psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich. There was something of a renewal on the left of interest in Reich. The independent socialist magazine *Monthly Review* carried articles on his ideas, for example.<sup>§</sup>

As a result, the talk on Reich was very well-attended. The questions and discussions after were serious and reflected the ongoing problems youth face in relation to their own sexuality and sex as a political issue. But my main focus was the contribution

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<sup>§</sup> Reich had been a follower of the early ideas of Sigmund Freud. From his experience as a psychoanalyst, he became convinced that emotional illness and sexual misery that were widespread in the population were basically socially caused. Individual treatment with psychoanalytic techniques, however useful for the individual, could never get at the root causes of the emotional problems of the masses. Becoming a socialist, he recognized the necessity of a socialist revolution before the foundations for a healthy psychological and sexual life for the masses could be created.

On the social and historical level, Reich was attracted to the explanations of Marxism. He rejected Freud's idea that humans had the same basic unchangeable nature throughout history. Freud tried to explain human history by generalizing from the psychology he observed in present day humans in capitalist society.

Reich held that the deep psychology of people in capitalist society was rooted in the bourgeois family. In this he was in close agreement with Freud. But he argued that Marxism gave the explanation of the changing history of the family in its different forms as it evolved along with the transformations in the modes of production throughout human history.

Reich joined the German Social Democratic Party, and ran clinics for young people grappling with their sexuality and the sexual oppression and repression that results from the bourgeois family and society. He then joined the Communist Party.

With the victory of Nazism in Germany, and the consolidation of Stalinism in the USSR, Reich became disillusioned with the proletarian revolution. He retreated from the historical materialism of Marx back into psychology-based theories, finding the reasons for the defeat in Germany and the USSR in the supposed intrinsic psychological defects of the masses.

He became entrapped in a vicious circle, believing that the salvation of humanity could come about only through a social revolution, but that the social revolution was precluded as long as human sexuality was distorted, and it would remain distorted as long as there was no social revolution.

Reich lived in exile in the United States. His mental health deteriorated, and he developed increasingly bizarre ideas. He became a target of the witch-hunt, and was jailed for fraud because he attempted without success to put one of his ideas into practice — a box that would concentrate "orgone energy" to cure a wide range of emotional and physical ills, including cancer.

Wilhelm Reich died in prison, a largely discredited figure. His later views and therapeutic techniques retain a small cultish following to this day.

Reich had made in understanding aspects of the psychology of masses of people under capitalism, especially in his *Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

Reich noted the manipulation by demagogues of the sexual fears that represent part of the psychological substructure of racism. What Reich wrote about in this regard could be applied to the US. In America's Jim Crow South, whites were mobilized against Blacks by the taboo against Black males having sex with white women. Most lynchings of Black men occurred because of real or imagined transgressions of this type, often of the most trivial nature such as "looking the wrong way" at a white woman. But there was no taboo of white men having sex with Black women. Both sides of this sexual mythology were utilized to keep Blacks in their place.

Reich also helped us understand the role of sexual repression in disciplining class society in general and women in particular. George Orwell captured this in his anti-utopian novel about totalitarianism, *1984*. In his book, the rulers had set up an "Anti-Sex League" among the members of the ruling party which helped maintain obedience and directed repressed sexual energy into hatred for the party's enemies, real or imagined.



Just after the educational conference, we held a rally in nearby Cleveland to launch our 1972 election campaign. Our candidates were Linda Jenness for President and Andrew Pulley for Vice President. The campaign opened more than a year before the election, because we had the opportunity to reach more people than ever before. It turned into the largest and most effective socialist electoral effort since Eugene V. Debs' campaign from jail in 1920.

Soon after the convention, in late August, Nixon announced a freeze on wages and prices. This was presented as an anti-inflation measure (based on the fabrication that rising wages are the prime cause of inflation). In fact, inflation was powered by deficit spending for the war. As in other times when wage-price freezes had been introduced, wages were frozen by the corporations with government backing, but prices kept going up. The result was a direct government attack on the working class's standard of living, the first since the aftermath of World War II.

Nixon also took the dollar off the gold standard. The dollar had been pegged to a certain amount of gold, at what had become an increasingly unrealistic rate. Theoretically, other countries could turn in the dollars they held to the US treasury and receive a disproportionately large amount of gold in return. This hadn't happened in the post-Second-World-War period, because the dollar was "good as gold" and had become the international currency. But with the inflation of the dollar, its real value fell while its value in gold was held to a high point.

Nixon let the price of gold in dollars float. This was aimed at preventing sharp deterioration of the US position vis-à-vis its trading partners, primarily its imperialist competitors.

Some older members of the National Committee in the San Francisco Bay Area predicted an immediate change in working class consciousness that would make the resolution we had just adopted irrelevant, and that we should make a big turn to union work. On the Political Committee, Tom Kerry was inclined to this view. Other experienced trade unionists like Farrell Dobbs and Frank Lovell, were more skeptical, though open-minded about what might happen.

If the prediction had come true, the gains we had made in our understanding of the radicalization — and the basic approach of the resolution we had adopted — were still valid, whatever tactical changes might be required. This would simply mean that the resolution's expectation of a broad response of workers to changing economic conditions had been fulfilled more quickly than any of us expected. A radicalization of the workers could only have deepened the radicalization of youth, women, Blacks and other oppressed nationalities.

I was uncomfortable with basing action on predictions and not on visible movement within the working class. There was tension on these points in the Political Committee.

I was functioning as the de facto National Secretary. Farrell Dobbs had begun writing his first book on the Teamsters in the 1930s, *Teamster Rebellion*, which covered the 1934 strikes in Minneapolis which the Trotskyists had led. Jack and Mary-Alice had taken a well-deserved vacation camping somewhere in Wisconsin, and then would move to Europe to help on the United Secretariat. I was in the position of acting as the point man resisting what I feared was an attempt to overturn the convention decisions.

I had a talk with Farrell, who proposed a compromise. We would urge the branches to try out plant-gate sales at workplaces. *The Militant* would feature articles about how the wage-price freeze would mean attacks on the workers' standard of living. We called on the union leadership to call for an emergency "Congress of Labor" to organize to fight Nixon's move. This campaign would help us see just what the reactions of the workers were. The PC adopted this course.

I also wanted to at least let Jack know what was afoot. By calling the National Parks Service I got a ranger to roust Jack from his campground to a phone. He agreed with the proposed course.

The AFL-CIO bureaucracy initially spoke against the wage-price freeze, but soon capitulated to Nixon. Rank-and-file workers didn't know how to respond, and there was no movement from below against Nixon's decree. The difference in the party leadership turned out to be a tempest in a teapot.

## 48. THE END OF THE WAR

As the huge April 24, 1971 march approached, support began to develop in unlikely places. Some office workers for the FBI, for example, volunteered to help out in the NPAC office, and got fired by the agency. Even in fairly high levels of the government, there were people who became committed opponents of the war.

Two researchers for the Rand Corporation, a government think tank, had access to a top-secret report created by the Pentagon that documented the involvement of the United States in Vietnam from 1945 up to mid-1968. The report comprised 47 volumes, some 7,000 pages. Only 15 copies of the report were made. Since it was supposed to be seen only by a handful of people with top security clearances, it told the truth, in contrast to the lies the government had spoon-fed the public about the reasons for the war.

The two researchers were Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo. They secretly copied the entire study, and gave it to the *New York Times* in March 1971. The *Times* worked for three months preparing a series of articles based on the documents, which would become known as the Pentagon Papers. That the top editors of the leading capitalist newspaper were prepared to publish state secrets meant that important sectors of the ruling class had decided that the war had become unwinnable, and were putting pressure on the Nixon administration to end it.

The first article appeared in the *Times* on June 13. The Nixon administration got a court injunction to stop publication after the first three were printed. But other major newspapers printed excerpts. At the end of the month, the Supreme Court by a six-to-three vote lifted the injunction and allowed publication.

This was an extraordinary development. Ellsberg and Russo violated “national security” laws (though not the Constitution). And so did the *Times*. But the administration could not stop publication of the Pentagon Papers, or even prosecute Ellsberg and Russo, so great was opposition to the war.

What the Papers documented was what the antiwar movement had been saying all along, and more. They proved that successive administrations — under Truman,

Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon — progressively deepened US involvement in an attempt to defeat the Vietnamese people's struggle for national liberation and social progress.

During World War II, the liberation movement fought the Japanese occupation. After the war, they fought the French who returned to re-conquer their rebellious colony. After the French defeat in 1954, the country was divided in two, with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North, and the Republic of Vietnam in the South. South Vietnam came increasingly under US control through puppet governments.

The 1954 division of the country did not reflect the situation on the ground. The Vietnamese had defeated the French throughout the country. But Washington insisted upon an international conference to determine Vietnam's fate. President Eisenhower had considered using atomic weapons to stave off the French defeat. This was the context in which Moscow and Beijing came to the conference. They agreed to the division of Vietnam, and pressured the liberation forces to yield. The US hoped to use the South as a launching pad to reclaim the whole country.

In the South, however, a peasant uprising began against the landlords who returned to reclaim their land after the 1954 division of the country. The fight for land reform became intertwined with the fight to unify the country. The Pentagon Papers documented in detail that the US was intervening in a revolutionary civil war in Vietnam, not defending South Vietnam from aggression by North Vietnam, and had been doing so since 1945.

NPAC held a conference of some 2,300 in July, 1971, in the midst of the exposure of the Pentagon Papers. The conference called for demonstrations in October, in cities around the country. They were large but not as large as the spring action. This did not signify any lessening of antiwar sentiment, which was still growing. But Nixon had continued to withdraw troops piecemeal, and those that remained were now supposed to be largely kept out of combat, which was to be taken over by the US.-backed Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Nixon's trip to China in February 1972, to seek a détente with Beijing, also led many to think the war would be over shortly.

Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had devised the strategy of seeking détente with both China and the USSR. In return for normalizing relations somewhat with both countries, Kissinger wanted them to compete with each other to put pressure on North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front to accept terms in the Paris negotiations more favorable to Washington.

But while Nixon was talking peace, the US was stepping up the air war. After Christmas, the heaviest bombing of the North to date was launched, which marked a

major escalation of the air war over Laos as well as Vietnam. Hanoi and the NLF responded with a major offensive in the South by NLF troops and, for the first time, by North Vietnamese regulars. The offensive was not a guerrilla action, but a conventional one. The South's army was badly mauled in the first encounters, but the revolutionary offensive was slowed, but not broken, by massive use of US air power. Nixon ordered the renewal of massive bombing on Hanoi and the port of Haiphong.

There was a pickup of antiwar activity on campus in response to these events. NPAC had called for demonstrations on April 22, 1972, which were held in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

I participated in the demonstration in New York. It was held in pouring rain. It was also unseasonably cold. There was a sea of umbrellas, 100,000 of them. John Lennon sang and led the crowd in chants of "Out Now!" I was with a French comrade, whom we knew as Vergeat. He was a very likeable person, and spoke excellent English. He was in the United States to work with Gus Horowitz to attempt to write a common Fourth International document on the Mideast. (The effort failed.) Looking out over the cold, wet but determined crowd, he turned to me and said, "This is a great victory for you," meaning the SWP.

On May 8, Nixon announced that he was implementing a blockade of Haiphong and other North Vietnamese ports. Immediately, demonstrations broke out across the United States. The *New York Times* reported, "The coast to coast outburst of demonstrations was the most turbulent since May 1970 ..."<sup>1</sup>

A march on Washington was called for May 21 in a spirit of unity by NPAC, PCPJ, and other groups such as SANE and Americans for Democratic Action which were more mainstream.

The blockade appeared to represent a reckless escalation of the war. Most of the aid Vietnam received, including from the USSR, was through Haiphong. This raised the possibility of a major confrontation with Moscow.

China's response to the blockade was low key, demonstrating the success of the Nixon-Kissinger policy of détente with China. Nixon had also scheduled a trip to Moscow for May 22. The whole world was watching, waiting to see what the Kremlin would do. Would it go ahead with the trip in the midst of the blockade and the war's most intensive bombing of North Vietnam? Unfortunately, that's what the Soviet regime did.

China and the USSR achieved détente with the US on the backs of the struggling Vietnamese. I was sickened by the photos of Nixon and Brezhnev smiling and shaking hands while this torrent of death was being rained on Vietnam. The antiwar forces had been kicked in the gut, and the May 21 action was relatively small, 15,000.

Two weeks before Nixon's trip to Moscow, Max Frankel wrote in the *New York Times*, "If the Moscow meeting still begins on schedule two weeks hence, then the situation in Vietnam will now be a principal item on the agenda ... In the name of 'saving the peace' between themselves, the major powers could finally attempt to impose a bargained peace on Indochina."<sup>2</sup>

Although it would take some time — which included the most massive bombing of the war against North Vietnam during the Christmas 1972 period in an effort to force more concessions from the Vietnamese fighters — the Paris peace talks resulted in an agreement signed in January, 1973. The US would withdraw its combat troops. A cease-fire was agreed to. South Vietnam was carved up into zones controlled by the Saigon government and others by the forces of the NLF and North Vietnam which, unlike in the 1954 Geneva Agreement, were not required to withdraw to the North. Both sides could replenish military equipment as it became used up.

But since the US had used the last months before the accord to massively build up Saigon's army, and the USSR and China didn't do the same for the revolutionary forces, this provision was to Saigon's advantage. The US also kept thousands of "civilian advisers" to the regime in the South — a thinly disguised military support network.<sup>§</sup>

The agreement and withdrawal of the last US combat troops meant the end of the antiwar movement as a mass movement. NPAC and the SMC still maintained themselves with skeleton staffs, in reserve, in case Washington once again sent troops.

But the war did not cease. The Saigon regime almost immediately broke the cease fire, and fighting continued for two more years, with another 200,000 deaths.

In early 1975, the revolutionary forces launched an offensive, which rapidly led to a rout of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), the South Vietnamese army. The NLF and North Vietnamese troops were unable to move forward fast enough to keep up with the retreating ARVN troops, whose discipline was disintegrating. The revolutionary forces had to fight some bitter battles with the defenders of the US-run regime. But ARVN, for the most part, was no longer an army but a fleeing swarm of individuals tearing off their uniforms and abandoning their equipment and weapons, which fell into the hands of the NLF-North Vietnamese troops.

The rout demonstrated clearly that the out-gunned revolutionary forces retained their morale, while the ARVN's was collapsing. That's because the revolutionaries were fighting for what they believed in — the unity of Vietnam and an end of the

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<sup>§</sup> The combined aid that the USSR and China delivered to North Vietnam from 1966 to 1972 amounted to \$4.1 billion. In the same period, the US sent \$101 billion to South Vietnam.

capitalist-landlord regime. The ARVN troops believed in nothing except saving their own skins.

By this time Nixon had resigned — the first US President to do so. His resignation came about as a result of the Watergate scandal, itself a consequence of Washington's inability to win the war, and a decade of civil rights, antiwar, and other protests across the United States. Vice President Gerald Ford became President. On April 10, Ford asked Congress to provide another \$1 billion to the tottering regime in Saigon by April 19. This proposal was a result of panic; the money couldn't even be delivered to prop up the regime because that regime was disintegrating.

There were spontaneous demonstrations in parts of the country demanding the complete withdrawal of the US from Vietnam. A demonstration for jobs called by sections of the labor movement for April 26 in Washington became also an antiwar event of some 60,000. Many carried signs reading "Jobs, Not War."

On April 30, the last remaining US troops in Vietnam, the Marine guards at the US Embassy, were lifted off the roof by helicopter in a vivid scene watched on TV around the world. Some Vietnamese who were desperate to escape the revolutionary tide hung on to the helicopter's skids.

Four hours later, the revolutionary troops marched into Saigon, which would soon be renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

It is hard for me to express the deep joy I felt as I watched these scenes on TV and in the newspapers. The US masters of war had been defeated. Vietnam was united and under a worker-peasant regime.

I was proud to have played a small part in this victory. I was proud of the SWP for its part. I was proud of all the antiwar fighters in the US and around the world, whatever differences we may have had. And I was especially proud of the people of Vietnam, this poor nation that stood up to the most powerful and evil war machine on Earth, and defeated it.



## 49. FUNCTIONING AS NATIONAL SECRETARY

At the August 1971 SWP convention, some of the young leaders of the French Communist League proposed that the SWP again send a team of young leaders to work in the International center in Brussels. No SWP leader had resided in Europe since Caroline and I left in May 1970. They urged that the US representatives live in Paris, where they would also work with the young leaders of the CL. The proposal was an effort to begin overcoming the factionalism that had developed in the Fourth International since the 1969 World Congress.

Farrell and Jack called me to a meeting at Jack's apartment. They proposed that we send Jack and Mary-Alice. Jack was functioning as National Secretary although Farrell formally held that post. They recommended that I replace Jack in that role.

I never imagined myself as the central executive officer of the party. My talents lay in being part of the leadership team that the National Secretary organized. But I understood the importance of this attempt to deepen our international collaboration, and with some trepidation, agreed to the proposal.

I have already written about the small flap in the party leadership concerning the Nixon wage-price freeze. I did not have the rapport with some of the older party leaders that Jack had, especially with Tom Kerry. Most of the younger party central leaders tended to leave it up to Jack to work most closely with the older leaders. However, my relations with Farrell Dobbs were quite close, and he helped me on a few important occasions during this period.

Shortly after the August convention, a great prisoners' uprising took place at the New York State prison in Attica, a rural town in upstate New York. This event deepened and extended the radicalization. We sent Derrick Morrison to Attica to report for *The Militant*.

The rebellion was organized mostly by the Black and Latino prisoners, but some whites were leaders also. There was little racial animosity during the uprising. The

prisoners took over several cell blocks and held 41 guards and civilian prison workers hostage.

Their basic demand was to be treated as human beings. They declared: “The entire incident that has erupted here at Attica is a result ... of the unmitigated oppression wrought by the racist administration network of this prison. ... We are men. ... We are not beasts, and we do not intend to be beaten or driven as such. ...”<sup>1</sup>

They made many concrete demands about prison conditions, the rights of religious prisoners, access to lawyers, the end of arbitrary punishments, the needs of Spanish-speaking prisoners, changes in the prison administration, and the right of prisoners to elect committees to negotiate with the prison authorities.

After four days, during which a committee of public figures acted as a go-between, negotiations between the prisoners and the state seemed to be progressing. In reality, the Rockefeller administration was readying a full-scale armed attack.

The result was a massacre that murdered 50 people, including about 10 of the hostages. The Governor’s office issued reports, presented as fact in the major media, that prisoners were cutting hostages’ throats and castrating them. But the hostages, like the prisoners, were proven to have been murdered by police bullets in the unrelenting barrage.

Wounded prisoners were denied treatment. All were forced to strip naked and lie on the floor while being beaten with truncheons, kicked, and otherwise abused. News of the atrocity leaked out, but it was 30 years before the government admitted wrongdoing and some victims were compensated.

As we decided at the 1971 convention, our activity that fall centered on the speaking tours of Linda Jenness and Andrew Pulley which opened our presidential campaign. In tandem with the tours, we aimed to win 30,000 introductory subscriptions to *The Militant*, the most ambitious goal we had ever set. When this subscription drive ended in November, we had sold more than 32,000. And, of course, we were building the fall antiwar actions.

We also joined in a very broad effort to save the young Black professor Angela Davis, an antiracist activist who was a member of the Communist Party. She was being railroaded on charges of having helped unjustly jailed Black militants who attempted to escape their captors.

In 1969, the regents of the University of California fired her from her job as assistant professor of philosophy for being a member of the Communist Party. A judge overturned the firing. In 1970, the regents tried again, this time citing her efforts to defend Black Panther Party victims and three Black inmates in Soledad State Prison being framed up on charges of murdering a guard. Jonathan Jackson, a brother of one

of the inmates, worked with Davis on the Soledad case.

In June, 1970, Jackson walked into a courtroom where a Black inmate of San Quentin prison was on trial for assaulting a guard. He gave weapons to the defendant and two other prisoners who were there as witnesses, and they seized five hostages, including the judge. San Quentin guards and police opened fire, killing Jackson, the defendant, one of the inmate witnesses, and the judge.

Based on the fact that Jackson had worked with Davis in the Soledad defense, Davis was charged with murder. She avoided capture and was put on the FBI's "10 most wanted" list, and was characterized as "armed and dangerous." She managed to remain in hiding until October, and the drama of the hunt for her made her case a *cause célèbre*. After her capture, the fight against the attempted judicial railroad won wide support from the Black and antiwar movements, Chicano struggle, women's movement, and other struggles.

Finally brought to trial in May 1972 she was found not guilty by a jury from which Blacks had been excluded.

*The Militant* commented, "Angela Davis is free! A massive protest movement that reached into every corner of the globe freed her.

"Millions saw her fate as their own. To Blacks, women, prisoners, and radicals she was the victim of the same racist oppression, sexist discrimination, and illegal harassment they face daily...

"The capitalist government from President Nixon to [California] Governor Reagan tried to make an example of Angela Davis. They framed her because of her affiliation to the Communist Party and her political activities."<sup>2</sup>

*The Militant* hailed the trial outcome as a victory of all who fought for a better and more humane world.

Earlier, in March, the Soledad defendants were found not guilty. This was a setback to the prison authorities who were using the prosecution to suppress the rising movement within the prison. Two days before the trial began, one of the defendants, George Jackson, the brother of Jonathan Jackson, was murdered by guards.

The prosecution and the judge whipped up a scare campaign, claiming the remaining defendants were so dangerous that they had to be flown to the courthouse each day by helicopter, and in leg and arm shackles.

The defense lawyers, however, destroyed the prosecution's case, proving that three of the witnesses were directly threatened with reprisals if they didn't testify, and that other evidence had been obtained through bribery.

The Davis and the Soledad verdicts showed the growing distrust of many concerning the government's attempts to victimize radicals and other defendants. This

phenomenon became known as “the revolt of the juries.”

Instead of another subscription drive in the spring, we sought to raise the number of single issues sold by the party branches and YSA chapters. Our goal was to make street sales a more regular part of weekly branch activity. Total weekly sales were then about 4,000 per week, and, in collaboration with the branches, a goal of 7,000 was set. In the course of the drive, sales rose to 8,000.

On January 30, 1972, British paratroopers shot and killed 13 peaceful and unarmed Irish nationalist demonstrators in Derry, a city in the British colony of Northern Ireland. Many more were injured. The event became known as “Bloody Sunday.”

The massacre triggered demonstrations throughout Ireland, and the world. The humanitarian mask of British imperialism was ripped off and its ugly face revealed for the world to see in the television news footage of the slaughter.

A new stage of the Irish struggle began. The SWP strengthened ties to the Irish movement, both to Sinn Fein and to younger leaders that had emerged in the Peoples Democracy civil rights movement, especially Bernadette Devlin. Gerry Foley, a mainstay on the staff of *Intercontinental Press*, visited Ireland to present first-hand coverage and interviews for our press.

Early in February, rebellious auto workers at the General Motors’ plant in Lordstown, Ohio, struck against speedup. We had been following this local, which was mostly young, and which had drawn some attention nationally for its militant actions.

The Women’s National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC), which SWP and YSA women helped build, held a broad conference in Boston on February 13 that drew 1,308 participants. The conference debated and resolved many issues facing the movement. One of these echoed debates in the antiwar movement. The International Socialists presented a motion to exclude all politicians from the Democratic or Republican parties from speaking on WONAAC platforms.

Women at the meeting who were candidates in Democratic Party primaries explained that would exclude them. The measure was really aimed at driving out the many women who supported them as well, and assuring control of the movement by left sects. Linda Jenness spoke for the SWP, pointing out that she was running against the Democrats and Republicans, but that she was “glad to work with women from those parties” to fight to repeal the laws banning abortion. The IS motion was roundly defeated.

On March 12, a National Black Political Convention was held in Gary, Indiana. About 8,000 Blacks attended, attesting to the growing interest in Black political action. While Black Democrats and their allies kept the discussion and decisions within

boundaries they could live with, there was evidence of interest in independent Black political action among the more militant participants.

On May 11-14, 1972, the SWP National Committee held a meeting in New York. I gave the political report, which focused on the Vietnam War and Nixon's latest escalation. I also described the new economic situation which had produced Nixon's wage controls. This measure signaled a new ruling class offensive against the living standards of working people.

Peter Camejo, who had recently made a tour of various countries in Latin America, reported on his experiences. This included the continuing debate in the Fourth International on the orientation toward rural guerrilla war in Latin America. The debate was becoming more concrete because Latin American groups were following different orientations and thus the counterposed lines had been tested in life. Jack Barnes and Mary-Alice Waters gave reports on the situation in the Fourth International as a whole.

While I was functioning as National Secretary, Betsey Stone and Lew Jones took on most tasks of the National Organization Secretary. Betsey concentrated on keeping in touch with the branches and helping them with their problems. Sometimes this would entail asking members to move to a different city to strengthen the branch there. Lew worked with the national office and the national party departments. Lew and Betsey gave reports on the organizational tasks of the SWP.

Larry Seigle, the campaign manager for the Jenness-Pulley ticket, outlined plans for the campaign. Just after the national committee meeting, Linda Jenness, who spoke Spanish, made a speaking tour in Mexico, Peru and Argentina. Her anti-imperialist and socialist message was well received, and there was extensive media coverage in those countries.

During our National Committee meeting, a wave of strikes in Québec protested the jailing of three union leaders for defying strike-breaking injunctions. Once again the Québécois workers showed their vanguard role in relation to their English Canadian counterparts.

On May 27, 25,000 people, mostly Black, marched and rallied in Washington D.C. on African Liberation Day.

The next day, 500 dissident coal miners, organized by Miners for Democracy, met in Wheeling, West Virginia, to choose candidates to oppose the corrupt United Mine Workers bureaucracy headed by Tony Boyle. Boyle was under indictment at the time for the murder of Miners for Democracy leader Joseph Yablonski and his family. Boyle was eventually convicted and imprisoned.

Frank Lovell reported on the miners' convention for *The Militant*. Joel Britton was the editor and thought that Frank's article was too favorable to the Miners for

Democracy. Both Frank and Joel came into my office to discuss the article. I sided with Frank, and Joel accepted our judgment.

The National Committee meeting marked a new stage in the transition in leadership from the old generation to the new. Farrell Dobbs would often make the point to me that as materialists (in the philosophical sense) we had to admit the fact of death and that the older people wouldn't be around forever.

James P. Cannon, the party's National Chairman, resisted stepping down from the National Committee. A formula was worked out, largely by Farrell's intervention. Cannon was elected National Chairman Emeritus. Jack Barnes was elected National Secretary, replacing Dobbs. I was elected National Organization Secretary, replacing Barnes. The post of National Chairman was left vacant. As part of the transition, Farrell Dobbs and George Novack proposed they leave their positions as regular members of the National Committee and be elected instead to advisory status on the National Committee. They joined Tom Kerry who already held that position. All three were also elected as consultative members of the Political Committee.

## 50. DISCUSSION ON GAY LIBERATION

Since women are oppressed as a sex, the women's movement raised many questions about sexuality and how it has been shaped and distorted in our society to perpetuate the oppression of women, such as in the sexual objectification of women, the transformation of sex into a commodity, and the possessive relations bred by this system.

Feminist women had to face hostility from backward males and females who thought feminists were "uppity" and "unladylike" for fighting for their rights. They were accused of being "unfeminine" — in other words, lesbians or lesbian-like. Fear and prejudice reinforced by these characterizations led to a debate in the women's movement over whether lesbians could participate in the movement as equals. Like redbaiting, lesbian baiting was divisive and was roundly rejected by principled feminists. This fight and victory was one source of the new gay and lesbian liberation movement.

Another was the tendency of radicalized youth to revolt against the debilitating and hypocritical sexual norms of a sick racist and sexist society. Gay and lesbian people suffered especially under these norms. A turning point came in 1969, when police raided a gay bar, the Stonewall, in New York City's Greenwich Village. Such raids were commonplace since homosexuality was outlawed in most states. The cops would routinely make some arrests and get their jollies off by clubbing bar patrons, who had to keep silent in many cases to avoid being exposed.

That night, however, fear was overcome by human solidarity, and the so-called "queers" fought back, much to the shock of the cops. News of the fightback rapidly spread throughout the country, giving a new impetus to the fight for gay rights.

As I explained in a previous chapter, the SWP had earlier been moving toward a policy of excluding homosexuals from membership. This ran against the grain of the overwhelming support the new gay liberation movement quickly gained among radicalized youth, including in the SWP and YSA. We were forced by the rise of the movement itself to come to terms with this issue of human rights.

The gay liberation movement and our membership policy was a subject of informal discussion at our first Oberlin conference in August 1970. Many comrades, including party leaders, who had been “in the closet,” began to come out. Our first leadership challenge was to repudiate the policy of barring homosexuals from membership. This was done in a report by Jack Barnes adopted by the Political Committee in November 1970. The report also explained the rise of the gay liberation movement as part of the radicalization, and the progressive content of the fight of gays and lesbians against their oppression.

At the May 1971 plenum of the National Committee, a short motion was adopted that gave “unconditional support to the struggles of homosexuals for full democratic rights including full civil and human rights, and against all forms of discrimination and oppression they suffer under capitalism.” The Political Committee also organized an information-gathering assessment of the movement. Gay and lesbian comrades began to attend meetings of various groups, and wrote reports on what they had found out about them.

There was a sharp reaction of unease in a section of the party with this initiative to learn more about the movement. It became clear that a division was brewing. A section of the party recoiled at having any direct participation in the gay liberation movement. The leadership thought that a democratic political discussion was necessary, so that these members would not feel they faced a *fait accompli*.

At the August 1971 SWP convention, we ratified the positions adopted by the May NC. But we also called a halt to the information-gathering participation in the movement, and authorized the new National Committee elected by the convention to open a written discussion on the gay movement among the membership in the Discussion Bulletin.

We waited until the May 1972 plenum of the NC to open this discussion, to give some time for members to soberly consider the question. The written discussion was to be followed by a decision of the National Committee.

I wrote the initial article to kick off the discussion. I did this as an individual, and the Political Committee did not take any position as a committee at this stage. Everyone else on the Political Committee was all too happy for me to play the leadership role in the discussion. As could be predicted, the discussion was lively and sharp, and lasted about three months in the summer of 1972.

My article discussed the ways gays and lesbians are oppressed, and reaffirmed our unconditional support to their struggle. It noted that in “1969 and 1970, gay liberation organizations appeared in major cities and on campuses across the country. The ‘coming out’ of organized gay liberation groups reflects a growing mood,



especially among young homosexuals, to reject self-hatred and to affirm their humanity, as well as a desire to fight discrimination.”

I also summed up what we had learned about the movement. A section of the movement had turned inward, away from action, and became part of the ultraleft and commune-oriented current among young people. Activist groups remained, but the situation was very uneven throughout the country. In some areas, groups had collapsed, in others there were viable organizations. There was no national gay liberation organization that could be a framework for our organized participation. Therefore I proposed that “it would be a mistake to attempt to carry out a national party intervention in the gay liberation movement at the present time.” Where local struggles occurred, I wrote, the branches should decide how to relate to them, within the framework of the totality of the tasks the party had decided on.

While this proposal became an issue in the debate, there were two other points I raised which became controversial.

One was that I proposed the party not take a position on why homosexuality exists. This question was (and still is) in the early stages of scientific study, and in any case, is beyond the purpose of a political party. The other was a sketch of what I thought about the origins of the oppression of gay people.

I noted that gays are not a class in the Marxist sense of having a defined relation to the means of production. Nor are they an oppressed nationality. They play no special role in the family, as women do, or in any other social structure. The oppression faced by gay people stems from prejudice against same-sex sexual activity. The traditional sexual morality that outlaws same-sex sexuality is a product of the family system in capitalist society, and consists of strictures of sexual conduct which help preserve family relationships in class society, including the subordination of women. Discrimination against gay people is a result of this deep-seated prejudice.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion centered in the main on criticisms of my initial article, from opposing points of view. One side, represented by Nat Weinstein and my brother Roland, opposed any participation by the party in the movement. The other side argued that we should go beyond the proposals I made, both in terms of the extent of party involvement in the movement and of taking a position on a whole range of questions dealing with sexuality.

Roland Sheppard summed up the argument of his side in the discussion: “The question, at the present time, is whether to actively intervene [in the working class] to take these prejudices [against gays] head on. It must never be forgotten that we are a very small propaganda group-party with no mass base and isolated from the [working] class in general. I have not seen anything written which would demonstrate that we

would not be further isolated from the class if we take up [the gay liberation] struggle, or that we would not have needless barriers to the party when the class starts to radicalize.”<sup>2</sup>

Nat Weinstein had the opinion that only those homosexuals who were out of the closet were subject to oppression, and that the great majority would never come out of the closet. This majority of homosexuals suffered only a “psychological oppression.”<sup>3</sup>

On the other side, there was a gamut of positions, ranging from disagreeing with my assessment of where the movement stood all the way over to arguing that homosexuality was superior to heterosexuality and was in and of itself revolutionary. Some contributions tried to predict what sexual relations would be like in the communist future, and that we should take a position on the question. Others said that the gay liberation movement had the same social weight as the Black and women’s movements.

I wrote a reply near the end of the discussion, taking up the main arguments from both sides. This article became the framework for the drafting of a “Memorandum on the Gay Liberation Movement” that I prepared for the Political Committee. This was submitted to the April 1973 plenum of the National Committee.

While I was working on this draft, Farrell Dobbs asked to talk to me. I had intended to include the position I had already written that, given the state of the movement, we couldn’t project an organized national party participation in it, but that we leave it up to the branches to relate to concrete local activities and organizations. Farrell came right to the point. He said that the opposition in the party to having anything to do with the movement was based “purely and simply on prejudice.” But, he said, if we stuck with the position I had outlined, it would split the party, and we therefore had to reject any reallocation of our forces to the movement by the branches. In other words, we had to capitulate to prejudice. Farrell was never one to mince words.

It was true that Roland Sheppard and Nat Weinstein spoke for a substantial layer in the party. One central party leader who agreed with them was Tom Kerry for example, although he didn’t write anything on the subject.

Harry Ring had written an article in the discussion urging that we reject the notion, still prevalent in psychiatric circles, that homosexuality was a mental illness. He wrote, “it is difficult for me to conceive how a materialist can characterize as ‘unnatural’ a phenomenon that appears in humankind and animals; in every known period of human history; in all forms of societies; and flourishes so readily in conditions of sexual segregation such as prisons, armies, schools, etc.”<sup>4</sup>

Farrell had great moral weight with me. Jack Barnes and I talked it over, and came to agreement with Farrell’s point. I dropped the position in the memorandum that the

branches should relate to local struggles and organizations. However, I sharpened our political position of support to gay liberation, including Harry Ring's point about homosexuality not being a mental illness. We summed up, "This development of the gay liberation movement is progressive. It confronts and helps break down the reactionary morality that helps preserve class society. The struggle of gay people for their rights is directed against the capitalist government, and is in the interests of socialism, which can only be built by the mobilization of the working class and its allies in the historic task of rebuilding society, eliminating every vestige of discrimination and oppression spawned by class society, including the oppression of gay people." This position formed the basis of our public stance in our press and election campaigns.

I also rejected taking any position on the relative merits of homosexuality or heterosexuality. We pointed to the fact that the social weight of the gay liberation movement was much less than that of the women's or Black movements.

The memorandum was adopted unanimously by the National Committee, and was approved at the party's convention in the summer of 1973. The great majority of comrades agreed with it, including gay and lesbian members. Some didn't and over time left the party. We lost some good people as a result. One of these was Howard Wallace, who would go on to become a leading figure in the gay and labor movements in the San Francisco area.

Another member who quit was a young writer for the party, David Thorstad. After he left, he became a founder of the North American Man-Boy Love Association, which advocates pedophilia. The memorandum stated that the sexuality of all of us is distorted in a class-divided and still patriarchic society. Because of this, it is a mistake to idealize any of the sexual manifestations of today's society as the way humans will be once they are free in a classless society.

Pedophilia — whether heterosexual or homosexual — is basically the use of adult status, power, authority, and influence to sexually exploit children and youth. It is a sickness, and does severe psychological damage to the young victims. When NAMBLA was formed, we characterized it as reactionary and as a threat to the broad support that the fight for gay rights was winning.

Our decision not to allocate forces to the gay liberation movement hurt us in another way, in addition to losing some good comrades. We missed getting to know some activists and potential leaders. Workers World continued to participate in the movement, and recruited some strong individuals as a result.

Looking back, I now do not think the party would have split over the question of involvement in local gay rights struggles. Those who opposed any intervention in the

movement were, I believe, in agreement with the party's overall course, and would not have attempted to set up a rival organization.

The radicalization was coming to a close, although its achievements and consequences would remain an important factor in US politics for decades to come. The gay liberation movement, as part of the radicalization, retreated as a mass-action movement although the changes in cultural norms and decline in prejudice resulting from the radicalization made possible further advances for gay rights over the years.

After the dust settled over time following the 1973 convention, some party branches in fact did begin to participate in the movement where warranted. In 1976, the New York branch, for example, had a large fraction of comrades, both gay and straight, who related to it.

As a party in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we were marked by the times. Prejudices in the society and the working class were reflected in the party, as were the new forces breaking down those prejudices. On the question of the liberation of gays and lesbians, the International Socialists and Workers World were ahead of us. But we were way ahead of most other socialist groups, especially those who were of Stalinist origin, whether of the pro-Moscow or pro-Beijing variety. While the Bolsheviks had abolished anti-homosexual laws in the revolution, the Stalinist counter-revolution had re-imposed them. The Communist Party USA and the various Maoist groups all held the view that homosexuality was a counter-revolutionary "bourgeois" deviation.<sup>§</sup>

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<sup>§</sup> For a discussion of the Maoist position, see Max Elbaum's *Revolution in the Air*, Verso, 2002.

## 51. THE 1973 PARTY CONVENTION

More than 1,100 people attended the educational conference held at Oberlin College in August 1972. It centered around international questions, particularly those that were being debated in the deepening factional struggle in the Fourth International.

The conference kicked off the final months of our 1972 presidential election campaign, and many local and state campaigns. Young Socialists for Jenness and Pulley (YSJP) organized tours to reach out to young people at campuses and high schools across the country once school opened. The YSJP was broader than the YSA, signing up young people who wanted to support the socialist campaign. On many campuses YSJP participated in mock presidential elections in the fall (the voting age was still 21, so many students couldn't vote in the regular elections), and got substantial votes for the SWP ticket. Many who were first attracted to the election campaign joined the YSA after the elections.

We carried out a big expansion of the national headquarters at 410 West Street. The company that owned the building was going out of business. They approached us to see if we would want to buy the building, offering to turn over their low-interest loan from the Small Business Administration to us. This covered the bulk of the price they were asking. We raised the remainder by getting some big donations from party members. I talked this over by telephone with Jack Barnes in Paris, and we came to the conclusion that this was a good deal. Our operating costs for the whole building and loan payments and taxes amounted to not much more than we were paying in rent for part of the building.

Party members and friends from around the country volunteered to rebuild the bottom two floors of the building, providing a new home for our publishing house and printing plant. We greatly expanded the plant, buying a web press and other equipment.

In November, WONAAC sponsored a rally in Washington, D.C. demanding an end to laws banning abortions or contraception, as well as opposing forced sterilization of women. The rally was attended by some 3,000. This was smaller than it could have

been. As part of a broad shift toward subordination to the Democratic Party, NOW refused to support the action and red-baited it as an SWP affair. While SWP and YSA women were the backbone of WONAAC, it had an important component of independent feminists in its leadership. But the red-baiting had an effect on the size of the demonstration.

The struggle of the United Farm Workers to organize the largely Mexican and Filipino workforce in the California fields heated up in 1973. The growers resisted with court injunctions limiting picketing, which the UFWA rejected. There were mass arrests of workers as a result. Another weapon in the growers' arsenal was the corrupt leadership of the Teamsters union. The growers encouraged and allowed the Teamsters to sign up farm workers on the basis of sweetheart deals with the growers, and the union chiefs sent goons to attack UFWA workers.

The UFWA stepped up its call for a boycott of table grapes from California. This struggle struck a chord in the tens of thousands of young people who had been radicalized in the fight against the war and racism. All the significant tendencies in the radical movement supported the boycott.

Wages were still frozen under Nixon's decree, but — surprise! — prices weren't. A brief struggle erupted in 1973 over the soaring price of meat when housewives organized to call for a boycott to drive the prices down. In San Francisco, unions organized a labor demonstration around the issue. Nat Weinstein was one of the organizers of the effort. I went to San Francisco to discuss the issue with Nat.

The United Labor Action Committee, representing the most progressive unions in the Bay Area, organized the demonstration, which was held on April 26. The official slogans were "Smash these chains: Highest price rises in history! Wage Controls! Five Million Unemployed! Unequal taxes that favor the rich! \$8 billion cutback in health and social service programs!" Between 3,000 and 5,000 participated, mostly workers.

Early in 1973 a group that came out of SDS called the National Caucus of Labor Committees, led by Lyndon LaRouche, decided that it was going to violently crush the Communist Party, in what they publicly called "operation mop-up." They accused the CP of obstructing their effort to take over the National Welfare Rights Organization. They had trained themselves in the use of special clubs called nunchakus, made of two pieces of wood connected by a swivel. The swivel gave a terrific swing to the outer piece of wood, which could do more damage than a solid club. They trained to use other weapons as well.

Their first attack on April 11 targeted supporters of the Young Workers Liberation League, the youth group of the CP, at Temple University in Philadelphia. The surprise

attack with clubs and pipes injured a number of people. *The Militant* ran an editorial calling for repudiation of the NCLC campaign. We called for a united defense of all organizations attacked by the NCLC, and were successful in winning broad support on the left and from civil libertarians to denounce the NCLC.<sup>§</sup>

Even with their own supporters under a potentially deadly attack, the Communist Party responded in a divisive way. The *Daily World*, the CP paper, tried to link the NCLC to “Trotskyites.”

On April 23, the NCLC attacked a meeting held at Columbia University to hear candidates for Mayor of New York City. On the speakers platform were a Democratic contender, CP candidate Rasheed Storey and Joanna Misnik, who was speaking for Norman Oliver, the SWP candidate. About 60 NCLC supporters armed with nunchakus and other clubs, and brass knuckles, charged the platform. SWP and YSA members, as well as CP members and Columbia students defended the candidates.

The defenders had to break off chair legs in order to defend the people on the platform, whom the NCLC thugs were trying to reach. They were after Storey in particular. SWP and YSA members, who outnumbered the CP supporters at the

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<sup>§</sup> LaRouche had been a member of the SWP. He was among the sectarians repelled by the party’s identification with the Cuban revolution and Malcolm X. He was expelled by the New York branch for being a member of Tim Wohlforth’s Workers League — the US section of the split from the Fourth International led by Gerry Healy in 1963 — after the Wohlforth grouping left the party in 1964. Prior to his expulsion, I discussed this charge with LaRouche and he admitted being a member of the Workers League. The expulsion seemed to be basically okay with him.

When Ethel and I were in the process of moving to New York in the summer of 1961, I went down from Boston a number of times to search for work. On one of these occasions, I was billeted at LaRouche’s apartment, where he lived with his companion.

LaRouche told me he was a “time study” person. If true, this meant he was hired by capitalists to figure out how to speed up workers. I thought this was not an occupation that a socialist should be involved in. However, during the next five years or so before he was expelled, he was never hired in that capacity. He was supported serially by the women who lived with him.

After he left the Workers League, in the later 1960s, he joined SDS and formed a group within it, the National Caucus of Labor Committees. This ultra-sectarian group developed a fanatical hostility to Black demands for affirmative action hiring in the construction industry, which it described as a fascist plot against white construction workers and working-class unity. It was as leader of the NCLC that LaRouche moved to the far right.

LaRouche’s so-called “socialism” always struck me as technocratic and hyper-intellectual, with no relationship at all to real workers’ struggles anywhere. It seems clear that, in a perverted way, he used what he learned from Trotsky’s descriptions and analysis of fascist organizations to build his own fascist group.

meeting, formed a cordon to get him out safely, and Storey thanked them for their help. In the end, the attackers retreated, taking their wounded with them. Six members of the SWP were hurt.

But the meeting was broken up.

I wasn't at the meeting, but following it, Larry Seigle and others who were in the thick of the fight showed up at my apartment to lick their wounds and discuss our response.

In retaliation for the SWP and YSA's role at Columbia, the NCLC announced that we were now targets also. On May 5, in Detroit, they attacked an educational meeting sponsored by the SWP and YSA. This time we were prepared to defend the meeting with a squad of marshals with baseball bats. The NCLC goons were driven off with many casualties on their side. One SWP member, Don Bechler, had to be treated at a hospital. That night, the International Socialists, Workers League and Spartacist League joined us in physically defending an SWP mayoral campaign meeting, and the NCLC didn't attack. A number of groups, including members of the YWLL, agreed to defend a meeting scheduled for our vice presidential candidate, Andrew Pulley, on Detroit's Wayne State University.

The NCLC, apparently despairing of attacking well-defended meetings, decided to go after individuals. They jumped three members of the SWP from behind on a street in New York. They used nunchakus and pipes. Jesse Smith suffered a broken arm and many bruises. Ken Shilman and Rebecca Finch were beaten but not seriously hurt.

The NCLC pulled back from their campaign following this incident.

The NCLC had claimed to be socialist. But their violent campaign against socialist organizations was a strong signal that they were moving far to the right. We began to hear stories of NCLC members recruiting people in bars to "get the commies" before their attacks. The police were very reluctant to arrest any of the thugs, some of whom had an appearance and behavior that led us to suspect they were cops.

In his newspaper, LaRouche publicly attacked the actress Jane Fonda, a favorite target then and now of the far right, for her support to the antiwar movement. They went on a ferocious campaign against struggles to protect the environment. One of their slogans was "feed Jane Fonda to the whales."

The LaRouchites put forward the racist theory that the big majority of Blacks were deformed by drugs that the Rockefeller family had forced on the Black community. LaRouche attacked financial capitalists (bankers) as the source of the ills of modern society, as opposed to the good and productive capitalists. These were adaptations of Hitler's fascist program to American society. From being an ultra-



sectarian socialist, LaRouche had become the leader of a new, small but dangerous fascist group.

The Watergate scandal began to unfold early in 1973. It arose out of a break-in by a group of thugs who were captured while in the Democratic National Committee's offices in the Watergate apartment complex in Washington, D.C. during the 1972 presidential election campaign. Nixon, the victor in that campaign, was eventually proven to have ordered the break-in, looking for anything that could be used against the Democrats in the elections. Nixon was forced to resign in disgrace, and there were more far-reaching results.

The government's dirty tricks against the Black and antiwar movements came to light, such as J. Edgar Hoover's campaign to discredit Martin Luther King. "Cointelpro" (Counter-Intelligence Program) was exposed as a many-year FBI campaign to infiltrate, disrupt, discredit, and victimize dissident groups. Coupled with the government's lying about the Vietnam War revealed in the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate revelations raised public distrust of the government to an unprecedented high.

One morning I suggested to Jack, who had returned from Paris, that perhaps the antiwar movement should file a lawsuit against the government, in order to force release of more information. Jack smiled and urged me to listen to Larry Seigle's report to the Political Committee that afternoon. Larry proposed that the SWP and the YSA sue the government. I was quickly convinced by his argument that if we tried to get all the tendencies in the antiwar movement to file a suit, we would get bogged down in a continual debate over different approaches. A single all-inclusive suit would be unworkable.

The SWP and YSA filed the suit in July 1973 against Nixon and his White House cohorts and other government officials. The suit charged Nixon and others with "illegal acts of blacklisting, harassment, electronic surveillance, burglary, mail tampering, and terrorism against the SWP and YSA, and their members and supporters." Leonard Boudin, the foremost constitutional lawyer in the country, filed the suit. In addition to the SWP and YSA as organizations, there were named plaintiffs, including me, Jack Barnes, Peter Camejo, Farrell Dobbs, Willie Mae Reid, Linda Jenness, Andrew Pulley, Norman Oliver, Evelyn Sell and Morris Starsky. It would take over a decade, but we finally won this suit.

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In the spring of 1972 I worked closely with Wendy Lyons, who was our national antiwar director. We made a number of trips together to talk to leaders of NPAC as

well as to branches. We became close.

In the summer, the triangle of me, Wendy, and Caroline caused considerable emotional turmoil for the three of us. It also cut into my time, and I didn't give as much time to organizing the party leadership as I had. I was spending about eight hours a day in the national office, as opposed to our usual ten or twelve hours. I didn't make many political errors while functioning as National Secretary, in my opinion, but I was becoming an organizational bottleneck by the beginning of 1973.

At the same time, we decided to bring Jack and Mary-Alice back from Paris. The experiment of trying to work together with the young French leadership had come up against sharper political differences, which I'll take up in Volume Two.

The upshot was that we decided to send Wendy and myself to Los Angeles, where the branch was in need of leadership strengthening. I also needed some R&R. So the triangle was settled — for a time.

We held a meeting of the National Committee at the end of April, 1973. The political report was given by Lew Jones. In his report he explained that with the withdrawal of most US troops from Vietnam, the continuing war was no longer the central issue in US politics, but we had to be on the alert if the US once again invaded.

While I didn't give the report to the NC plenum, I was the primary writer of the draft political resolution for the party convention to be held in August. Because of this, we decided that I would give the political report at the convention. Normally, the National Secretary, Jack Barnes, would have given the report, but he had been out of the country and needed time to re-acclimate to US politics.

The convention centered on the disputes in the Fourth International, including the question of projecting the strategy of guerrilla warfare for Latin America. There were minority tendencies with their own written resolutions, and one of these, the Internationalist Tendency, which emerged to a large extent from the "For a Proletarian Orientation" tendency of 1971, sided with the majority in the International. At the time, the International majority was critical of our views on Black nationalism, the Chicano movement, women's liberation, the role of students in the radicalization, and other issues, which the "For a Proletarian Orientation" tendency tended to agree with. So in a sense we had a rerun of the debate at the 1971 convention.

The convention gave the IT spokesperson, Hedda Garza, equal time to debate me under the political report. Two leaders of the International majority, Livio Maitan and Pat Jordan, participated in the debate. Afterwards, Farrell Dobbs congratulated me on a job well done. My presentation seemed to resonate with the great majority of convention participants.

More than 1,400 people attended, our largest convention to date. Forty-four percent

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were women, and 55 percent were under 25 years old. Some new blood was brought onto the new National Committee. More young Blacks and more women, including Caroline and Wendy, were elected.

The pre-convention discussion bulletin had included 240 articles from party members on all sides of the issues — more than 1.5 million words in all. On top of that were the oral discussions in every branch. Some branches held discussions two or three times a week. It was by far the most thoroughgoing discussion that the SWP had ever had, more comprehensive, in fact, than any other group associated with the Fourth International and, I believe, more comprehensive than any discussion held in any group on the left anywhere in the world. Not only did our discussion provide a model, but our discussion bulletins were also circulated around the world so that the issues relevant to the discussion in the Fourth International could be brought to the attention of our international comrades everywhere.

The convention participants bought \$5,700 worth of literature from the Pathfinder table.

In my report, I pointed out that there had been a downturn in protest activity in the Black, women's and other movements. I reiterated that the central contradiction of the radicalization remained the fact that the workers as workers had not yet thrown their weight onto the scale, but we were hopeful that this would soon change.

## 52. WHAT THE RADICALIZATION ACCOMPLISHED

There were two engines driving “The Sixties” — the Black liberation struggle and the fight against the war in Vietnam. The sit-ins at lunch counters by university students began the most active phase of the struggle, which extended into massive protests and upheavals in overwhelmingly working class Black communities across the nation.

The antiwar movement began as an initiative by socialist and radical pacifist groups. It began out of the mainstream, with no power to stop the war or even have much effect on its course. The segment of the population that first began to actively oppose the war was a minority of students on college campuses. At the same time the deepening struggle for Black liberation was having a profound and widening impact on a generation of young people, Black and white.

As the war escalated, the antiwar minority on the campuses became a majority, and began to involve other young people and sectors of the social and political mainstream. Throughout the years 1965 to 1973, the movement won over more and more people, but the students, including high school students at a certain point, remained the spearhead.

Opposition to the war became the majority opinion, especially among Blacks and other oppressed nationalities, and in the working class as a whole. Soldiers were drawn in more and more, including soldiers in Vietnam. Finally, the army began to disintegrate as a reliable fighting force. With US imperialism unable to make headway in breaking the popular revolt in Vietnam, the tide turned and the US was forced out. None of this would have happened if the Vietnamese people hadn't put up the amazing fight they waged, at great cost in lives and to the infrastructure of their country.

It was the heroic and inspiring Vietnamese resistance to the US invasion that finally led the great majority of Americans to the conclusion that the moral and political justifications offered for the killing and maiming of hundreds of thousands of US

young men and millions of Vietnamese were unconvincing or downright lies, and that the war was not worth the blood sacrifices that Washington demanded. A smaller group, but numbering in the millions, came to recognize that the Vietnamese people had morality and justice on their side.

The exposure of the government's lies about the war (reinforced by the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate scandal) led the majority to develop a deep distrust of Washington. Attitudes resulting from all these factors became known as the "Vietnam syndrome" of opposition to any more Vietnam-type wars. This sea change in attitudes remains a problem confronting the rulers in conducting their war against Iraq today.

Because the war was fought in the name of anticommunism, opposition to the war led to a breakdown of this scourge in the antiwar movement and in wide sections of the population. More democratic rights were won.

The antiwar movement in the United States and throughout the world played a key role in ending the war. This was the first great accomplishment of the radicalization of "the Sixties."

The other great accomplishment was the destruction of the Jim Crow system of legal segregation in the South along with a wide range of its reflections and extensions in the North. This was a big transformation in the social and political structure of the United States.

After the Civil War, in the period of Reconstruction led by the Radical Republicans, substantial gains in education, political rights, and other areas were made by the former slaves. But by the late 1870s, the ruling class of the United States (not just the new layer of agricultural landlords and other businessmen of the South, but the industrialists, bankers, and railroad men of the North) sponsored a counter-revolution, including the use of gangs of thugs to terrorize Blacks. This counter-revolution resulted in the imposition of a new form of white rule, Jim Crow segregation and discrimination, including denial of the Blacks' right to vote, throughout the South.

The cesspool of the Jim Crow system in the South infected the whole of the United States. Outside the South, there was widespread *de facto* segregation and oppression of Blacks in jobs, housing, education and in every sphere of life. The overthrow of the Jim Crow system had far reaching effects throughout the country.

It was the movement of Black people, in the South and the North, that was primarily responsible for destroying this setup. This mighty mobilization of Blacks pushed back white racism and won sections of the white population to the cause.

The momentum of the movement went beyond the dismantling of the Southern system of legal segregation and oppression of Blacks. *De facto* segregation in the rest of the country was pushed back a long way, too. Attitudes changed, among Blacks as

well as whites. The official policy of the governments, both federal and state, became opposition to racial discrimination. This opened the door to more challenges to racist policies.

Affirmative action contributed to enabling many more Blacks to land better-paying jobs in auto, steel, and other industries, and also made it possible for a layer of Blacks to get university educations and move into the middle class. Some even have become millionaires, sitting on the boards of *Fortune* 500 companies. This minority among Blacks was able to move out of the still *de facto* segregated Black communities.

The institutionalized racism that still permeates society can be seen in the gap between whites and Blacks in terms of unemployment and wages, in differences in infant mortality, life expectancy, and in most social indicators. It is also evident in the poverty in the Black ghettos. Since housing remains segregated for the majority of Blacks, education is also segregated and has become more so for most Blacks. Black schools are underfunded and the attitudes toward educating Black children remain permeated with racist prejudice. School busing has achieved a better education for some Black children, but most are in inferior schools. Racial profiling by the cops is normal throughout the country. Even better off Blacks face this and other forms of systematic racism. Cops can shoot Blacks on the most trivial of pretexts and still avoid prison. It is considered a big event if one of the killers is put on trial or fired. Conviction and imprisonment are extremely rare.

By the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, however, the militant Black leadership was in disarray. This reflected both the impact of deadly police repression, and the subsidence of the movements following victories in defeating Jim Crow and ending the Vietnam war.

SNCC tended to converge with the “urban guerrilla warfare” posturing of a section of the Black Panther Party, and ultimately disintegrated. Some former SNCC leaders, as well as other militants, were drawn into the Maoist dead-end. The BPP itself split in 1970, into two groups, one favoring “armed struggle” largely in the abstract, and the other doing social work such as providing breakfasts to Black children and running candidates for office in Democratic primaries. Neither approach succeeded in building a leadership that could take the struggle for the liberation of Blacks to the next steps.

The Lowndes County Freedom Party (the first Black Panthers), went into the Alabama Democratic Party which was now open to Blacks. John Hulett was elected sheriff as a Democrat. Black politicians began to win elections, mostly as Democrats. Former SNCC leaders John Lewis and Julian Bond, and former Black Panther Bobby Rush, the victim of a cop shooting and now a Chicago Congressman, were examples. The thrust toward independent Black political action was blunted and sidetracked

into the Democratic Party which meant accepting and adjusting to its capitalist politics. (A temporary exception to this trend was the National Black Independent Political Party, a short-lived attempt to form a Black party in the early 1980s.)

The assassination of Malcolm X cut short his attempt to found a new political organization. Some say that Malcolm just wasn't organizationally savvy enough to leave behind a group that could continue to build on the program he was elaborating. This is false. Malcolm X was a driving force in the transformation of the Nation of Islam from a small sect of a few hundred centered in Detroit into a national organization of tens of thousands with a widely-distributed newspaper. His organizational skills were more than adequate. He was very far advanced politically compared to his small handful of followers but the US rulers denied him the time he needed to overcome that gap. In retrospect, it was too much to expect that they would be able to continue the work he had begun.

The direction Martin Luther King had begun to take, trying to link up with struggles of Black workers, and other workers, and take up the fight against imperialist war, was cut short by his assassination while building support for the striking sanitation workers in Memphis.

Before the victory of the civil rights movement had come from what used to be described as the "talented tenth" of church leaders, small businessmen, educators and the like who lived in the Black community. But because of gains like affirmative action, the more successful layer, including higher-paid workers, could now live outside the ghettos, and tended to become alienated from the Black masses they left behind.

The institutional racism in American society is as much a part of the institutions of US capitalism as are the corporations and banks, real estate operators, educational institutions, courts and prisons, and the Democratic and Republican parties. Like other oppressed and exploited people in the United States, Blacks are being increasingly challenged by life itself to develop an anti-capitalist program and outlook, which includes struggles for democracy and immediate practical demands but also goes beyond them.

Out of the antiwar and Black movements came the movements of other oppressed nationalities, of women and of gays, as has been described in previous chapters. The radicalization led to major changes in attitudes in wide sections of the population.

There were important struggles of some sections of the working class, but the radicalization did not reach the stage of a generalized radicalization of the working class. This was the primary cause of the winding down of the radicalization. The Sixties went pretty far, but without the workers stepping forward, the radicalized layers became disoriented or burned out. And the masses, having achieved some

gains, became weary of conflicts that seemed to lead nowhere.

A minority reached socialist conclusions, however. They became committed to the working class, partly through the forms of the class struggle they participated in and partly through achieving a theoretical understanding. Some began getting industrial jobs. Various Maoist groups and the International Socialists made concerted efforts in this direction in the early 1970s, but they counterposed this tactic to the radicalization as a whole. The SWP and YSA did not make a general turn to getting industrial, union jobs at that time. Members recruited in the 1960s off the campus were generally becoming white collar workers, such as school teachers, upon graduation. Some SWP members also took industrial jobs.

The radicalization had a massive impact on the SWP. Coming out of the witch-hunt years, the SWP had become smaller in numbers, and older. Of course, it had recruited young people throughout those years, but not many and, usually, not for long. The process that led to the foundation of the Young Socialist Alliance in 1960 — even with only about 130 members — situated the SWP to participate effectively in the youth radicalization which was just beginning.

The recruitment and training of young people saved the SWP as a revolutionary organization at that point. Revolutionary socialist organizations generally do not last long in unfavorable times, and the SWP had been running out of time. The new layer of young people, and the opportunities provided to intervene in real struggles, gave the organization another lease on life. The older generation, that came out of the labor radicalization of the 1930s which was renewed for a time after World War II, was able to pass the torch on to the new generation.

The older leaders — especially Farrell Dobbs — understood that this process, in order to succeed, had to go all the way to replacing the older central leadership with a new one from the new generation. He sought to accomplish this in a phased way, while the older leaders were still around to train the new leadership. The transition in leadership was essentially completed by the end of the 1960s. Thus the SWP was in good shape to face the challenges of the next decades — or so we thought. The next volume of this political memoir will discuss the contradictions of the period from 1973 through 1988.



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