



# Polemic with USec Supporter Revolutionary Program vs. 'Historical Process'

We print below a polemical exchange with Roy R., a supporter of the Fourth International Tendency (FIT) in New York. Roy's broadside was occasioned by Neil Henderson's "open letter" announcing his resignation from Socialist Challenge, the FIT's sister group in English-Canada (see accompanying article). Socialist Challenge, like the FIT, looks to Ernest Mandel, leader of the European-based "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" (USec) as their ideological mentor. Henderson's "open letter," which we have not included here for reasons of space, is not essential to an understanding of the following exchange. (It is reprinted, with other materials documenting his fight for Trotskyist politics within SC, in Trotskyist Bulletin No. 4.)

Roy R. was not always an adherent of Mandel. While a student at New York's Queens College in the late 1970's, he was a well-known sympathizer of the Spartacist League (SL). In 1982 he was briefly a candidate member of the SL. Roy was politically inactive for the next four years. He re-entered left politics as a sympathizer of the Bolshevik Tendency (BT) in New York in early 1987.

It soon became apparent, however, that Roy had more in common politically with Mandel and the USec than with the Bolshevik Tendency. He quickly drifted into the orbit of the FIT, one of three American groups associated with the USec. Roy currently writes for the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism, the FIT's monthly magazine.

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## Letter to the Bolshevik Tendency

"You yourself have experienced in your own person the opposition between the movement of a sect and the movement of a class. The sect sees the justification for its existence and its 'point of honor' not in what it has in common with the class movement but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from it."

Karl Marx to J. B. Schweitzer, 13 October 1868, *The Selected Correspondence of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels*, (emphasis in original)

Considering the movement undertaken by Neil Henderson, he himself has yet to experience in his own person that taken by a sect. However, that will undoubtedly change now that he has thrown in his lot with that of the Bolshevik Tendency (BT). For the BT's politics are based on those of the Spartacist League (SL), politics which are squarely rooted in that group's very nature as a sect, which under any and every condition must seek to justify its separate existence as such. Driven by such a motive, its perspective inevitably becomes divorced from any objective analysis or connection with reality and entirely subordinated to its own self-justification. *The degradation of*

*theory to legitimize the sect's existence*; that is the real meaning of the SL's "defending and deepening the program of the subjective factor." For if the reformist's credo is "the movement is everything, the goal nothing," then that of the sectarian should be (and in reality is) "the movement *and* the goal *both* are nothing, the 'program' or 'organization' (i.e., the sect) is everything." In both cases, building a revolutionary mass party and achieving the socialist goal are struck off the agenda, for they render both the ultra-right and the ultra-left, comfortably ensconced in their own little niches within capitalist society, null and void as far as their proletarian pretensions go. Indeed, reformism and sectarianism are two sides of the same coin for the interests of *both* are bound up with the preservation of the bourgeois order.

Having lost all touch with reality, the sectarian must either deny reality altogether or "change" the reality to suit his "program" (the preferred shibboleth of Spartacism). To do otherwise is to engage in "programmatically liquidation;" in other words, question the sect's understanding of the world and its relation to it. Worst of all is to raise the question of whether or not the class struggle might be able to proceed (and the working class triumph) without the sect's divine intervention in the process.

Thus, the whole lot of "IC (International Committee) organizations" who were caught off guard by the changes in the post-WWII world and could not cope with the victories of the proletarian revolution in Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam and Cuba have sought to either ignore that reality (Gerry Healy) or distort it (James Robertson) because of their fear of being rendered historically irrelevant by it. The sterile "orthodoxy" that Neil Henderson and his new-found friends in the BT champion means undialectically standing still in the face of an ever-changing world reality. This may be suitable for the "orthodox" followers of the Mosaic faith but it is certainly not the case for revolutionary Marxists, who seek to understand society in order to change it. *This* "program" deserves to be buried for it provides *no* answers to *any* crises, least of all that of leadership of the proletariat.

Carried to its "logical conclusion," this line of thought leads to *cultism*, a phenomenon finely personified by both Gerry Healy and James Robertson. After all, if within the multi-millioned movement of the working class, only a handful of "orthodox" high priests are capable of interpreting the holy scriptures, it must follow that within that priesthood only the infallible god-king (or national secretary) has a direct hotline with the deities themselves. Such a perspective leads the sect, just as Marx pointed out, to *counterpose* its movement to that of [the] masses, and in the case of the SL, to *oppose* the movement if it fails to meet the strict standards of programmatic purity laid down by James Robertson. Neil Henderson and the

BT may respond that they no longer swear allegiance to Robertson (after having done so for years), yet all their sectarian points of honor, or “acid tests” in BT-talk, are one and the same as those of Spartacism. For a Spart by any other name is still a Spart!

Having counterposed its own movement to that of the masses, the sectarian has little trouble in contemptuously and con-

tionism.” Trotsky, however, had this to say about those who prefer not to act at all rather than risk exposing their hollow pretensions and bring into question their self-proclaimed role as “workers vanguard”:

“It is possible to see in this policy [the united front] a rapprochement with the reformists only from the standpoint of a journalist who believes that he rids himself of reformism by ritualistically criticizing it without ever leaving his editorial office but who is fearful of clashing with the reformists before the eyes of the working masses and giving the latter an opportunity to appraise the Communist and the reformist on the equal plane of the mass struggle. Behind this seemingly revolutionary fear of ‘rapprochement’ there really lurks a political passivity which seeks to perpetuate an order of things wherein the Communists and reformists each retain their own rigidly demarcated spheres of influence, their own audiences at meetings, their own press, and all this together creates an illusion of serious political struggle.”

—Leon Trotsky, “On the United Front,” 1922

Such are the “organizational consequences” that the sectarian’s programmatic *fetishism* leads to. And such a program, based on isolation and irrelevance, isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on, even if that paper is *WV* [*Workers Vanguard*]!

The curtain thus raised we can see that the sect’s obsession with its particular shibboleth is what’s behind its analysis of important events in the class struggle internationally. Rather than concern themselves with objectively analyzing the given events in a particular country, and using that analysis as a guide to action in order to better be able to intervene in them, the sect seeks above all else to set itself up outside and often against the movement of the masses. In order to justify this it is necessary to resort to slander and accusations of “treason.” Thus Henderson, perhaps in order to show his BT buddies how well he has progressed in the Spartacist school of sectarianism, boldly states that, “the USFI (United Secretariat of the Fourth International) has repeatedly demonstrated its tendency to come down on the wrong side in the international class struggle.”

Pretty strong stuff! One would assume that “com[ing] down on the wrong side...” means supporting the capitalist class against the working class, the stuff that reformists are made of. Yet Henderson and Co. would be hard pressed to name one situation in which the FI [Usec] actually “came down” on the side of the bourgeoisie. That is, unless by the term “international class struggle,” Henderson really has in mind the “global class war” of Sam Marcy, whose Stalinophilic politics the SL-BT have come to resemble. Marcy broke with Trotskyism in order to side with the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and since then has had a line practically undistinguishable from that of the CP. For the SL-BT the key question in the world today is the “Russian question” and the “acid test for Trotskyists” is support for General Jaruzelski. Far from being traitors to the ranks of the working class, the FI [Usec] has dared to go up against Spartacism’s sectarian shibboleth, that “defence of the USSR” begins everywhere from Belize to Benin to Burma to Burbank. Today as Gorbachev and Reagan bargain over how to best thwart revolution around the world, the sectarians will be as hard-pressed to get revolutionary-minded workers to take their “acid test” as the bosses will be to get union militants to go along with their own urine tests.

Henderson’s catalog of crimes allegedly committed by the FI [Usec] around the world in itself is deserving of little more

### Ernest Mandel—Usec theoretician

1917 Photo

descendingly dismissing the masses and their movements as nothing more than the playthings of particular leaders. This view of the working class may in fact reflect the internal life of the SL and the relationship between Robertson and his dwindling band of acolytes, but it bears little resemblance to the strategy and tactics that revolutionaries from Marx to Lenin to Trotsky have employed to win communist hegemony amongst the ranks of the working class. How many times did Lenin write of the necessity to “patiently explain things to the workers.” Certainly not enough for the Sparts, as anyone who has had the unfortunate experience of encountering one knows all too well.

It is only through common experiences in common struggles that the masses of workers will be won over to revolutionary Marxism and break from the yolk of the reformists; for it [is] necessary for the former to demonstrate the superiority of their program in *practice*, not on paper. Sectarians have been denouncing reformism for years and have yet to exorcise that demon from the ranks of the proletariat. Nor will they ever and odds are they haven’t the slightest desire to do so anyway for the existence of one provides an excuse for the existence of the other. To the sectarian, of course, any common action with anyone other than those who are in full agreement with their given points of honor constitutes...“programmatically liquida-

than ridicule. To do otherwise is to dignify what is nothing more than a Spartacist characterization of the positions actually taken by the FI [USec] in the countries concerned. For the Spartacists, obscuring an opponent's position is far easier than confronting it (as the BT itself has come to find out). However, they typify the methodology of the sectarians when confronted by the actuality of a revolutionary situation and the utter bankruptcy of their programmatic "orthodoxy" as any kind of guide to action for the working class.

Thus, in Iran, we are told that the FI [USec] "criminally tailed Khomeini..." and was "unable or unwilling to grasp, that the bourgeoisie, much less feudal reactionaries, [had] no progressive role to play." Yet if we examine "Perspectives and Problems of the Iranian Revolution," part of the "The World Political Situation and the Tasks of the FI" resolution adopted at the 1979 World Congress, we read that "(t)here can be no 'stage' of capitalist development in Iran independent from imperialism (and that) neither can the Iranian bourgeoisie carry through the democratic tasks...." In the very next paragraph we are told that "the Shi'ite hierarchy headed by Khomeini.... is the key card the ruling class in Iran is playing in its attempt to restore a stable state apparatus and a new bourgeois political leadership in order to crush the revolutionary process and relaunch a process of 'rationalized' capitalist development..." Sounds like real "criminal tailing" indeed.

Henderson lets the cat out of the bag when he quotes Ernest Mandel to the effect that "it was correct to support the uprising against the Shah even though it was *led* by the clergy" (my emphasis). What he doesn't quote is the very next sentence where Mandel states that, "in all conflicts between the new regime and... the masses...we stand 100% on the side of the masses and against the regime." Or the end of the section on Iran in *Revolutionary Marxism Today*, where Mandel states that, "to identify revolution with religious obscurantism is an act of ideological treason... detrimental to the cause of Iranian and world socialism." Besides what were revolutionary Marxists supposed to do? Call for a "military bloc" with the Shah against the "feudal reactionaries"? As the sectarian can only see the leaders and not the masses of workers and peasants actually making the revolution, he can leisurely write off the whole affair with the sleight of hand, pox on both your houses, which needless to say offers no possible or practical avenues to winning the masses over to communist politics and actually breaking with the reactionary leaders of the Khomeini stripe.

The same holds true for Poland, the sectarian point of honor par excellence for the SL-BT. Trotskyists are not going to win over many Polish workers to their politics by forming "military blocs" with the Stalinist bureaucracy. Fortunately, there were no Sparts in Poland to discredit Trotskyism there the way they have wherever and whenever they have made their presence felt. Henderson apparently attributes "the growing strength of the sinister anti-Semitic KPN or the plan to dismantle the planned economy" to the Polish proletariat when it was, and remains, his bloc partners in the Stalinist bureaucracy, that have fostered and strengthened such tendencies. It's no accident that Jaruzelski is amongst the biggest boosters of Gorbachev's anti-working class economic reforms today.

No doubt the sectarians will reply in unison that the bureaucracy's power and privileges are based upon "working-class property forms" which means that they have a material interest in preserving the dictatorship of the proletariat. And what about the proletariat itself? According to the SL-BT, the

masses of Polish workers either have no material interests themselves in maintaining their dictatorship, or else are deemed too "stupid" to realize where their real interests lie, unlike Robertson and his kith and kin in the bureaucracy whom he rightly relates to so well. Thus the SL has taken the elitist logic inherent in its sectarianism to its ultimate conclusion by making common cause with the bureaucracy against the working class. Talk about "abandonments of Trotskyism;" shades of "Pabloism"!

As for Nicaragua "unraveling" the FI [USec]'s "pretensions to Trotskyism," what more need one say about a tendency (the SL-BT lineage) that actually claims that there is *no* state in Nicaragua almost after ten years of revolution and FSLN rule. Small wonder that Henderson is at a loss to give a class characterization (either proletarian or bourgeois) to the "bonapartism" of the Sandinistas. That is, unless one takes seriously the timeworn "orthodox" catchall cliché of dubbing any and every grouping outside of one's ranks as "petty bourgeois." Indeed, the SL-BT's pretensions to Trotskyism, and historical materialism in general, are unraveled by Robertson's "unique" position that all of the post-WW II socialist revolutions have been carried out by "petty-bourgeois" parties rather than bureaucratized working class ones. According to the SL-BT, the petty bourgeoisie, a property-owning class if ever there was one, can be 'pressured' by imperialism into breaking with its own material interests and carrying through the process of permanent revolution to its conclusion, the creation of a workers state. Better to accord such a lofty role to another class than to another tendency within the workers movement regardless of what it means to Marxist theory, let alone the reality that it is based upon! Such a line has more in common with that of Tony Cliff than with that of Leon Trotsky, only at least the former has been honest enough to admit where he parts company with the latter, whereas Robertson still considers himself to be the last "orthodox" Trotskyist in the world.

It would seem that those who claim to praise Trotsky the most (Henderson manages to invoke the name of Trotsky eleven times in four pages), in fact bury him, or rather the brand of revolutionary politics associated with his name, under a mound of dogmatism and sectarianism. For if there has been any "abandonment" of the basic postulates of revolutionary Marxism, in general or in particular, it has been on the part of the sectarian cultists of "Jimstown" (the SL, as appropriately dubbed by the BT), both past and present. The essence of Spartacism is total separation of theory from practice, thought from action, and party (or rather, sect) from class, along with the wholesale debasing of theory to legitimize all of the above. *That is the real basis behind Robertson's credo that "program generates theory"!*

For revolutionary Marxists, "program" consists of a dialectically interrelated and constantly interacting totality of what an organization does as well as what they say. Genuine Marxist theory, being both a living science and an instrument for changing society can only play its proper role as a guide for action, not as an excuse for inaction, if it is used to analyze an ever-changing reality on an objective level. Otherwise, it stagnates into sterile dogma, totally divorced from all reality except, perhaps, that of the sect...seen through sectarian blinders that is.

Having spent most of their active political lives within the realm of Spartadom, the BTers find themselves psychological prisoners of their pasts, unable and unwilling to turn their backs

on their alma mater. Obsessed with proving themselves to be more Robertsonite than Robertson himself, the BT's each and every act is defined by the parameters of Spartacism. Neil Henderson may have been attracted by the seemingly-revolutionary rhetoric associated with all of this, but in the end, he along with the rest of the BT will be choked by the Spartacist umbilical chord, cut off from any and all contact with the working class and doomed to isolation and irrelevancy even more so than the real Sparts.

No doubt the high level of personal and political integrity, honesty, and dedication to the cause of the working class that undoubtably characterizes the vast majority of BTers will prevent them from falling victim to the cultism that is today the calling card of Spartacism. Yet there is no escaping from the overall evolution of all sects as long as their underlying basis is still tenaciously clung to. For there is no opening on the left for Spartacism with a human face. No one is looking for a few good Robertsonites. Because the BT is so caught up in the methodology of Spartacism with its programmatic fetishism, it fails to see just what the aura of Spartacism really is. In spite of, or rather, precisely because their entire political past consisted of serving time in Spartadom, they are incapable of seeing just what the stuff of Spartacism really is.

Psychosis, neurosis and a severely guilt-ridden state of mind that yearns for an authority figure to subordinate itself to; this is what attracts individuals to Robertson's "obedience cult," not the latter's r-r-r-revolutionary program. Those now in the BT were and are the exception to the rule that in fact proves the rule.

So if Neil Henderson prefers the movement of the sect to the movement of masses so be it. In time he himself certainly will experience it in his own person. As for myself, I prefer the former to the latter and would rather engage in building just such a movement with the FI [U.Sec], even if it means making mistakes (as most human beings outside of James Robertson are prone to do) and getting one's hands dirty in the process. Better to be on the left fringe of the "Mandelites" and "Pabloites" than on the lunatic fringe with the Sparts!

For revolutionary Marxism; against Spartacism/sectarianism.  
Roy [R.]

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### *Bolshevik Tendency Reply*

Despite the bombastic tone and intellectual opacity of Roy R.'s denunciation of Leninist "sectarianism," his critique of our politics clearly poses the all-important question of program vs. "process" as the central axis of socialist politics. Roy begins by decrying our adherence to outworn shibboleths inherited from the Spartacist League which, he claims, causes us to deny or distort reality in order to justify our own sectarian existence. Of course, he cannot be bothered to spell out precisely what these doctrinal "points of honor" are. It is abundantly clear from the balance of his letter, however, just which "shibboleths" are under attack.

*Shibboleth No.1:* The only class in modern society with the material interest and the social power to carry out a socialist revolution is the proletariat.

*Shibboleth No.2:* In order for the proletariat to accomplish its revolutionary mission, it must be led by a vanguard party

that embodies its most advanced elements and highest consciousness.

*Shibboleth No.3:* The degenerated workers state that rests upon the social foundations created by the October Revolution, as well as the deformed workers states that exhibit an essentially identical social structure, must be defended against both imperialist aggression and all domestic attempts to restore capitalism.

The first of these "shibboleths" is the principal tenet of the revolutionary theory of Karl Marx. The second embodies the main contribution to that theory made by Lenin, which guided the Bolshevik Party in carrying out the world's first and thus far the *only* successful workers revolution. The third encapsulates Trotsky's position on the Russian question, and its extension to the deformed workers states created since World War II. These three "shibboleths," taken together, constitute the essence of the program that Trotsky fought for until he was murdered by a Stalinist agent in 1940, and remained the political basis of the organization he founded—the Fourth International.

### **Post-War Stalinism and the Split in the Fourth International**

Roy is correct in saying that the anti-capitalist social transformations following World War II caught the Fourth International off guard. More significantly, they led to a split in its ranks. If, as Roy implies, these transformations were simply proletarian revolutions with a few minor unforeseen wrinkles, he will be hard-pressed to explain what the Fourth International became so exercised about. Rather, the dilemma facing Trotsky's followers consisted precisely in the fact that these revolutions were carried out by *Stalinists*, whom Trotsky had deemed incapable of any revolutionary leadership, and whom he had in fact characterized as *counterrevolutionary* in their international role.

In those countries where they consolidated power, the new post-war Stalinist regimes not only failed to mobilize the proletariat, but remained implacably hostile to any attempt by the working class to organize itself independently. The Soviet bureaucracy created a constellation of nationalized economies throughout most of Eastern Europe. In Yugoslavia, China and Vietnam, Stalinist parties, at the head of peasant-based guerrilla armies, seized power. In none of these cases were the expropriation of the capitalists and the nationalization of the means of production accompanied by the establishment of the *political* rule of the working class. Instead these societies were presided over by materially privileged and nationally insular state bureaucracies politically identical to the caste that coalesced around Stalin after the death of Lenin.

In response to these unanticipated developments, there emerged within the Fourth International two fundamentally divergent currents. On the one hand, there were those—in the International Committee (IC)—who resisted any attempt to revise the basic Trotskyist appraisal of Stalinism or the Fourth International's program for world revolution. They by and large acknowledged that Stalinist parties, under the pressure of war and foreign occupation, had been compelled to go a lot farther along the anti-capitalist road than Trotsky had foreseen; they agreed that the new collectivized economies represented a partial gain for the working class and should therefore, like

### Mao talks to peasants in north China during struggle against Japanese invasion, 1937-45

nationalized property in Soviet Union itself, be defended from all attempts to reimpose capitalism.

But they also insisted that the newly created Stalinist regimes—mired in material backwardness and top-heavy with bureaucracies that stifled the masses—were politically deformed from the outset. They pointed out that in the revolutionary crises that had convulsed the world since the 1920's, Stalinism had betrayed the working class far more consistently than it had encroached on imperialism, and therefore remained fundamentally an obstacle to proletarian power rather than an instrument for its realization. Thus, despite postwar events which they understood only imperfectly, the “orthodox” IC current, led by the American Socialist Workers Party, reaffirmed the historic necessity for Trotskyist parties, rooted in the working class, to complete the work begun by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917. It is this legacy that the Bolshevik Tendency defends.

Ranged at the opposite pole in the postwar controversy were the followers of Michel Pablo, head of the International Secretariat (IS) at the time of the split. Pablo's wing claimed that the Stalinists' postwar successes ushered in a “new world reality” which rendered “the old Trotskyism” obsolete. In terms of their long-range perspective this meant that the world proletariat could no longer look forward to socialism, but rather to “centuries of deformed workers states.” The Pabloites conceded to the Stalinists not only the present, but the future as well. According to Pablo, Stalinist parties had proven by their victories in Eastern Europe and Asia that they were essentially adequate (if “blunted”) instruments for socialist revolution. He therefore urged a tactic of “deep entry” whereby the national sections of the Fourth International would dissolve into the Stalinist parties. There, they would act as left-wing pressure groups on the various CP leaderships, helping to sharpen the “blunted instruments.” It is with this tradition, represented today by the United Secretariat (USec) led by Pablo's former lieutenant, Ernest Mandel, that Roy R. has chosen to cast his lot.

Since the split in the Fourth International, the Pabloites have proven that their defining characteristic is not a commitment to working within Stalinist parties, but rather an inclination to accommodate themselves to whatever ideological current is in vogue on the left. This, in the parlance of V. I. Lenin and other “sectarians,” is known as *opportunism*. The same opportunist instincts that originally propelled Pablo in the direction of Stalinism, today drive Mandel and his followers toward social democracy and even the avowed anti-communism of Poland's Solidarnosc.

It is not possible in the space available to recount the entire history of the USec's accommodationist meanderings; but neither is it necessary. Roy R.'s letter represents the thinking of his mentors accurately enough, if rather more crudely. It provides a catalogue of opportunist dodges and distortions sufficiently

extensive to illustrate our point.

### Insurrectionary Peasant-Based Stalinism

Roy claims, without offering any supporting arguments, that the revolutions in Yugoslavia, China, Cuba and Vietnam were *proletarian* in character. But the countries left off his list are perhaps as significant as the ones he includes. What of Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, Albania, Czechoslovakia and East Germany? Were these states, after 1949, different in social structure or political form from the ones in the first-mentioned group? If there is no qualitative difference in the end results, for example between Vietnam and Bulgaria, then the difference must lie in the formative process.

The difference is certainly not in the role played by the proletariat. Was Ho Chi Minh, who butchered Trotskyist-led workers occupying factories in Hanoi in 1945, any less hostile to the proletariat than Bulgaria's Georgi Dimitrov? The main difference between the countries of Eastern Europe and the ones named by Roy was that the former became workers states as a result of military conquest by the Soviet Union, while the latter were transformed after the accession to power of indigenous mass movements. But what precisely was the *class character* of these movements? To answer this question one must inquire as to the class character of the peasantry, for it was at the head of peasant armies that the Stalinists—in each of the countries Roy lists—marched to power. Elsewhere in his letter, Roy ridicules the notion that the petty bourgeoisie (“a property-owning class if ever there was one”) can create workers states. But Roy cannot deny that the entire Marxist tradition, from Marx to Trotsky, characterized the peasantry as a petty-bourgeois layer. By what mysterious alchemy has the peasantry been transmuted into the proletariat?

Roy's mentor Ernest Mandel “solves” this thorny theoretical problem by asserting that *only* proletarian parties could uproot bourgeois property. In a December 1982 polemic with Doug Jenness of the Socialist Workers Party, who used the fact

### Castro proclaims victory, 1 January 1959

that Stalinist-led peasant movements had on several occasions overturned capitalist property as an argument for reviving the Menshevik two-stage theory, Mandel asserted:

“the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, not to mention the Chinese Communist Party, which have been the historical instruments of the destruction of capitalist property and peasant property, can only be considered a ‘peasant’ army or party by emptying Marxist class analysis of all its substance.”

Mandel’s argument for the “proletarian” character of the PLA is pure tautology. He asserts that the peasantry as a class can only be:

“centralized either under bourgeois leadership—in which case the revolution heads for certain defeat—or under proletarian leadership (even though it may be extremely bureaucratized, as in China) and in that case, and that case only, the victory of the revolution is possible.”

In fact the outcome of the Chinese revolution, and the other peasant-based insurrections which overthrew capitalist property since World War II demonstrate that, in certain specific historical situations, private property in the means of production can be ended by *non-proletarian* social movements.

### Cuba and Marxist Theory

We are glad that Roy has chosen to include Cuba in his list of proletarian revolutions. For in the other three instances (China, Yugoslavia, Vietnam) the nature of these revolutions is partly obscured by the fact that the parties leading them

retained the *title* of “Communist” and had at one time been worker-based. Cuba, on the other hand, provides a clarifying case precisely because the July 26th Movement (M-26) that brought Fidel Castro to power in 1959 had no historic connection with the Communist International or the workers movement. Not only were its cadres drawn almost exclusively from the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia; its base consisted of perhaps a thousand peasants recruited in the Sierra Maestra. Its propaganda contained none of the familiar rhetoric of Stalinism. Most importantly, its program—far from aiming at socialism—did not even call for extensive land reform or the nationalization of industry, but was limited to the demand for the restoration of the pre-Batista “democratic” constitution of 1940. And yet, only twenty-one months after riding into Havana, Castro found himself at the head of a nationalized economy and a member of the “Soviet bloc.”

The particular episodes of this drama are well known. As a simple matter of self-preservation, Castro upon assuming power dismantled the repressive apparatus (army and police) of the pro-U.S. Batista regime he had just overthrown. This did not sit well with Washington, which suspected Castro of having been a crypto-communist all along. The increased hostility of U.S. imperialism left Castro with nowhere to turn but to the Cuban worker and peasant masses, whose hopes for social justice had been aroused by the ouster of the hated Batista dictatorship. To consolidate his power base, Castro issued a series of extensive land reform and rent-reduction decrees. These measures caused a split within the government that the July 26th Movement had initially installed. When Castro ousted the

bourgeois elements who resisted his land reforms, relations with Washington became strained to the breaking point and Castro began to turn to the Soviet Union, with which he signed a series of trade and military agreements. The climax came in the autumn of 1960 when Castro, in response to a total economic blockade imposed by the Eisenhower administration, announced the nationalization of the extensive U.S. holdings which, up to that point, had dominated the Cuban economy.

Thus a band of radical petty-bourgeois democrats was propelled by the dual pressure of imperialism and its own plebian base, along a course that ended in a society qualitatively the same as those of Eastern Europe and China, i.e., a *deformed workers state*.

The forerunner of the Spartacist League (the Revolutionary Tendency [RT]) crystallized as a faction within the American Socialist Workers Party in opposition to the increasingly reformist drift of that party and its unbounded adulation of Castro. According to the RT, the Cuban revolution possessed a theoretical significance at least as great as its political impact: it provided the key to understanding the postwar revolutions that had so perplexed Trotsky's followers. The RT argued that, despite their proletarian origins and rhetoric, the Stalinist parties that seized power in Vietnam, Yugoslavia and China were far closer to Castro's M-26 than to the Bolshevik Party of 1917.

Tim Wohlforth, at that time a leading RT spokesman, explained this position so clearly that he bears quoting at length:

"The motive force for the transformation of the Eastern European countries (excluding Yugoslavia) into deformed workers states was the Soviet Army. The working class played essentially a dispersed, passive role in these events. The motive force behind the Chinese Revolution which deposited Mao and Co. in power was primarily the peasantry....The transformation of China into a deformed workers state was instituted, not by the working class of China nor primarily because of great pressure from the working class—it was carried through on top on the initiative of the Maoist bureaucracy itself as a defensive act against imperialism.

...

"Cuba makes this process all the more clear precisely because of the central *unique* feature of the Cuban Revolution—that the transformation into a deformed workers state occurred under the leadership of a party which was not even ostensibly 'working class,' by a non-Stalinist petty-bourgeois formation.

"Thus the Cuban experience not only illustrates the small role the working class plays in these transformations; it also suggests that the so-called 'working class' nature of the Stalinist parties in many of these colonial countries has been given too much emphasis as well. The fact that Castro's 26th of July Movement was able to carry through a social transformation in an almost identical manner as Mao's CCP reflects...the essential identity in nature of the CCP and the M-26. Both parties were essentially petty-bourgeois formations—petty-bourgeois in the class nature of their *leadership*, their *membership*, their *mass base*, and their *ideology*.

"While the ideology of the Stalinists contains certain socialist elements within it and in this respect is different from that of the M-26, it is questionable as to whether these elements essentially changed the nature of the movement. This is especially doubtful when one realizes that the Stalinist perversion of socialist ideology is precisely in the direction of petty-bourgeois nationalism. Thus these parties must be viewed... as essentially the instruments of the petty-bourgeois classes in society—not as even distorted instruments of the working class."

"Cuba and the Deformed Workers States," 20 July 1961

If workers have as little to do with running these societies as they did with creating them (which is indeed the case), by what historical or theoretical right do Trotskyists persist in calling them *workers states*, deformed or otherwise? Wohlforth answered as follows:

"Because of the extreme crisis of capitalism together with the crisis of leadership of the working class, these essentially intermediate social classes have been able to play an extremely radical role which the Marxist movement earlier had not foreseen—they were able to break with capitalism itself. However, their very radical actions proved the essential *weakness* of these social strata—while they were able to negatively smash the capitalist system they have been unable to positively substitute their own rule for the rule of the capitalists. Rather they are forced to lay the economic basis for the rule of another class—the working class—a class which they in reality distrust and despise. While on the one hand their very historical weakness as an intermediate social class forces them to create property for another class, the crisis of leadership of the working class allows them to consolidate a political rule inimical to the working class. Thus the development of a bureaucratic caste and the necessity of political revolution."

Implicit in Wohlforth's whole argument is the notion that collectivized property, although it can be brought into being by petty-bourgeois forces rather than the proletariat, cannot achieve its full breadth and scope without workers democracy and a further unfolding of international revolution. Because collectivized property requires workers rule to insure its future on this planet, it is a property form to which the working class retains the historical title. But where proletarian property forms were created by non-proletarian forces hostile to workers rule and world revolution, those petty-bourgeois forces, once in power, are inevitably compelled to replicate the function of the Stalinist ruling caste in the Soviet Union and erect bureaucratic obstacles to the revolution's further development.

The states which today embody workers' property forms (except the USSR, which was born in genuine proletarian revolution but which *degenerated*) may thus be said to be *deformed*, i.e., crippled from birth. To open the road to socialism they require a political revolution, in which the workers sweep away their respective bureaucracies and put in their place the genuine instruments of working-class democratic rule. In this way, the Revolutionary Tendency cut the knot of theoretical difficulties that had surrounded the postwar social transformations.

Roy asserts that the above theorization represents a distortion of reality in order to justify the Spartacist League's (and derivatively the BT's) sectarian existence. But the SL had not even come into being at the time this analysis was first formulated. The RT's conclusions from the events in Cuba were not only empirically well grounded, but also represented the *only* theorization of post-war revolutionary experience that upheld the program of Permanent Revolution.

### **Solidarnosc: A Mass Movement for Capitalist Restoration**

For many years Ernest Mandel, the leading light of the USec, has specialized in inventing sophisticated "Marxist" theoretical reasons for tailing whatever political trends are in favor with the "broad left." Roy, who has absorbed the spirit of Mandel's opportunism, is less accomplished in the art of

theoretical embellishment. With a baldness that might embarrass his mentor, he proclaims his desire to be in step with the “multi-millioned movement of the masses” with no apparent regard for who is leading such a movement or what its aims are. Roy may question our particular criteria for deciding which “mass movements” to support and which to oppose. But can he seriously argue that no such criteria exist for Marxists and that anyone claiming otherwise is sectarian by definition?

Of all the positions the Bolshevik Tendency has retained from the Spartacist League, our opposition to Poland’s Solidarnosc is by far the hardest pill for centrists to swallow. This is due not only to Solidarnosc’s enormous popularity in the West, but also to the fact that this movement was organized and led principally by workers and commanded the support of the overwhelming majority of Poland’s working class. The working class, according to Marxist theory, is supposed to be the agent of historical progress. That the Solidarnosc leadership was in fact reactionary, did aim at capitalist restoration and was indeed making a bid for state power in 1981 has been extensively documented in a separate BT pamphlet (*Solidarnosc: Acid Test for Trotskyists*). But is it conceivable, demand the centrists in unison, that ten million Polish workers could have been deluded concerning their own interests, and is it *ever* permissible to side with the Stalinist bureaucracy against the workers? We answer both of these questions in the affirmative, and can perhaps make our position clearer by means of an analogy.

Trotsky likened the Stalinized USSR to a bureaucratized trade union: a workers organization dominated by a privileged officialdom that identifies more with the bourgeoisie than the proletariat. Let us now take this comparison one step further. Suppose workers in a given plant have been sold out so many times by the national union leadership that sentiment begins to grow among them to break with the union altogether, i.e., to decertify. In this plant a small minority of class-conscious workers tries, as Roy says, to “patiently explain to the workers” that, rotten as the union brass is, the union is the workers’ last line of defense against the bosses and to decertify it would be a mistake. But there is also an organized right-wing caucus which is fanning the anti-union sentiment. These elements propose to run a slate of candidates in the upcoming local election pledged to organize an immediate decertification. As a sop to those workers who dislike paying dues money to a bunch of corrupt piecards in the national office, but who still think that some kind of collective bargaining is necessary, the right wingers promise to set up an employees’ association *after* the decertification goes through. Management greets this development with enthusiasm and makes funds and facilities available for the dissidents. When the vote is taken the right wing caucus wins overwhelmingly, thus setting the stage for decertification. At this point the national office of the union moves to head off decertification by suspending the elected leadership at the plant and appointing an interim slate more to its liking.

This situation, while hypothetical, is not at all inconceivable. Can there be any doubt that Trotskyists in such circumstances would consider the bureaucrats’ removal of the democratically elected local leaders as a lesser evil? While not in any way absolving the bureaucracy of the countless betrayals that have caused the workers to turn against the union, the militants would be forced to acknowledge that *in this particular situation* the actions of the bureaucracy temporarily averted the union’s total extinction. While not addressing the root of the problem, it at least gains some time for the class-conscious ele-

ments to turn the legitimate hostility of the ranks away from the union as an institution and toward the corrupt leadership.

The existence of the corrupt and bureaucratically-dominated trade unions of the AFL-CIO represent a historic gain for the working class; the collectivized economies of the degenerated and deformed workers states are an even greater gain, and are preferable from the vantage point of the workers’ long-term interests to a “free market” economy. And when the workers living under a collectivized economy are driven by decades of Stalinist arrogance and ineptitude into the arms of a leadership that equates bureaucratic mismanagement with collectivized property as such, and tells them that they would be better off under capitalism, then it is the duty of Trotskyists to prevent such misleaders from seizing the reins of state power.

Does Roy doubt that Walesa and Co. intended to restore capitalism? No other conclusion can be drawn about an organization that hailed the election of Ronald Reagan, looked to the most reactionary pope in decades as its spiritual leader, invited a known CIA labor operative to its congress, deleted all mention of socialism from its program, invoked the memory of the White Guard Josef Pilsudski, and adopted an economic program calling for the dismantling of the state-owned economy? For Roy to compare this overtly restorationist movement with the heroic pro-socialist uprising of the Hungarian workers in 1956, is obscene. Recently it has come to light that

## *Solidarnosc: Acid Test for Trotskyists*

*How Solidarnosc, a mass movement against Stalinist rule, was hegemonized by capitalist restorationists—and the necessary programmatic conclusions for Trotskyists . . . . . \$2.50*

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**Iran 1978-79: USec hailed Khomeini's revolution, Trotskyists said "Down with the Shah! Down with the Mullahs!"**

Solidarnosc has willingly accepted more than \$5 million in cash and supplies from the U.S. Congress and State Department over the past three years. If these facts are insufficient to convince Roy of Solidarnosc's counterrevolutionary intentions, we must conclude that nothing short of an actual capitalist restoration in Poland would change his mind.

**Iran: USec Capitulates to Islamic Reaction**

Roy's polemic at least has the virtue of consistency. He shrinks from nothing in embracing the record of the USec, even its most grotesque betrayals. It will be recalled that the Spartacist League responded to the 1979 Iranian upheaval with the slogan "Down with the Shah! Down with the Mullahs!" The rest of the left, including the USec, tailed Khomeini. Roy derides Neil Henderson's charge of Khomeini-tailing as a ludicrous Spartacist caricature of the USec position, and to prove his point quotes Mandel to the effect that Marxists should have supported the Iranian masses against the Shah *despite the fact that they were led by Islamic reactionaries*. But the Iranian masses were at that time supporting Khomeini's power bid. What, therefore, is the operational significance of the distinction between leadership and "masses" in this case? The distinction makes sense only if one assumes that the automatic workings of the "revolutionary process" can transcend reactionary leadership.

To support a mass movement and/or a "revolutionary process" *despite* the hegemony of leaders one admits are reactionary, presumes that the masses engaged in this political mobilization will spontaneously move in some direction dif-

ferent from that advocated by their leaders and produce some result other than the accession of those same leaders to power. Were the Iranian masses, without alternative leadership, capable of sidestepping Khomeini and guiding the 1979 insurrection toward some more progressive outcome? Was Khomeini's triumph the mere prelude to some further unfolding of a "revolutionary process" which would ultimately install the workers in power? The differences between the SL and the USec over Iran turned upon the answers to these questions.

Roy seems to forget that the answers no longer require *foresight*, but can be supplied with the advantage of nearly a decade's *hindsight*. Were Khomeini and his henchmen tossed aside by a leftward-surging mass movement? According to our latest information, the Imam is likely to die in office, and his designated successors are now moving to mend fences with U.S. imperialism. Did the "Iranian Revolution" result in any significant social gains for the masses? Ask the millions of Iranian women who cannot venture out of doors without donning the *chador*. Did the revolution at least create a democratic opening for the workers movement and the left, like the February Revolution that overthrew the Czar in 1917? Ask the fifteen militants of the now-outlawed Tudeh Party (Iranian CP) and People's Fedayeen who currently face execution at the hands of the Islamic Republic. Better still, Roy can consult the surviving comrades of the HKE and the HKS (the two Iranian USec affiliates), who have either been imprisoned or driven into exile. The fact that many of these militants to this day defend their support of Khomeini in 1979 simply attests to their refusal to learn the lessons of history, even when those lessons are written in their own blood.

But, retorts Roy, you sectarians won't even be able to talk to workers if you insist on counterposing your own dogmas to their mighty, multi-millioned movement! Now, we would be the last ones to argue against talking to workers. The question, however, is: what do you say to these workers once you have their ear? If you believe that the only way you will get them to listen is by repeating (perhaps with a few "Marxist" caveats and qualifications) what they already think, or rather what their misleaders have encouraged them to think, they will correctly conclude that you have little new to offer, and continue on the same course as before. The more astute among them might even observe that you are not attempting to persuade, but to *ingratiate yourself* and conclude that the Marxism to which you give lip service cannot be worth much. Anyone attempting to propound a new or unfamiliar way of thinking must at least temporarily endure a certain degree of unpopularity. Those who shrink from counterposing their program to the present political consciousness of the masses are not in the business of *leading* but of *following*.

**February 1988: BT and ASA/SC co-sponsor demo against contras**

### On the United Front

One tactic employed by Trotskyists to win people to their program is the united front. The united front is defined in the Leninist tradition as cooperation between a revolutionary party and other organizations which do not share its program, in pursuit of supportable, limited and clearly defined objectives. As a condition of their participation, Leninists insist only that they be accorded full freedom to say and do anything that does not contradict the immediate demands of the united front—including the freedom to voice their differences with their non-revolutionary collaborators over broader political questions.

Roy accuses "sectarians" of refusing to participate in united-front actions for fear of compromising their doctrinal purity. And it is undeniable that the Spartacist League has in recent years shied away from even the most principled cooperation with other groups because of its dread that contact with anyone it does not control could undermine its members' faith in the absolute wisdom of their leadership. But, because Roy's broadside is directed against the Bolshevik Tendency as well, we can only assume that he is also charging us with such sectarian cowardice. For this charge, as for the others, no evidence is offered. The most cogent refutation of this charge is our political record.

In 1984, supporters of the External Tendency of the iSt (the BT's immediate precursor) initiated a labor boycott of South African cargo aboard the freighter *Nedlloyd Kimberley*—to our knowledge the only labor strike against apartheid in U.S. history. We are flattered by Roy's inference that we, by ourselves, were capable of idling this cargo for eleven days in San Francisco. In fact, the boycott was successful because the officers of Local 10 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) were forced by rank-and-file pressure to go along with it, and because longshore workers—including black nationalists, Communist Party supporters, and union members of no political affiliation—were determined to carry it out. We did not hesitate to cooperate with all groups and individuals in this boycott—or to expose the bureaucrats and the CP when they caved in to an injunction against it. We

can also point to the ongoing work of our Bay Area local in the Committee to Free Moses Mayekiso—a trade-union militant facing the death sentence in South Africa. Most significant of all for our current polemical purpose is our recent work with Roy's Canadian co-thinkers of Socialist Challenge (known before May as the Alliance for Socialist Action and referred to herein after as ASA/SC) in the Toronto Anti-Intervention Coalition (TAIC). Here we can directly contrast our own actions with Mandel's Toronto co-thinkers to see who was the more consistent in upholding united-front principles.

The TAIC was formed as a reformist propaganda bloc devoted to opposing U.S. intervention in Central America. In November of last year, a fight broke out in the coalition when the Communist Party and the Canadian followers of Jack Barnes in the Revolutionary Workers League demanded a formal endorsement of the Esquipulas II accords, also known as the Arias plan. The accords, which the Sandinistas had just signed, bind them, among other things, to legalize the CIA-backed opposition in Nicaragua and to release thousands of Somoza's bloodthirsty former National Guardsmen from prison. Elements of the ASA/SC at that time held a position considerably to the left of the USec's international leadership, which has hailed Ortega's acceptance of the Arias plan as a victory. At the TAIC convention, the ASA/SC voted against endorsing Esquipulas II. At this point the reformists walked out of the TAIC.

Several months later, after the TAIC had been reconstituted as a principled united front and the BT had joined, it was decided to call a demonstration against continued U.S. funding for the contra mercenaries. The demonstration was organized as a united front, and each organization that participated was granted speaking rights. In early February, a crowd of over three hundred demonstrators heard a BT speaker denounce the Arias plan, while firmly opposing all U.S. (and Canadian) intervention in Central America. The ASA/SC speaker also criticized this Sandinista retreat, although more equivocally. A representative of Canadian Action for Nicaragua reaffirmed their support for the Arias plan from the platform. While the mobilization was successful in terms of numbers, it also created a minor political furor in Toronto. The rad-lib Central

American “solidarity” milieu was scandalized by the fact that anyone had dared to criticize the Sandinistas at an anti-intervention rally.

In response to reformist pressure, ASA/SC executed an abrupt about-face. At a subsequent TAIC meeting the ASA/SC’s leader proceeded to ram through a series of motions which blew apart the united front. He argued that to allow groups like the BT to speak at future rallies would “alienate” TAIC’s liberal friends. When his motions passed, the BT resigned from TAIC. The ASA/SC subsequently proclaimed Esquipulas II as a “victory” and “a danger” to the Nicaraguan revolution (see *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 4). These events played a direct role in Neil Henderson’s eventual decision to quit the ASA/SC and join the BT.

The ASA/SC’s political zig-zags provide a textbook illustration of the *modus operandi* of fake-leftists. In *My Life*, his autobiography, Trotsky described this same phenomenon in the Russian workers movement:

“The leader of the Mensheviks, Martov, must be counted as one of the most tragic figures of the revolutionary movement. A gifted writer, an ingenious politician, a penetrating thinker, Martov stood far above the intellectual movement of which he became the leader. But his thought lacked courage; his insight was devoid of will....Martov’s initial reaction to events always showed a revolutionary trend of thought. Immediately, however, his thought, which lacked the support of a live will, died down.”

If our contemporary Mensheviks lack Martov’s gifts and tragic pathos, they at least share the worst elements of his political psychology. On rare occasions their initial impulses might incline them to take a principled stand. When confronted, however, with the consequences of upholding such a position consistently, when subjected to the slightest pressure from the reformist milieu in which they thrive, they will invariably swallow their principles and side with the reformists against the revolutionary left.

In our work with the TAIC, the Bolshevik Tendency applied the united-front tactic in the Leninist spirit. We adhered to it so long as we were accorded full freedom of propaganda, and availed ourselves of the opportunity to win left-moving militants to our program when our partners wavered. In the “broad-based” coalitions initiated or joined by the USec, participants are expected to bury fundamental differences in the interests of larger unity. Any utterance not compatible with the sentiments of the coalition’s most right-wing components is deemed “disruptive,” and the left wing must therefore confine itself to repeating demands and slogans wholly in keeping with a liberal worldview. By agreeing to such conditions, the would-be Marxists allow the “united front” to become a vehicle of the reformists, while they are relegated to making posters and stuffing envelopes.

### Why Did the SL Degenerate?

Except in periods of acute social and political crisis, revolutionaries in any society are seldom more than a minority. But even by the standard of “normal times,” the political landscape of the United States during the Reagan years has been extraordinarily bleak. Of the tens of thousands of New Leftists, student radicals and black militants who twenty years ago espoused some brand of ostensibly revolutionary politics (however partial or confused), few today believe that revolu-

tion is possible, or even desirable. The handful who have maintained a political commitment have for the most part embraced social democracy as the only “realistic” alternative. Today, those who consider themselves to be revolutionary Marxists are a smaller minority of the leftist minority in American society than at any time since the McCarthy period of the 1950’s.

There can be no doubt that political isolation was one cause of the degeneration of the Spartacist League, virtually the only organization that attempted to maintain a genuinely Trotskyist course amid the rightward drift of the late 1970’s. This intransigence was not without organizational consequences. As the radical student base from which the SL had recruited throughout the previous decade dried up, and the anticipated radicalization of the working class failed to materialize, a crisis of disappointed expectations set in among the membership; new recruits became harder to find, and cadre began to quit in greater numbers.

These objective pressures, however, do not by themselves explain the destruction of the SL as a revolutionary organization any more than, on a much larger scale, the isolation of the Russian Revolution alone accounts for the Stalinist Thermidor. To the weight of difficult circumstances must also be added the conscious response of the particular individuals in the leadership. James Robertson, SL National Chairman, responded to the impasse of the late 1970’s by devouring the organization that he, more than any other individual, had labored to create. As the ranks diminished, Robertson no doubt worried that the Marxist conviction of the membership was too weak and vacillating to sustain the SL through a reactionary period. He also feared that eventually the ranks’ increasing sense of social

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isolation and irrelevance would result in a factional explosion that would shatter the SL's nucleus of cadres.

Robertson concluded that only unquestioning acceptance of his personal authority could insure the organization's survival. This led to a series of demoralizing purges, not only of those who ventured to disagree with the leader on secondary questions, but also of those deemed *capable* of opposition in the future. The lesson of these purges was not lost on the SL's remaining cadre, who became too intimidated to take initiatives and voice their own opinions. The final result was the lifeless, bizarre and nasty obedience cult that the Spartacist League has now become.

In Roy's view, however, the SL's degeneration is an *inevitable* consequence of its politics and program. With this sweeping assertion, Roy avoids the responsibility of analyzing the *concrete process* of its evolution. Was the SL a "sect" or a leader cult since its inception? If not, when and how did it become one? Roy does not even pose these questions let alone attempt to answer them because doing so would require an appraisal of the role played by political leadership in this process. And it is the denial of the importance of leadership, with both its positive and negative consequences, upon which the entire objectivist methodology of the USec is predicated. The same logic which allows Roy to minimize the significance of conscious Marxist intervention in the "revolutionary process" also leads him to regard the SL's degeneration as the automatic result of its program, thus absolving Robertson of responsibility for his specific crimes.

What then, according to Roy, are the political positions that led to the Spartacist League's isolation and consequent metamorphosis into a cult? When all Roy's ranting and empty generalizations about "sectarianism" are set aside, we are left with the proposition that the SL is now bankrupt because: 1) it did not regard the peasant-based Stalinist takeovers of the postwar period as proletarian revolutions; 2) it did not wish to follow Walesa and Solidarnosc on the road to capitalist restoration in Poland or the majority of the Iranian left to the slaughterhouse of the Islamic Republic; and 3) it refuses to participate in "broad-based" coalitions on terms dictated by the reformists. If principled opposition to Stalinism, religious reaction and reformism are the cardinal sins of Spartacism, we can only infer that Roy locates the cause of the SL's degeneration in revolutionary Trotskyism itself. In actual fact, Roy and his USec comrades have a lot more in common with Karl Kautsky and the German Social Democracy, whose fear of isolation prevented them from opposing another "mass movement"—the stampede of the working classes to the colors of their respective ruling classes at the beginning of World War I. But those who lack the courage to swim against the stream of popular opinion are also too spineless to acknowledge their real historical affinities.

### The Necessity of Revolutionary Leadership

In our opinion, the Spartacist League during the first fifteen years of its existence represented the only authentically Trotskyist current in the entire international left. We regard its subsequent degeneration as a genuine misfortune for the workers movement. It is now necessary for us to fight for the Trotskyist program it once upheld under the banner of the Bolshevik Tendency.

The degeneration of the Spartacist League should not be viewed in isolation. The last ten years have been marked by a

## Trotsky on 'Sectarianism'

**"We are passing through a period of colossal reaction, following the revolutionary years (1917-23). On a new and higher historical stage, we, revolutionary Marxists, find ourselves thrown back into a position of a small and persecuted minority, almost as was the case at the beginning of the imperialist war. As all of history demonstrates, beginning, say, with the First International, such regressions are unavoidable. Our advantage over our predecessors lies in this, that the situation today is more mature and that we ourselves are more 'mature' for we stand on the shoulders of Marx, Lenin and many others. We shall capitalize on our advantage only if we are able to evince the greatest ideological irreconcilability, fiercer even than Lenin's irreconcilability at the outbreak of the war [of 1914-18]. Characterless impressionists like Radek will depart from us. They will invariably speak about our 'sectarianism.' We must not fear words.... The greatest honor for a genuine revolutionist today is to remain a 'sectarian' of revolutionary Marxism in the eyes of Philistines, whimperers and superficial thinkers."**

12 July 1929 (emphasis added)

massive right-wing offensive, both in the United States and internationally. Trade-union givebacks, continued racist atrocities, a gigantic arms buildup against the Soviet Union—these are the legacies of the Reagan years. The growth of reformism in the present period is evidence of the demoralization of many subjective leftists in the face of Reaganite attacks.

But the onslaught will not continue unopposed. It is only a matter of time before the festering resentments accumulated under the Reagan regime will explode. A renewed wave of class struggle will open real opportunities for the growth of a hard communist organization which does not shrink from telling the bitter truth to the masses. And when this eruption occurs, there can be no doubt that those who have stuck to their guns will be in a better position to intersect it than those who have thrown up a smoke screen of "Marxist" phraseology to cover their ignominious retreat.■