

Geoff White Interview (Conclusion)

Spartacist League: The Early Years

This is the third and final instalment of our interview with Geoff White. In the early 1960s White was one of the original leaders (along with Shane Mage and James Robertson) of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the U.S. After being expelled from the SWP, the RT cadres launched the Spartacist League/U.S. which upheld the banner of revolutionary Trotskyism in the 1960s and 1970s. The International Bolshevik Tendency is committed to carrying forward the best traditions of the revolutionary Spartacist tendency of that period.

In the first part of this interview (which appeared in *1917* No. 7), White recalled the decade he spent as a cadre in the Communist Party before being won to Trotskyism and joining the Socialist Workers Party. The second part of the interview (*1917* No. 8), dealt with White's role in the RT's fight against the SWP leadership's abandonment of Trotskyism and rapprochement with Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel in the revisionist "United Secretariat of the Fourth International."

In this, the concluding portion of the interview, White recalls his early years as the leader of the Spartacist League in the Bay Area, and his eventual decision to resign in 1968. Shane Mage had given up on Trotskyism some years earlier, so White's departure left only James Robertson from the original RT leadership.

As an appendix to the interview, we reprint Geoff White's 1968 resignation statement, which outlines his doubts about the historic viability of the Trotskyist movement. We also print Robertson's rejoinder, which appeared in the SL's Political Bureau minutes. Robertson's postscript perhaps contains a hint of the "hard tactics" that White refers to in the interview, but his defense of the historic validity of the Marxist program demonstrates the revolutionary commitment which helped sustain the SL in a difficult period. Unfortunately, the contemporary SL is a corrupt and degenerate caricature of what it once was, with Robertson comfortably ensconced at the top as the omnipotent fatherly leader and chief political bandit.

1917: So you saw the fusion course with Pablo as evidence that the [SWP] party leadership was irreversibly centrist. There was a differentiation in the RT [extensively documented in the SL's *Marxist Bulletin* series] which culminated in a split dictated from London. The Bay Area RT remained solidly with Robertson against Wohlforth and Healy. What was your involvement?

GW: By this time I was pretty much the leader of the Bay Area RT. When Art Fox came in from London with his ultimatum [which rejected the characterization of the SWP as centrist, and claimed that it remained "the main

instrument for the realization of socialism in the U.S."], all of us without exception just shot that down as hard as we could. In the first place I couldn't stand that kind of operation, and, in the second place, most of the people were in political agreement with Robertson over the alleged substance in his fight with Wohlforth, which none of us believed was the real issue at hand. There were some people who agreed with Wohlforth on the putative difference, but they went along with us. Everyone knew there was something else and everyone knew what it was, pretty much.

1917: The RT saw itself as being linked to Healy internationally?

GW: Oh yes. We had leaned heavily on Healy. Healy was the Grand Old Man.

1917: Before the split was dictated from London, did you have any intimations of the kind of operation Healy was running?

GW: No. We'd been in close correspondence with Healy. Mostly organizational stuff. I've got quite a file of 186a Clapham High Street. It wasn't any tactic within the organization, it's just that he wrote to us as well as to people in New York.

1917: Was this clandestine correspondence?

GW: It was clandestine in the sense of content. We certainly didn't give carbon copies to the majority, but they knew we were in correspondence. We would come to branch meetings with the latest copy of Healy's press and sell it. Occasionally someone would give us some static about that: why can't we sell our own stuff? But it was trivial. We were fairly open about this.

1917: So Healy splitting the tendency came as something of a shock?

GW: It came as a total shock. That was the most traumatic meeting our tendency ever had, when Art Fox came in with that ultimatum. Somebody had called up from New York. I recall getting a call. It wasn't from Robertson because apparently everything was at sixes and sevens out there. He delegated somebody who gave us the essence of it, and we had less than 24 hours to prepare. Fox was already scheduled to come out. The meeting had been set up.

There had been this problem between Wohlforth and Robertson before the Art Fox ultimatum came down. It looked like a tactical difference between Wohlforth and Robertson, and I agreed with Robertson on the tactical thing. They knew that, so they had some hope. I don't know how well anyone back there knew me personally, I don't think they did, but I could have predicted how I would have reacted to that kind of ultimatum.

Another person who was extremely influential here

was Ed Lee, who, as an ex-Stalinist, was really solid on the question of organizational hanky-panky. He ended up an anarchist. So you can see what his tendency was.

Robertson and Wohlforth

1917: You had seen trouble between Wohlforth and Robertson before? That was evident to everyone in the tendency?

GW: Everyone in the tendency knew there were these disagreements, but we didn't know how deep they were. I remember at one point writing a letter about the thing. Essentially what I was trying to do was to blow the whistle on the factionalizing: "We've got enough of a fight on our hands without you guys acting like idiots." I made it as sharp as I could, and I knew I had the backing of everybody out here regardless of their opinion on the tactical differences at issue. Of course this was before the days of word processors. When you sent a letter, the question was, "who gets the carbon?" So I made two carbons, and sent them both carbons and kept the original. They compared notes and found out about it. Robertson thought that was funny, and Wohlforth couldn't see the point. That's one difference between Wohlforth and Robertson. Robertson had a sense of humor, and that was a saving grace for him. He really saw things were funny. He used to send me documents and I'd send them back saying *imprimatur albus episcopus Californiae*, and that was okay with him but some people around him in New York were horrified at this sacrilege. That was alright with Robertson. Robertson was a bigger man than the people who surrounded him.

1917: Did you have many dealings with Wohlforth?

GW: No, not many. I had an idea of what kind of guy Robertson was. Wohlforth I didn't know much about; sometimes on the telephone. There was a lot of correspondence; he was a good letter writer; he was conscientious about things like that. I felt he didn't have the—I've got to be very careful about hindsight here—I think I felt, even before the famous Fox ultimatum, that Wohlforth, perhaps, didn't quite have the power, the principles. It's pretty tentative because I didn't have much personal contact. I had a lot of personal memories of Robertson. You get to know somebody when you're out at the coffee house with them a lot, which you don't get by any amount of formal correspondence. Formal relations with Wohlforth at that time were okay. But from the time of the Fox ultimatum on, I have very negative feelings about Wohlforth. I have no respect for him at all. He advanced this naive stuff about "gee whiz, this is what James Cannon says about the SWP." Well, I thought Wohlforth has no right to say anything gee whiz. He's been around too long. It's disingenuous. I think he was maybe disingenuous in the beginning. You could never accuse Robertson of that, because he was absolutely clear.

1917: As regards the tactical differences between Wohlforth and Robertson preceding the Fox ultimatum, did you have a perception that this was an authority fight?

GW: Yes. We saw it as unprincipled. On the only issue that I can recall them mainly arguing about, on the

attitude toward the SWP, I felt that Robertson was right. Robertson had a somewhat harder line.

Art Fox, Shane Mage, Kay Ellens

1917: How did Fox end up getting associated with the RT? He was supposed to have something of a base in Detroit; he was an autoworker.

GW: Yes, he had a base. He joined the tendency. He, his wife and some other people in Detroit, so we had a Detroit group for a while. The first time I laid eyes on Fox was when he came with the loyalty oath. In fact, I'd barely heard of him before that; he was nobody to us. But he was somebody that Healy wanted to use because he didn't have this historical association with either Wohlforth or Robertson, for one thing. Another thing was he could pass him off as the true voice of the proletariat: a Detroit autoworker, what more do you want? Of course he wasn't any more proletarian—well, you know how that works.

1917: Besides you and Robertson, the other prominent leader of the RT was Shane Mage. Did you have much contact with him?

GW: Not much. He put me up when I was in New York at the convention, and I met him on various other occasions, but I don't have any very profound thoughts about Mage. It seemed to me at the time I thought he was a little gassy, but I didn't have very strong feelings about him.

1917: Was he a guy who mostly did theoretical work up in his loft, or did you have a sense that he was factor in, say, the Wohlforth-Robertson dispute?

GW: I don't think he much of a factor in the way things developed organizationally. I think he formulated things well. He was a very sharp guy, a good mind, but a lot of guys like that are without other abilities. I don't think he had much other ability. He did not play a very big role. He was not the kind of guy you could rely on when there was a confrontation coming on to be there to back up the team. You didn't want him cracking pistols behind you.

1917: Rose [Kay Ellens] also played some kind of role in the leadership?

GW: Yes, she did. She played a very substantial role. She really came out of the Robertson tradition. She was trained in the Robertson school. For a while, she was Robertson's wife, of course. She represented some of the same kind of thinking. But she came out here and spent quite some time. She injected some of the more positive things of that tradition during the RT days. She was a good tactician, and, like Robertson, she had a pretty good insight about people, I thought, and knew what their limitations were and what could be expected and couldn't be expected. I think she played a positive role on the whole. I don't think she was a theoretician; she was not any kind of an intellectual. I think she sometimes let her personal life and the kind of personal lifestyle that she adopted narrow her political perceptions a bit. But on the whole I think she did a good job.

The Bay Area RT After the Split

1917: When Healy split the RT, the Bay Area branch remained solid, so you didn't have to contend with the

Wohlforthites out here?

GW: No. One guy showed up later who I think was a Wohlforthite, but he was totally ineffective. We never had to deal with him. There were a couple of people in the RT who were wavering a bit, mainly because they wanted some way of compromising the thing, some way of avoiding a split. Possibly I think some of them were motivated by a deep distrust of Robertson, but that never came to much. I think that the main effect the split had was that it was demoralizing. Some people, although they didn't drop out of the tendency or anything, became less active and less enthusiastic.

1917: Given that you were locked into a certain geographical area, you had done pretty well with perhaps 40 percent of the combined branches. You had a pretty stable situation. Besides the nibbles in Seattle and L.A., did there ever seem to be any opportunity for the RT to break out nationally, or was it a period of just going through the motions?

GW: We felt that we were stable, but we were not going anywhere and that what we had was what we were going to have, until such a time as there was a split, and then there was a possibility of recruitment. But it was very difficult for us to recruit when they wouldn't admit our people.

1917: What did you do with the people they wouldn't admit? Were you able to keep them around?

GW: I think we kept one or two of them, but we lost most of them. There were only three or four of them, and I would say that probably only one of them we were able to keep. We didn't really have anything to offer. If we had met with non-party people to discuss party matters, then that would have been a perfectly legitimate basis on which to expel us, so we didn't want to do that. There was a difference of opinion about that because some people said "so what, they're going to expel us anyway."

1917: Of course, the majority could have just planted somebody on you.

GW: Well, I don't know if they would have done that. I think that would have been difficult for them to do. There were people out here who wouldn't have gone for that. It could only have been done by people who were working on their own directly from New York. It could not have gone through the branch out here because there were really good people in the majority who would have objected to that; they would have blown it; they would have told us. I hadn't even thought of that as a matter of fact.

The Expulsion of the RT

1917: You went to the 1963 SWP convention as a delegate?

GW: That's right, and Robertson was a delegate. I thought we had three delegates, now I'm not sure. Maybe we had two from this area.

1917: At the convention it was pretty clear that you were not going to survive [in the SWP]. How was morale in the RT? Were people looking forward to the future fairly confidently, or were they worried about the prospect of being thrown out?

GW: Well, in the Bay Area, it varied. Some people were discouraged and other people were confident. It was mixed.

1917: At the convention itself how much of the time was taken up bashing the RT?

GW: I think we and the Wohlforthites, between us, were the center of attention. That is what it was mainly about. Because they had already broken with Healy, and they wanted to formalize the marriage with Pablo, they were already starting, and perhaps somewhat consciously, on the road to the present situation. They had already said "C" and "D" and they were really moving along. I thought the convention was a very unenlightening experience. You know, we got up and made our points, they got up and made their points. They bashed us. We snarled back at them. We had positions on about four or five different things. That's all in the documents; I can't remember what they all were. I remember making a presentation on one of them.

We had a little trouble internally on what was then called the "Negro" question, because we had some differences of opinion within the RT about our attitude toward nationalism, but it wasn't too serious. It was one of those things that just took us a little while to work through. And there were a couple of other fairly exotic things that came up which gave us all a chance to see how Marxist we could be, about taking the positions, and it was alright. But, because everybody knew by that time what the outcome was, it wasn't much fun. It wasn't very enlightening. We knew what was going to happen.

I mean you take your lumps, and by this time we'd been taking lumps for two or three years. People can only give you lumps if they've got some kind of moral authority, and they'd lost the moral authority as far as we were concerned. We couldn't do much about them either for the same reason. Whereas earlier, during the Cuba thing, there was some real listening—not much, but some. Therefore in a certain sense the Cuba thing was more painful, although it was more focused, and people had a more hopeful attitude about it.

1917: At the convention you'd line up and then there'd be ten speak against you and then you'd have another one speak in favor?

GW: You make your presentation and somebody does some kind of back-up thing, and then that's it. And there wasn't any point in trying to do anything more. What's the use of just going over the same territory again and again?

1917: You were then unceremoniously kicked out?

GW: Oh, ceremoniously! There was a plenum after the convention. They decided we had maintained our faction beyond the discussion period, which was perfectly true. There was association with non-party elements, which was not true, at least it wasn't true here. I don't know what they were doing in New York. New York said that they didn't do this, so I assume they were telling us the truth, but we were a little suspicious about that. Anyway, there was this kind of thing going on, and they just made up their minds they were going to expel us. They expelled the leadership. I think I was the only one expelled in the first wave out here. I remember when

I got the message that I'd been expelled by the plenum I was in Arizona somewhere on vacation. I called somebody and they said, "well you're out." And you're entitled in the SWP to come back and make a final statement after you've been expelled, so I thought well, you know, let's follow this whole thing through—I like being organizationally correct if it's possible. So, I went back and I made my pitch and people were quite friendly by this time, in the majority, because it was all over.

We still wanted our people to stay in the party for a while. The rest of us who were expelled were going about getting the SL organized, and we knew that people in the party weren't going to be able to last very long. They'd been affiliated with this condemned, illegal tendency. It was just a matter of time. But they didn't want a mass expulsion.

1917: Why was that? To look more democratic?

GW: To look more democratic. Because they had Weissites and Fraserites and various other "ites" here and there who were worried. And toward the end was when we really began to get support from people whom we considered to more or less represent a right tendency. Myra Tanner Weiss especially was very, very good on the question of democracy and very, very helpful to us. And we did work with the Fraserites. They were Maoists and they really hated our politics. Because one of the things we kept hitting on was any tendency toward Maoism, so it was a little more difficult for them, but the Weissites, especially Myra, were quite, quite decent. By this time there were some Weissites out here. In the last days of our existence in the party sometimes we would combine with them on organizational questions, and we always made it very clear that we were combining on the question of democracy. We voted against them when they brought their things up, and they voted against us on the political level. But it made life a little easier having some other lightning rods, because some of the party leadership was beginning to shoot at the Weissites as well as at us.

1917: When you were outside you were presumably advising your people who were still inside?

GW: This time we were meeting with them—to hell with the rules because we knew the game was up. But one of the problems we had was that a lot of our people didn't want to stay in and we had a lot of discussions about whether they would. Dorothy [White's second wife] resigned and some other people did.

1917: What was the plan, to leave people in and fight a rearguard action indefinitely?

GW: No, no, just temporarily as I understand it. There had been some talk about, you know, an indefinite SWP orientation. Everybody knew this wasn't for real. We couldn't have done it even if the SWP had let us. The RT people were of the caliber to do it, but they wouldn't put up with it. They wanted their own organization where they could do their thing. Their caliber was fine. They were good people. We had real old-time people, some of them, as well as some young ones, all ranges. Guys back from 1946 right on through.

1917: So before long, most of the tendency is outside the organization.

GW: Very shortly everybody's out of the SWP. I think the final people were not expelled, but resigned. It was a foregone conclusion.

Early Years of the Bay Area SL

1917: Did you do some work around the Berkeley student sit-in and the Mario Savio business?

GW: No, we really didn't get much involved in that—we wanted to, but we couldn't really find a way to get in on it. I think that was one of our first big failures, and I think I was personally responsible for it. I couldn't come up with a way to get in on that, and I was probably in a better position than most people to figure out a way because I knew people there. Dorothy had good connections up on campus and knew a lot of these people so I got a chance to meet them and talk to them, stuff like that, but I couldn't quite figure out what we could do.

1917: Because the nature of the issue?

GW: Because of the nature of the issue, because we didn't have any kind of a student base, and because of their attitude toward the Old Left. I guess somebody who had more imagination might have been able to mount some kind of what we used to call an intervention. But we didn't get in on that much.

We were constantly being stymied by the fact that we didn't have anybody on campus. That was a big weakness, and because we didn't have anybody on campus, we couldn't get anybody on campus. There probably would have been ways to get around it. I don't know what they were. I didn't know then how to get around it and I don't know now how we could have. But it's the kind of obstacle which is not insurmountable in theory.

1917: Was one of the reasons you didn't have anyone on campus because you were in an older age bracket?

GW: Oh, all of us were in an older age bracket and we had never had anything on campus. The YSA never really had anybody on campus. We had a couple of people who were sometimes students, but they never had any connections with anybody on campus. We had Mario Savio to dinner and all this kind of stuff. Nothing ever came of that politically because they really were not prepared to listen to anything that wasn't New Left. If we had vowed to make ourselves felt there we would have had to get out and do a hell of a lot work which a lot of people in the SL here were reluctant to do.

1917: For political reasons or just for lack of energy?

GW: Lack of energy. Beyond that we would have had to really define what it was that we had to say to these people that they were prepared in the beginning to hear. Because if we just wanted to go in there and explain to them about the revolutionary role of the working class: "excuse me, that's ridiculous." So we never were able.

1917: You obviously made some attempts if you had Mario Savio over for dinner.

GW: Yes, but we had Mario Savio for dinner more for the sake of having a friend for dinner. It wasn't for politics. I never expected anything to come of it.

1917: Did any other organization get much out of the 1964 events?

GW: I think the ISL [successor to Max Shachtman's

Workers Party] did. I think they were quite successful. Hal Draper wrote something on the student revolt in Berkeley which I thought was very good. They were by temperament suited for working in that milieu and they had some real students. They got more out of that than anybody. I don't know, the CP may have picked up a recruit here and there, but they were stumblebums on campus.

1917: So, looking back on it, you think that there wasn't a lot more you could have got out of the '64 business.

GW: Given the circumstances including the nature of the people involved yes, that's true. But I'm not saying the people who were better adapted to the thing couldn't have done something because they could have.

1917: While still in the SWP, the RT had a correct anticipation that PL [Progressive Labor—a Maoist split from the Communist Party] was a fairly vital and vibrant organization. Was PL active in California at that time?

GW: Yes, there was a PL out here, and we had a lot of discussions with some of their people, and especially with Lee Coe, who was one of their old-timers. I talked with him a lot, possibly because we had a common background in the CP and it was a little easier for me to talk, and I knew his language. He was pretty good guy, you know; for a Pler he was not bad at all. And he knew how to do a little community organizing. He could get people out to get a stop light on the corner and stuff like that, which nobody in our movement had the foggiest notion about. On the other hand, you know, he really didn't understand. Of course, ultimately maybe none of us really understood what the long-range historical process was, but he sure as hell knew less of it.

1917: He wasn't even interested?

GW: Well, he was interested, yes he was interested, but he was a Stalinist.

1917: Did you have prospects of getting anything out of PL?

GW: We thought there might be. We tried and I think we did think there were some prospects, but nothing came of it.

1917: The early days of the Bay Area branch weren't really lucrative. The branch contracted as I understand it.

GW: One of the key people who'd been in the RT was Ed Lee, and he didn't come into it at all. Toward the end of the internal struggle he began to pull back from it because he could see it was kind of futile, and he had other ways to spend his time. When we were expelled from the party he said that's it as far as he was concerned. He was never part of the SL. He told us in advance that he would see it to the end with the RT, but when it came to the end with all the minutiae with the Pablo thing, he lost a lot of enthusiasm. I can't fault him for that. I wanted to stay with it, but I was lot younger than he was.

Dorothy didn't come into the SL. She took a position somewhat similar to Ed Lee's that she didn't want to have much to do with it once the fight in the party was over. And I think there were one or two other people that were that way too.

The differences between us and New York became

more apparent; we began to feel them more at this point. Again they seemed to be mostly stylistic, but people suddenly arriving from New York were, well, they were welcome but there was a little uneasiness about them.

1917: Did the Bay Area branch's divergence from New York have anything to do with the press?

GW: It didn't come out as often as we thought it should, and it was kind of strident at times. But those were just stylistic differences. We were always getting directives from New York to trash the IS [Independent Socialists]. And what we really wanted to do here was to see what we could work out with the IS, and maybe have common actions or some discussions, and maintain reasonably amicable relations with them. So this was a source of friction, and New York kept urging us to do this and we kept dragging our feet. And it never came to any kind of confrontational stuff.

We were good pamphleteers. Wrote good pamphlets—I thought they were. I'm speaking from ego because I wrote most of them, but I thought they were good. I wrote one which was directed to some kind of namby-pamby, wishy-washy liberal group that was really trying to do something but didn't know what the hell they were doing, and the headline was "Join the Revolutionary Party of Your Choice." We didn't clear anything like that with New York; we just put out our own stuff and we sent them a few copies for the archives. We knew they would keep archives. Robertson was great on archives, and besides, they wanted to know what the hell we were doing and that was one way to let them know. So we sent them that and we got a rather frosty letter back from them about this sort of indifferentism. I think that's what the church calls that kind of stuff. That's what it was, indifferentism, but that all blew over. Nothing ever came to a head.

1917: There was no attempt by New York to send anyone out to take charge of the branch?

GW: No, no, they never tried to put us in receivership or even made noises in that direction. They would express a little uneasiness about what they considered our softness from time to time, and we'd express a little uneasiness about what we considered their harshness and sectarianism, but it was nothing.

1917: Was there much personnel interchange between the two branches?

GW: Not much.

1917: So, the Bay Area branch of the Spartacist League was pretty much what the Bay Area RT had been.

GW: That's right, it was pretty much the old gang. We didn't recruit much and we didn't have much exchange.

The 1966 London Conference

1917: Did you have much of a role in the 1965-66 unity negotiations with the Wohlforth group?

GW: Well, I went to the Montreal conference. I was one of the delegates. And I had long discussions with Healy there. That was kind of the high point as far as I was concerned of the unity prospects. We were involved in that. There was a lot of correspondence between us and Robertson back east, but we didn't take any direct part

in that because we didn't have anybody to talk to out here. There weren't any Wohlforthites. There was this one guy, but he didn't count.

1917: How did Healy strike you when you talked to him?

GW: My reaction to Healy at the time was not overly positive. He was a funny little old gnome-like man with a lot of energy, and he was being affable at the time, and it seemed to me that we could work with him. I thought maybe it was going to be okay. I didn't pick up on the part of Healy which was so unpleasant. He seemed a strange guy for a revolutionary leader.

1917: The prospects of fusion with the Wohlforth group were seen as a pretty important opportunity.

GW: Out here we had always thought that the split with Wohlforth was a negative, a very strong negative, and that it could be overcome on a principled basis, and that it would be okay. Of course, our definition of a principled basis was not necessarily the eastern definition of it. What we were mainly concerned about was we didn't want any diktats from Clapham High Street; we would not have put up with that under any circumstances. On the other hand, if you're going to say the "reconstitution" or the "reconstruction" of the Fourth International, we didn't give a damn about that. We felt that this fusion was important, and we wanted to do it. On the other hand, it didn't have the kind of immediacy that it had for the people back east because we didn't have any Wohlforthites to deal with. They were a national abstraction as far as we were concerned. We did want to be represented in Montreal and we were feeling optimistic at that time.

1917: Were there any differences between you and the people from the east in the Spartacist League in terms of dealing with Healy? You said that Healy talked with you quite a bit. Was that because you were from the CP, or was he trying to line you up?

GW: No, he didn't seem to be. I think it was generational. For instance, I presented a bridge between the people of Robertson's generation and his generation. Perhaps because I had a CP background; I don't know. It just happened. But I don't want to exaggerate the extent to which it's significant. We never had any private political discussions that were pertinent to the issues at hand.

1917: In the branch here, you would presumably get the SLL press?

GW: Oh, yes. Before the break with Healy we had used it very much—we used Healy almost as a cover. Healy's respectability in the movement was sort of a plus for us. After we were out of the SWP, that became less important.

1917: What about Wohlforth's newspaper, did you read it very closely?

GW: No. There wasn't much interest in it.

1917: At the London Conference in 1966, the expectations of unity were disappointed. Healy broke with the SL on the pretext that Robertson had missed a session. What kind of effect did this have on the Bay Area branch?

GW: I think it was good for us because it made everybody mad and re-energized them, because it seemed like

it was a re-run of this goddamn loyalty oath that Art Fox had brought over in the first place. It also meant that was the end of this whole business with Healy. We weren't going to have to deal with that in any way, shape or form anymore. There's a certain relief in even a bad thing coming when it comes, and it's over with, and now you can proceed. I don't recall it having a bad effect. I think on the whole it had a good effect. I remember that Robertson was a little concerned to make sure that nobody was going to fly the coop out here. Nobody did that I can recall. And I think that we gave very strong support to the position that they had taken at that time.

1917: There was no softness on anybody's part?

GW: There had never been much softness toward Healy out here. I mean, when Healy was on our side, you know, we were leaning on him, sure, but as soon as this nonsense began to start I think that there was probably more hostility to Healy on the West Coast than there was on the East Coast, if there was any difference at all. No, we were hard on that.

In Montreal Jim and I met, and we discussed how to handle the tactical thing and we thought that soft-cop/hard-cop would be the way to go. And we also decided that he would be the soft and I would be the hard because it kind of went against the grain in both of us. Therefore we would be restrained from going too far in the roles we were playing. That suited me fine because I was still smarting from the earlier business, and I wanted to bring some of this out. Healy was charging me with being an American nationalist and stuff like that, which I rather resented as being without any substance. He probably knew it was without any substance. What he meant was that we weren't taking orders from anyone.

Robertson and the SL

1917: The Spartacist League did grow in its initial configuration?

GW: Yes. They recruited at Cornell. I think that was the first group, and that was a number of pretty good people. And it seems to me that we were reinforced out here by some of the people from the Cornell group who were SL Texans. The initial reaction by people out here when we heard these people were coming out was to be a little suspicious. People thought that maybe the East was going to put the thumb on us.

But after these people came out, relations were very good, and it worked out well; everybody got along. They did, perhaps, represent a little tougher style than the dominant thing out here; it was probably good for us. I think some of us felt it was good for us to be moved a little bit in that direction, and more than that, I think that they were kind of assimilated into the West Coast way of doing things, so that I never felt during this period that there was any big problem. This is not true about other people from New York, and my own personal feelings at the [1966] Chicago convention [which launched the SL] were extremely negative. That's when I began first to get a really bad dose of some things, which were one of the causes for me dropping out of the League.

1917: A bad dose of what, small group megalomania?

GW: Small group megalomania, a kind of Stalinoid style of personal harshness, a lack of humor. It's not an original thought, but you can characterize Robertson as a giant surrounded by real midgets. And I couldn't stand the midgets, and the fact that Robertson was using these people. I thought he was using them for political purposes, and also to build up his own ego. I thought that Robertson couldn't stand anybody of stature around him, and the people that I knew from New York who were close to him I had very little respect for. I had very little respect for their political judgment, and they weren't good, they weren't comradely, I felt. They were harsh. They reminded me of the old CP style. They had a totally unrealistic view of real relations in the real world. They were out of it. They were sectarian. They were all these things that really bothered me. But at the same time, the basic politics of the organization I was in agreement with. Life out here on the West Coast in the SL was okay. We could function. I could see that they had a lot of energy and were producing things. They were recruiting at a time when we weren't, and that's hard to argue with. And I hoped that either we could just co-exist with this sort of thing, or that over time they might mellow a little bit.

1917: These would include some of the young theoretician types?

GW: Mostly the young theoretician types. They're the ring around Robertson.

1917: Not Harry Turner for instance?

GW: Oh, Harry was a good man. I thought Harry understood a lot. I don't think I met him until after we were expelled from the SWP, when the SL had been organized formally. I just saw him at conferences, and I think I may have had some correspondence with him about something or other, I don't know, but at any rate he did impress me. The CP people—you can pretty much identify them—because there are some things that they have in common. Anti-Stalinism is usually one of them, and I think they've got better tactical sense than those who were around then.

I mean he might go off on a few things, I can't remember the details, but I remember that my feeling about Harry was that he was a reliable guy. But I didn't think that these kids were reliable. I thought that under certain kinds of stress and pressure they might do almost anything; they were unpredictable.

"Kids" is a bit of an invidious word and I'm sorry for using it. Because they were mature, grown-up people, but I didn't think they were all that mature. They were mature in years but they bothered me, they really bothered me. Then that's a rather subjective reaction, and I didn't talk to anybody except my wife about them. But I could also feel that other people out here were picking up some of those same vibes.

1917: In your opinion had that become the dominant character of the organization?

GW: Well, I thought Robertson prevented that from becoming too bad because he understood people pretty well. And he might be manipulative, and he might be this and he might be that, and he might be the other

thing, but he knew what the price was that you had to pay to work in the real world with certain people, and so, therefore, I was rather looking to Robertson to prevent this thing from getting out of hand. But I was also asking myself: why was Robertson encouraging these people and bringing them forward when there were people like Harry and other people in the organization? Why didn't he educate these people? Maybe you can't educate people out of stylistic things, but you can damn well try, and he was in a position to do it. I would have some arguments with him and all I got for my pains was sharp personal attacks.

1917: From Robertson?

GW: Not from Robertson, from these other people. No, Robertson wouldn't do that.

1917: But Robertson's style, which you spoke of earlier, was hard, even harsh. You mentioned earlier that you feared that he might prematurely harden things up in the SWP.

GW: Yes, yes, that's true but his style was one of hard tactics, and also a hard ideological line, which sometimes in both areas can be a serious error, but that is sometimes necessary and sometimes desirable. He could come up with these real bitter statements, but he always knew how to deal with human beings, I felt, at least on some levels. I mean his personal life might not have been that well organized, but I felt that Robertson had a far better evaluation of people's function and capabilities, and the conditions necessary to their work, than any of these younger people did. If they had got their hands on the branch out here they would have destroyed it.

1917: Did you feel that there was a danger of them taking the organization in a bad direction?

GW: No, I didn't think they could stand up to Robertson. I thought he had things under control.

1917: You had confidence in Robertson?

GW: It was a limited confidence, but I did have confidence, yeah, relative confidence in Robertson. And I think I was correct.

1917: Did the people in New York around Robertson tour nationally?

GW: Occasionally one or two of them would come out on a tour. If we learned that Robertson was coming we could expect a certain amount of fireworks, but basically we thought it was going to be helpful. My attitude, and I think it was shared, without being made too explicit by a lot of the other people out here, was that these other people might just as soon have stayed in New York. And yet they were running the organization pretty capably: the press was expanding, we were recruiting. They were the ones that recruited the Cornell group which was very, very important to us—good people.

1917: One of the chronic complaints of the Spartacist League in that period is the infrequency of the press. Was that a problem in the branch out here?

GW: Yes, and we got a lot of local bulletins out on our own. We did a lot of leafleting. We were upset by the problems of the press irregularity, but we didn't know what the problem was really. I felt at the time that we

were holding our end up, because some of the stuff was written out here. And we tried not to put spokes in the wheel, but we did want to see the definitive articles before they were published because they became the line of the organization, and we had not only a right, but a duty to see them. Sometimes it took a few pieces of paper going back and forth to get that sort of thing straightened out, but I don't think that we were responsible for the irregularity of the press. There was some problem they had back there; I don't know what it was. All we wanted was for them to clean it up one way or another.

1917: Were there ever serious problems with the line in any of the articles?

GW: I don't think so. I don't recall. We recognized that the national leadership was in New York. We didn't have any problem with that. We didn't have any basic political differences. Sometimes we said, "well look at this paragraph." More often it would be a matter of going through with a blue pencil and cutting out some of the provocations, and usually they would accept that. It was a price they had to pay, and if they didn't accept it, well then, we would accept the existence of it. Some of the stuff, of course, was written out here. And then it was a matter of sending it there, and they'd say, well, beef up this and beef up that. It all worked out.

1917: Generally relations were pretty good?

GW: Generally relations were pretty good and we were productive. I know I wrote the thing on Israel. That was pretty well received and I think they edited a little bit, but only normal stuff, no problem. It depends on what you define as basic in politics. We are taught in the movement—and this conversation brings me back into that frame of mind, I sort of feel like I'm fifteen or twenty years younger and I'm thinking in those terms—that the basic problem was your political line or ideology. But actually politics has a great deal to do with style and personal attitudes also, and I think we shoved all that kind of stuff under the rug and thought it wasn't legitimate, and really, especially in small organizations, it can be decisive. Personal relations, attitudes, the way you conduct yourself in life in general. I wonder if the current problems with the SL, which I gather are fairly extensive—I don't know too much about it—if some of them don't stem as much from that as certain problems with their line. To me it's an academic question, but not to you guys.

I think Robertson is able to use humor directed against his own position on this sort of thing—referring to Spartacism as "old high Trotskyism." This is one of his most endearing characteristics, and he has some very endearing characteristics. I recall him saying one time, not to me, actually to Dorothy, that he had already got himself to be a footnote in the history books, and he was working on getting himself up to be a chapter.

He has self-understanding, as well as understanding of other people up to a point, I think. Of course, I don't know what he's like now. Robertson loved, and probably still loves, to be provocative, and he would say things in a way which would leave his interlocutor with his mouth hanging open. I remember him one time spitting out the phrase: "The god-figure Nehru!" I can't

reproduce the tone, but it was just *wonderful*. He was very aware of himself, and he knew exactly what kind of an impression he was making on all these things. And he really had control, and he really understood what he was doing up to a point.

1917: Did he always have that, did you see it develop?

GW: I think it was developed, and I think he probably always had it, but I think it matured in him as he matured, and it may be decaying if he's now decaying, which I don't know, because I haven't had any contact with him in a long time, but he always treated me personally quite decently. He's not my favorite person by a long shot; there are a lot of things I find unattractive about him, but at the same time I also feel some admiration and respect even though I don't have much in common with him politically.

The Peace & Freedom Party Dispute

1917: We were going to talk a little bit about the Peace and Freedom Party dispute. This came towards the end of your career in the SL.

GW: Yes, it was significant in that the Peace and Freedom Party was organized when I was out here. It was sort of a vague New Left organization. It had a lot of adherents and it made a considerable amount of impact in left circles. In this precinct, for instance, in which I live, there were more people registered Peace and Freedom than there were Republicans—it's a strange precinct. The Peace and Freedom Party had its merits as a mass organization, and I thought it was an organization in which the Spartacists could profitably participate in as a recruiting ground and as a means of also getting some experience with some kind of mass work.

I know that this was in our lexicon a bourgeois organization; it did not have a socialist ideology; it didn't have a working-class ideology, but it was a genuine radical opposition. It seemed to me that we were engaging in an exercise in formalism of the worst sort to say that we don't want anything to do with it because it doesn't have a socialist ideology, so we have to keep our distance, differentiate ourselves and counterpose the working-class thing. But this view was characterized as "popular-frontist." I understood at the time, and I certainly understand now, that it is legitimate, intellectually acceptable, and it's not absurd to call this "popular-frontist" because it was popular frontism. But it also seemed to me that, given the situation in which we were, and in which the Peace and Freedom Party was, that it was the thing to do. So I proposed this, and apparently it created more of a flap in New York than I had realized at the time.

1917: Had you proposed to enter the Peace and Freedom Party or to go to the meetings?

GW: To put our people into it as an arena of mass work. I found that there were a lot of people here who were against it too. In the first place, I didn't want to precipitate a real head-on confrontation between East and West. And in the second place, I couldn't even do that because it first required a confrontation between the pros and cons out here. I also knew enough about how these things work out that when you come down in the name of orthodoxy against a proposal, and when you're cor-

rect on the grounds of orthodoxy, and it does violate the canons of the organization to do it, there's not much point in arguing it. So I said, okay, we won't do it. Well, that may have had more reverberations than I felt at the time. I was just rather disappointed because I wanted to get the Spartacist League out here involved, in day-to-day politics, and get them so that they could have an influence on something maybe, so that we could, perhaps, do some recruiting because you can't recruit in a vacuum and finally just to bloody the troops. Just to get a little experience.

The following is Geoff White's resignation statement from the Spartacist League and Jim Robertson's reply. They were attached to the 29 July 1968 Spartacist League Political Bureau minutes.

Geoffrey White
Berkeley, California
[received 23 July 1968]

The Political Bureau,
The Spartacist League
New York, New York

Dear Comrades:

As I am sure you know, for some time now I have been developing in my thinking a series of questions concerning the politics and the role of our group and other groups of a similar character. These questions led indirectly to my leave of absence at the beginning of this year.

I do not think it is useful to raise fully here questions which I know you consider closed, and indeed, must so consider in order to continue your political existence as presently organised. Never-the-less, I would like to try to indicate very briefly the salient points in my feelings on this subject.

In the first place, there is the long term history of what may broadly be called our movement from the emergence of the Russian Left Opposition to the present. This history is characterized, I think, by two outstanding features. On the one hand, we have observed, analysed, criticized, and commented on events, often brilliantly, sometimes not so brilliantly, but with an overall record of which we can be proud. On the other hand, never, in any of the great historical crises, have we been able to influence the actual courses of events. This applies to all the great historical events of recent times, the rise of Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, the post-war revolutionary opportunities in Western Europe, the Polish-Hungarian Crisis of 1956, and, of course, on a less grand scale, the rise of the CIO in the United States. Our people were involved in all these crises, with the possible exception of 1956, and yet, can you honestly claim that the outcome would have been in any significant way different if we had not existed?

Of course, we had an explanation for these historical incapacities. The Stalinists had wrongfully appropriated the banner of the October Revolution, and stood between us and the masses who needed our leadership. In 1956-57, this Stalinist monolith was shattered on a world scale, and in Great Britain and the United States, and I believe this is true in most of the rest of the world

as well, we could no longer attribute our isolation to the overwhelming power of the Stalinist movement. Certainly the crisis was all the comrades of the pre-1956 era could have dreamed of, and yet, we were unable, on a world scale or in this country, to alter our position qualitatively as a result of it. In fact, according to our own analysis at the time of the fight in the SWP, the general crisis of world Stalinism soon became the general crisis of world Trotskyism.

For us in America, especially, the explanation still remained that there were, after all, no masses in motion. This explained our operational insignificance. Now, however, this is no longer true. This country is in the grip of a profound political crisis, but in the midst of rapid polarization, radicalization, and ideological and political turmoil, we remain exactly as we were, except that the contradictions of the situation lead to greater demoralization in our ranks. The course of the struggle refuses to follow our preconception, and we are unable to make our ideas or our history relevant to it.

The point of all this is not a long series of defeats in themselves being the decisive factor; rather, it is the effect this history has had on the mentality and outlook and habits of our organizations and our comrades, and the degree to which the resulting patterns have come to guarantee that the series shall be continued. Certainly one thing Marxists might be expected to examine with great care would be the effect of a history of this kind, however interpreted, on the life and thinking of those almost organic entities, the left sects.

I have come to some tentative conclusions about what has happened to us. I think we have become so habituated to the role we have been forced to play that it has become a value in itself, and the real basis of our political existence. Over the years, certain rules have developed. Originally, most of these were for purposes of survival and quite rational. However, these rules now survive and develop autonomously, regardless of their relevance to the objective world. It is as if we were involved in a great game, the object of which is to make points according to an elaborate and very sophisticated set of evolved rules and stylistic considerations. The analogy to bull-fighting comes inevitably to mind. In short, I question whether our basic orientation is not toward making a good record in some cosmic history book, rather than making history itself. Perhaps, too, this abstractness is necessary for the preservation of our political identity. In the only two cases I know of where groups like ours have actually achieved a small but significant mass base, the POUM and the LSSP, we ended as ministers in bourgeois governments.

The Spartacist League specifically has an admirable record. On middle level political questions especially, such as guerrillism, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Israel question, and draft resistance, the League has far outshone its competitors. Only the last of these, however, is potentially fruitful in terms of immediate political involvement. I suggest that certain difficulties we have encountered in implementing our line on this point are not so much the result of individual weakness, although they have are certainly that too, as symptomatic of our ingrained inability to relate abstract correctness to

meaningful implementation.

If I were confident in the League's essential validity, such organizational atrocities as a semi-annual publication schedule, despite personnel changes, and eighteen month delays in the publication of PB minutes would stimulate resolve rather than despair. As it is, they seem to me rather manifestations of an underlying sickness.

We have differences over the PFP. I feel we did right to enter, and were wrong to withdraw. This in itself is simply an episode. What really bothers me about the PFP is the way in which our comrades discussed it, reacted to the arena, and carried out their withdrawal. The whole discussion revolved around what are to me the relatively sterile question of the exact political and ideological nature of the PFP, not the fruitful one of whether we could contribute to making things we theoretically desired actually happen. My impression of the arid and scholastic nature of the discussion may be a subjective error. However, the attitude that the group as a whole brought to the intervention is quite clear. Our comrades felt extremely uncomfortable at being involved in a real arena, seemed to fear some sort of contamination. They greeted our ludicrous and futile exit with intense relief. The danger of a blot on our cosmic record had been avoided and we would not have to meet the challenge of actually trying to influence events in even the smallest arena.

I don't think the PFP question is of great importance in itself, but it is typical of an attitude and an approach to politics which I think is fundamentally invalid and destructive to our professed goals. The long chain of failures will not be crowned with the final justifying success because we really don't want it to be, because that is no longer the standard by which we judge ourselves and our organizations. Judged by its ability to influence the resolution of the political and social crises of our day, or of future days, our existence is, in my opinion, one of total futility. Our existence is justified only in terms of our own abstract criteria, not subject to the criticism of reality.

This is the conclusion I have been moving toward with increasing consciousness at least ever since the Chicago conference, and in some ways, considerably before that. I have been reluctant to follow these thoughts to their logical conclusion for two main reasons. One is the subjective reason of considerable personal investment in the sectarian movement. The other is that despite my confidence in the validity of these criticisms, I have been unable to discover, much less develop, adequate alternatives. Just as I, as I suspect many other comrades, have subscribed to the degenerated workers' state position on the Russian question largely because the visible alternatives present even more horrendous intellectual difficulties and destructive political consequences, so for some time I have subscribed to the validity of Spartacism because I have been able to see no valid alternative.

However, that position is too full of contradictions to maintain long. Comrade Robertson correctly stated at the time of my leave that my course led straight as an arrow out of this organization. I was fully aware of it at that time. I believe it was the common feeling of the C.C.

comrades and my own at the time of that discussion that my leave of absence was transitional. In the last six months it has become increasingly anomalous, and I feel that the time has come to make the formal relationship conform to what exists in reality.

I am therefore officially submitting my resignation from membership in the Spartacist League.

Fraternally,
Geoffrey White
CC: BASL, file

A Comment On Geoffrey White's Resignation Statement

Ex-comrade White's resignation contains four main sections. The first argues that the history of the Trotskyist movement has been one of failure, at bottom indefensibly so. Second, White argues that as a result of these failures a set of formal little "rules" to maintain the movement's purity evolved which moreover served to reinforce the failure of our movement. His third point, which is given a length and emphasis comparable to the other sections, argues that leaving the Peace and Freedom Party typifies our futility. White devotes to PFP about a quarter of his attention in his resignation justifying his break from revolutionary Marxism. Fourth, he concludes that he has been moving in his present direction for a long time and the substance of his break can no longer be denied. He further notes, however, that he had resisted until now the logical conclusion of his drift, both because of his "considerable personal involvement in the sectarian movement" and because whatever his distaste for our position on the Russian question he could see no valid alternative.

Regarding the first of White's points, that of the alleged failure of Trotskyism, the position he advances is either too much or too little. In a direct sense, Trotskyism would be a failure, and moreover decisively disproved, if somewhere the working class were to come to power without the Trotskyist revolutionary program and party, or the reverse, if the Trotskyists came to power but not the working class. The reasons for this should be obvious. The "rules" of Trotskyism were not worked up by the Trotskyists to explain away defeats and failures and keep "pure." They are, or at least aim to be, nothing other than a codification of that experience the significance of which White completely overlooks, the Russian October Revolution, the great working-class revolution which *succeeded* and which, despite all vicissitudes, still endures and still represents, even in its present great deformity, an enormous threat to the bourgeois order. It is logically incumbent upon White, if he is not simply to abandon politics—which as a highly politicized intellectual he is, in any case, unlikely to do—to show either that Trotskyism differs from the lessons of the October Revolution or that the revolution itself is without relevance. This leads to the other, broader, level of consideration, namely that if White is so sure that Trotskyism has failed, where are the successful political practices to which he orients? What his perspective toward social change? And what social change does he now want, anyhow? This latter point is raised by the ends and means link-

age—the forces which effect social change determine its shape.

In short, if you don't know who has won or can win, how can you speak of other than a transient failure of Trotskyism, a failure which is but the ideological and organizational expression of the failure of the working class itself to threaten in a serious and prolonged way the bourgeois order in the past several decades? Or, to put it in reverse form, every time the proletariat has surged forward in an elementary way as a class at least to the point of embryonic soviets or the urgent felt need for soviets (Spain 1936, Italy 1943, Bolivia 1952, Hungary 1956, Belgium 1960, France 1968), then the atmosphere positively reeked of the main elements of the Trotskyist program, and only (only!) the lack of preparation of the vanguard and the brevity or abortiveness of the incidents prevented the emergence of a powerful revolutionary party—and that could only be a party of Trotskyism, the Marxism of today.

Everything else about Comrade White's resignation is anti-climactic to the above considerations. His argument that our initial historical failures led us to evolve elaborate, abstract "rules" of purity with which we render ourselves permanently impotent is defeated when White rather pathetically observes that perhaps these "rules" are necessary, considering the fate of the two "groups like ours", the POUM of Spain and the LSSP of Ceylon, which departed from the "rules" and ended up helping capitalists run their governments! To call the questions White raises "rules" is disingenuous—what he's talking about are not rules but *politics*, specifically, what *kinds* of struggles the working class can undertake which if victorious will lead it to power, and what kinds will betray the working people and perpetuate capitalist imperialism. Comrade White has nothing historically to add or subtract. He merely regrets that "rules" exist and ignores their real origins in the Russian Revolution and the building of Lenin's Bolshevik party.

But for the present day, White has found a place where he hopes the "rules" don't apply—the Peace and Freedom Party. Faint hope that! What has the Peace and Freedom Party discovered that differs from or goes beyond the Leon Blum Front Populaire or the Henry Wallace Progressive Party? The answer is: *less* than nothing. The PFP is a self-conscious mobilization of young intellectuals which *refuses* to even aspire to becoming a mobilizer of working-class masses, *even* in order to subordinate the workers to middle class ideology and aims. And *this* appears to be the *ad hoc* alternative to which White now goes as he leaves our modest, but only genuine embodiment in the U.S. today of revolutionary Marxism, the Spartacist League.

* * *

Receipt of White's resignation statement creates mixed feelings. Comrade White, for all his inner corrosion, was a mainstay of our tendency in the Bay area and nationally. Comrade White was instrumental in holding together the Bay Area tendency at the time of the Healy-Wohlforth split from us in 1962, so that not a single member of the Bay Area tendency went over. In those years he played a valuable role in the development of our perspectives and our theoretical outlook. Later, he

made some of the finest journalistic contributions in SPARTACIST. However, from the beginning of his relationship with the tendency, a skeptical quality and a careful, sanitary aloofness were not absent from his make-up. These debilitating features evolved and grew greater and more pervasive. By our 1966 Founding conference, Comrade White argued, albeit without stubbornness and unsuccessfully, that we should oppose the possession and development of nuclear weapons by the Sino-Soviet bloc, a position which cannot in any practical way be squared with the defense of the deformed workers' states against imperialism. Probably the last real opportunity to deflect Comrade White from the course which led him out of the Trotskyist movement came with the anticipated reunification with Healy. White played a strong role at the Montreal Conference in 1965. But that possibility ended with the revelation of the illusory character of the Healy connection.

Locally, in the Bay Area, comrade White's organizational contributions were on balance ultimately decisively negative. His skepticism was not without deep impact, especially his view that perhaps the historic opportunities for proletarian revolution had been missed and humanity faced now only the prospect of nuclear holocaust. In our principal local spokesman and political leader, this quality naturally alienated would-be revolutionaries and militants who came in contact with the Bay Area local, effectively leading to the recruitment of only one or two people in the area in a half decade! Moreover, the great Berkeley student strike of 1964, with many of whose militants White had close contact, was for us a lost opportunity. Comrade White felt strongly at the time that the Marxist movement—i.e. he—had nothing to tell the student radicals! Later, his loss of necessary organizational focus and hardness led the local to distribute a leaflet, at a demonstration where many radical-talking tendencies were present, containing the outrageous slogan: "Join the revolutionary organization of your choice"! Finally, as implied in his resignation, it was White who led our local into the Peace and Freedom Party, a step from which we extricated ourselves satisfactorily and without undue internal turmoil. Later, in *Spartacist-West*, our comrades acknowledged the error, but opponents, particularly the SWP, continue to exploit our misstep, the only departure from principle in our history, in a way which shows full well the SWP's sensitivity to their own departures and their eagerness to turn on us with "you're another." White may despair of our impact, but our opponents are not unaware of it by any means. (Parenthetically, we wonder what White thinks of the SWP's own "valiant" efforts to transcend the "rules" of Marxist principle. But that gets us into the whole question of the incompatibility of different species of opportunism, i.e., essentially the adaptation to different and often sharply, even bloodily, counterposed forces.)

So we miss White for what he was and what he might have been in helping to forge a revolutionary workers movement in this country. And we note that in his leave taking he was organizationally responsible. He agreed to a gradual withdrawal so as to minimize damage to the Bay Area local in which he played a dominant role until

the end of his active period. But given what he had become, his formal departure becomes mainly a new opportunity for younger comrades to build on foundations he helped lay but then himself lacked the strength to help develop.

James Robertson

[based on notes of 29 July 1968]

Postscript

On helping proof-read White's resignation statement I was struck by his reference to the lack of "relevance to the objective world" of Trotskyist political rules. In particular his use of the word "relevance" excited my memory. So I checked back to confirm that nineteen years ago there was played out with a closely parallel content the exchange of opinion displayed today in White's "Resignation" and my "Comment." Only at that time both contributions were literarily much superior, but each politically rather poorer (though more comprehensive).

I refer to "The Relevance of Trotskyism" by Henry Judd in the August 1949 *New Internationalist* and its reply "The Relevance of Marxism" by Albert Gates in the

January-February 1950 *NI*. Judd's denial of Trotskyism's relevance and his random search under the pressures of anti-Stalinism and imperialism led him shortly to become (as Stanley Plastrik) a founder of *Dissent* magazine (ech!). Even with the large handicap of the bureaucratic-collectivist line on Russia, Gates made mince-meat of Judd and properly so. However this didn't prevent Gates (Glotzer), Shachtman's long-time #2 man, from following his leader into the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation ten years later after a combination of the arid, unrewarding 1950's and a profoundly wrong Russian position had combined to wreak their havoc on the Workers Party-Independent Socialist League.

Nineteen years ago Geoff White was a CP youth leader who had just graduated from Harvard to go on to struggle for nearly two decades as a communist. By his present lights, it's a shame White couldn't have read and accepted Judd back then and saved himself a lot of trouble.

J.R.