



— **World in Turmoil** —

The Trotskyist Answer

— **Ukraine War** —
Turn the Guns Around!

— **Pandemic** —
Down With the Lockdowns!

— **Defend China!** —
For Political Revolution!

— Editorial —

A World in Turmoil

This new issue of *Spartacist* comes out at a time of turmoil and instability in the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the utter bankruptcy of the capitalist system and its incapacity—even in the most advanced countries—to fulfill the most basic health and social needs of working people. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia, which was provoked by the NATO imperialists' encirclement of capitalist Russia, shows the urgency of overthrowing the world imperialists as the only way to obtain lasting peace. These have been the two key events of the last two years, which in turn have caused a rise of inflation unseen since the late 1970s and contributed to the breakdown of global supply chains. For billions of people, the threats of economic crisis, famine and war loom ever larger.

What we have witnessed since 2020 is a shift in the historical period, posing new problems for revolutionaries that must be answered in a truly orthodox Marxist fashion. The task of revolutionaries is to develop the Marxist doctrine and program through its own extension, in complete and irconcilable opposition to reformists and pacifists who turn Marxism into pure bourgeois liberalism or who are simply cheerleaders for non-revolutionary forces.

The task we have set ourselves in the dawn of this new period is to cohere the forces of authentic Marxism around a clear program answering in a revolutionary fashion the burning problems facing the international proletariat. This issue of *Spartacist* is a contribution toward this task. We reject the concept of a "family of the left," whereby all who claim to be in favor of socialism share a common goal. Building a new revolutionary international—that is, re-forging the Fourth International destroyed by revisionism many decades ago—requires a clear communist program, which can be elaborated only through a relentless struggle against those who claim to stand for revolution but are in fact promoting reformist deceptions.

It would be absurd for us, the International Communist League, to claim to be the Fourth International. Our numerical forces are much too weak. But we firmly believe that the elements of program contained in this issue of *Spartacist* are *essential* to re-forging the Fourth International—world party of socialist revolution—in our time.

* * *

2020 opened with the Covid-19 pandemic, a social and economic catastrophe for working people across the globe. The bourgeoisie responded to the virus by locking up the population in their homes for months on end, increasing all aspects of capitalist oppression, with the working class internationally suffering huge pay cuts, speedup, mass layoffs, etc. Faced with the bourgeoisies' offensive against workers' living standards, the leadership of the working class in all countries completely betrayed the proletariat, fully joining the orgy of national unity. While the working class desperately needed to wage defensive struggles to protect its health and safety against the virus, address the social roots of the crisis and resist the bosses' offensive, the leaders of the trade unions and workers parties pledged themselves to helping the capitalist rulers enforce their devastating measures, disarming the proletariat.

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English Edition

SPARTACIST

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Ukrainian, Russian Workers: Turn the Guns Against Your Rulers!



Garanich/Reuters

Ukrainian troops in Donbass, July 18. Ukrainian president Zelensky, flanked by U.S. secretaries of defense and state. They aim to further enslave Ukraine to imperialists, while President Putin wants country under the Russian boot.



Ukrainian Presidential Press Office



Zemlianichenko/Reuters

The following was issued as a Spartacist supplement (27 February 2022).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was provoked by the decades-long U.S.-led expansion of NATO and the European Union. After having engineered the capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the USSR, the imperialist powers have expanded eastward to the very borders of Russia, bringing with them pillage, ethnic strife and humiliation. The Western imperialists now rage against Russia's "war of aggression" and its violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. These bandits who plunder the workers of the world couldn't care less about Ukraine's national rights. What they are really furious about is that Russia is challenging their exclusive rights to pillage East Europe as well as U.S. hegemony over the region. The never-ending cycle of crisis and war must be stopped

at its source, through socialist revolutions in the imperialist centers. **For workers revolution in the U.S.! For the Soviet United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis!**

There is only one progressive way forward in the war between Ukraine and Russia: to turn this war between *two* capitalist classes into a civil war where workers overthrow *both* capitalist classes. We call on the soldiers and workers of Ukraine and Russia: Fraternize! Turn the guns against your exploiters!

This war is fundamentally about whose sphere of influence Ukraine is under, and the victory of either the Russian or Ukrainian armed forces can only lead to more oppression. The Ukrainian government is fighting not to liberate Ukraine but to further enslave it to the NATO/EU imperialist powers, to which it has been bound since the 2014 U.S.-backed coup.

Down With the EU and NATO!

Its victory would also increase the oppression of the Russian minority in Ukraine. On the other side, Russia's invasion of Ukraine seeks only to replace the imperialist boot with a Russian whip. The legitimate national struggle for self-rule in Donetsk and Luhansk has now been hitched to Russia's broader reactionary war aim. Revolution in Ukraine and Russia would resolve the national question, do away with the oligarchs and inspire workers internationally to rise up against their own exploiters.

A revolutionary outcome to the current war is necessary and possible. In 1917, Russian and Ukrainian working people were also being used as cannon fodder by their rulers. They put an end to this by shooting their officers and joining insurgent workers under the leadership of the Bolsheviks to sweep away their common exploiters—the capitalists and landlords—in the world's greatest revolution. *For new October Revolutions in Russia and Ukraine!*

The capitalist world has already been ravaged by two years of crisis triggered by the pandemic. Lockdowns, unemployment, speedup, inflation and crumbling health care are the reality for workers around the world. The current war can only accelerate the destruction of workers' living standards and sharpen class antagonisms. The task of revolutionaries is to convert the raw anger building up at the bottom of capitalist societies into the only solution to war, misery and exploitation: the establishment of international workers rule.

The pandemic clearly laid bare the total bankruptcy of the current leaders of the workers movement. While the working class was being pummeled by both a virus and capitalist attacks, these class traitors—social democrats, Stalinists and trade-union bureaucrats—were entirely on the side of the bosses, demanding more lockdowns and more sacrifices. Now these same misleaders, particularly in the imperialist centers, are rallying workers to the cause of the U.S. and its allies, pledging undying loyalty to NATO and the EU and demanding that Russia be sanctioned into



no credit

1917: Russian and Austrian troops fraternizing at the front during World War I.

starvation. *Enough betrayal!* Workers must oppose the sanctions and military aid to Ukraine! To struggle against imperialist depredation abroad and attacks on living standards at home, the working class must break with its current leadership. It needs a new, revolutionary leadership to fulfill its world-historic role as the gravedigger of capitalism. *Reforge the Fourth International!*

“Socialist” Stooges of Imperialism

The precondition to building a genuine revolutionary opposition to imperialism and war is to ruthlessly struggle against the pseudo-Trotskyists, Stalinists and Maoists who use pacifist and “anti-imperialist” slogans to mask their utter subservience to their own imperialist masters and national bourgeoisies. Just like the opportunists Lenin warned against during the First World War, “By means of patent sophistry, Marxism is stripped of its revolutionary living spirit; *everything* is recognised in Marxism *except* the revolutionary methods of struggle, the propaganda and preparation of those methods, and the education of the masses in this direction” (*Socialism and War*, 1915). Here are the main deceptions pushed by today's opportunists:

- “No to war in Ukraine.” This slogan, raised throughout the left, is a pacifist swindle, deceiving the people that there could be a just settlement to the war short of revolutionary struggle. No cease-fire or peace deal between capitalist robbers will address the causes of the war. Any such agreement will necessarily be directed against workers in Russia and Ukraine and prepare the ground for the next bloody conflict. Whoever wants a lasting and democratic peace must fight to transform the current capitalist war into civil wars against the Russian and Ukrainian bourgeoisies and to extend revolution to the imperialist countries.
- “Russian troops out of Ukraine” (raised, for example, by the Committee for a Workers' International). This is NATO's slogan and can only mean victory for the Ukrainian government. Those who raise this slogan from the U.S., Britain, France or Germany are calling not for the freedom of Ukrainian workers but freedom for their own imperialist rulers to plunder Ukraine.

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Бюллетень Спартаковцев **SPARTACIST**
 Приложение № 23 март 2022 г.

Агрессия НАТО/ЕС провоцирует войну в Украине

**Украинские, российские рабочие:
поверните оружие против своих правителей!**

Наше издание печатается по заказу Интернационалистической Коммунистической Партии 214-й Интернационалистической коммунистической организации в солидарности с революционными рабочими и революционными коммунистами в антимпериалистических странах НАТО и ЕС, с которыми она борется за свержение империалистического 2021-го капиталистического режима.

NATO/EU Aggression Provokes War in Ukraine
**Ukrainian, Russian Workers:
Turn the Guns Against Your Rulers!**
Down With the EU and NATO!
Spartacist Supplement (27 February 2022)

Available in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Turkish

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Down With the Lockdowns!

The Working Class Must Defend Itself

We reprint below a 19 April 2021 statement of the International Executive Committee of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), which was issued as a Spartacist supplement.

Miserable health care, decrepit housing, production for profit, imperialist domination: the very nature of capitalist class rule fuels the economic and health crisis that has ravaged the world since the outbreak of Covid-19. The parasitic bourgeoisies have responded to the pandemic with the means that best serve their interests, forcibly locking up their entire populations at home, pending vaccination.

The bourgeoisies' lockdowns are a *reactionary* public health measure. Workers must oppose them! Lockdowns may well temporarily slow the spread of infections, but they *weaken* the fighting ability of the working class. By shutting down whole branches of industry and services, they have caused an economic crisis and thrown masses of people into unemployment. Closures of schools and childcare facilities have increased the oppressive burden of the family. State repression has been severely increased as democratic and working-class rights have been gutted. Gatherings, protests, travel, strikes, union organizing: all have been restricted or banned. Lockdowns aim to prevent working-class struggle, the only way workers can genuinely protect their health and combat the social causes of the crisis.

Invoking "shared sacrifice," the capitalists have launched a blitzkrieg against the working class. Union-busting, massive layoffs, wage cuts and speedups are the "new normal." Faced with the combined threats of a deadly virus and the capitalist onslaught, the working class stands disarmed. Around the world, the pro-capitalist leaders of both trade unions and workers parties have loyally collaborated with the ruling class in its offensive. In the name of national unity

and fighting the virus, they are betraying the working class.

From the British and Australian Labor parties to the German Social Democratic Party and Die Linke, the French Socialist and Communist parties and the South African Communist Party, the labor misleaders play a key role in enforcing the lockdowns, locally and nationally, and shoving them down the throats of workers and the oppressed. From the American AFL-CIO to the Mexican and Italian trade unions to the Japanese Rengo, Zenroren and Zenrokyo federations, union leaders urge their members to support the bourgeoisies' measures: stay home and get screwed!

The urgent need to defend the health and livelihoods of the working class directly poses the task of forging a new leadership of the workers movement. Unions need to fight *against* the capitalist state shutting down industries and *for* safe working conditions. The decrepit health care and housing infrastructure needs to be rebuilt and expanded *now*. The expropriation of the capitalists' best real estate combined with massive public works programs is necessary to provide decent living conditions for working people.

At every step, the basic interests of the workers and oppressed run up against the pillars of capitalist class rule. The current crisis sharply poses the need for women's emancipation from the shackles of the family, for ending racial oppression and for liberation from imperialist exploitation. The only way forward for humanity is through workers revolutions and the establishment of an international socialist planned economy.

Faced with the utter bankruptcy of the established leaders of the workers movement and their pseudo-Marxist lackeys, the vital question posed for the class-conscious proletarians is the need for a leadership based on the revolutionary program of Trotskyism—authentic Marxism-Leninism. The

Break with the Labor Traitors— Reforge the Fourth International!



Mike Kemp/Getty

Creepy Orwellian propaganda campaign by British government to blackmail population into accepting bourgeoisie's reactionary measures.

International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) strives to build an international Leninist vanguard party, the essential instrument for bringing revolutionary consciousness to the proletariat and achieving workers power. *Reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution!*

Down With Class Collaboration and National Unity!

For the last year, the position of the ICL was to accept the lockdowns as necessary. We repudiate this position. It was a capitulation to the “national unity” rallying cry that all classes should support the lockdowns because they save lives.

For this supposedly universal cause, the labor tops have willingly sacrificed the proletariat's interests. Like public health in general, fighting the pandemic does not stand above class antagonisms. Behind the capitalists' concern for “saving lives,” they in fact pursue their class interests. The bourgeoisie's interest in public health is to maintain a workforce fit enough for exploitation at the cheapest possible cost while protecting its own health. Contrary to this

reactionary aim, the proletariat has an interest in securing the best living conditions and health care for all. These clearly counterposed class interests cannot be reconciled, pandemic or not. It is only through its independent mobilization *against* the bourgeoisie that the working class can defend its health and safety.

The bourgeoisie blackmails workers with the idea that fighting for their interests spreads disease—that union meetings and protests threaten public health; that health care workers kill people by fighting for better working conditions; that schools and day care centers must be closed to protect children. This is a big lie! Fighting against the lockdowns is the necessary starting point to address the social causes of the current disaster. Union meetings are *essential* to workers' self-defense. *Struggle* by health care workers is the road to better health care. Fighting against school and day-care closures is the *precondition* for better schools and childcare—and furthers the struggle for women's emancipation.

In *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938), Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky insisted:

“In a society based upon exploitation, the highest morality is that of the social revolution. All methods are good which raise the class-consciousness of the workers, their trust in their own forces, their readiness for self-sacrifice in the struggle. The impermissible methods are those which implant fear and submissiveness in the oppressed in the face of their oppressors.”

The bourgeoisie always uses supreme moral imperatives such as “saving lives” to justify its crimes. The German and French imperialists use the European Union to plunder the proletariat across Europe in the name of “peace” and “social progress.” The American imperialists and their NATO allies have devastated Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and many more countries in the name of “democracy” and “freedom.” They invaded Somalia in 1992 to “feed the starving.” When the bourgeoisie urgently cries about “saving lives,” this is *always* used to instill submission to the ruling class and rally national unity behind its interests.

For Union Control of Safety!

The capitalist state—constituted at its core by the police, prisons, army and courts—is an apparatus of organized violence to maintain the rule and profits of the exploiting class. While Marxists support certain state-enforced public health measures beneficial to the working class, such as mandatory vaccinations, it is suicidal to rely on the state to protect health and safety.

The Stalinists of the Communist Party of Greece are experts in distorting such ABCs of Marxism. One of the main demands they raise in the unions is:

“Organized sanitary control to prevent spread of the virus, under the responsibility of state agencies, at the port of Piraeus, at Cosco [shipping company], on the ships, in the shipbuilding and repair zone, in factories and industrial units employing thousands of workers.”

—*Rizospastis* (1 April)

This means tying the working class to the capitalist state and spreading illusions in the benevolence of its health agencies. Workers have to fight for *union control of safety*. The unions, *not* the capitalist state, should determine what conditions are safe to work under.

Unions are the elementary defense organizations of the working class. Their purpose is to defend workers on the job, *continued on page 26*

Down With the Lockdowns!

Statement of the ICL International Executive Committee (19 April 2021)

Available in Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, Turkish.

Read online at: icl-fi.org

NDP and Fake Socialists: Spearhead for Lockdowns and Crackdowns

Labour Must Defend the Truckers!

Canada



Goldberg/SOPA



Pichette/EPA-EFE

Truckers convoy sparked by government's vaccine mandates for the industry became focal point for massive anger over disaster caused by bourgeoisie's pandemic response.

The following was first printed in a Spartacist supplement (February 2022).

21 FEBRUARY—Massive unemployment, overloaded hospitals and cancelled treatments, widespread deterioration of working conditions, crippling inflation, gutting of democratic rights, ruined shopkeepers, closing of schools, families stuck together day and night, unspeakable pain and distress, death: For two years now, the workers and the oppressed have suffered the devastating consequences of the bourgeoisie's response to the pandemic and its lockdowns. This is the backdrop to the truckers' convoy on Ottawa, which has become a lightning rod for widespread discontent in society.

Faced with this first significant blowback to the ruling class's "national unity" campaign in the pandemic, the bourgeoisie, its media mouthpieces, the New Democratic Party [NDP] and the reformist left immediately went into hysterical overdrive. Their propaganda barrage which portrays anybody participating in anti-government demonstrations as "far-right extremists" is but a *lie* to justify cracking down on them. What has pushed thousands of people in major cities to come out in protests is not "racism," a "far-right agenda" or (as tinfoil-hatted liberals would have it) a "U.S.-funded coup," but the totally *legitimate anger* against the social disaster created by the bourgeoisie's health measures.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has decreed the Emergencies Act—a "rebranding" of the War Measures Act—with which the government gives itself arbitrary powers to increase repression, suspend civil liberties, freeze bank accounts and extend the policing powers which they've used to crack down on truckers and protesters. Nearly 200 have already been arrested under this law. We say: *Defend the truckers! Drop all the charges! Down with the Emergencies Act!*

Break with the Labour Traitors! Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Outrageously, the loudest voices in the hysterical campaign against the truckers and protesters have come from the NDP and their fake-socialist left tails such as Fightback, Socialist Action and the Communist Party of Canada, which have pushed for *more* state repression. Fightback (among others) even acted as shock troops for the government, mobilizing counterprotests in several cities against the truckers!

This comes as no surprise. Throughout the pandemic, the NDP and union tops in the Canadian Labour Congress and Unifor, as well as the leaderships of the Quebec union federations, all supported the lockdowns, i.e., the *reactionary* response to the Covid-19 crisis by the capitalist ruling

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George Crawford

Our comrade George Crawford died suddenly in London in October 2021 at age 77. George was a 50-year member of our tendency, who from the time he joined the Spartacist League/U.S. served on the party's highest leadership bodies. At the time of his death, he was a consultative member of both the Spartacist League/Britain Central Committee and the ICL's International Executive Committee.

George grew up in Los Angeles and, like many of his generation, was radicalized by the struggle for black rights and opposition to the war in Vietnam. He was a founding member of the Communist Working Collective (CWC), a Maoist grouping whose political evolution is described in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 10, "From Maoism to Trotskyism." George and other CWC comrades carefully studied the works of Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Trotsky and drew the conclusion that Trotskyism was the continuity of Leninism. The CWC would fuse with the SL/U.S. in 1971.

Determined to assimilate the fundamentals of Leninism and Trotskyism, the CWC undertook a rigorous study of the first four congresses of the Communist International (CI). George correctly concluded that the CI's 1922 Fourth Congress resolution on the workers government was flawed in allowing for the possibility that such a government could be something other than the dictatorship of the proletariat. George's conclusion, which was shared by SL/U.S. founding leader Jim Robertson, signaled that the fusion would be politically solid.

With the fusion, George became a full member of the SL/U.S. Central Committee. He went on to hold a multitude of leadership positions, including Organizational Secretary. From his experience working at a Firestone tire factory and other industrial jobs, he developed a shrewd eye for the trade-union bureaucracy's treacherous role as labor lieutenants of capital. George served on the Trade Union



Family photo



1943-2021

Commission, the party body tasked with guiding communist work in the unions.

In 1993, at the request of the organization, he and his wife and comrade, Kate, transferred to London. It was there that in 2004 George intervened decisively to help break the ICL from its opportunist adaptation to the social forums and reassert the basic Trotskyist position of opposition on principle to popular fronts. George also visited and worked with other ICL sections, including numerous trips to South Africa.

George was a worker-intellectual who despised the division between mental and manual labor in bourgeois society. He is fondly remembered by comrades for his role as an educator, his dedication to training women cadres to become party leaders and his championing of the SL/U.S. maintenance department.

George had his own way of seeing the world. He described the society that shaped him in a forum he gave titled "Sex, Race and Class in the 'American Century'" (published in *Women and Revolution* No. 33,

Spring 1987). Condemning the stifling morality of American bourgeois society, he declared, "It brings one to rage." Besides his wicked sense of humor, George will be fondly remembered for Crawfordisms like "the tenements of Marxism" and "You've buttered your bed, now lie in it."

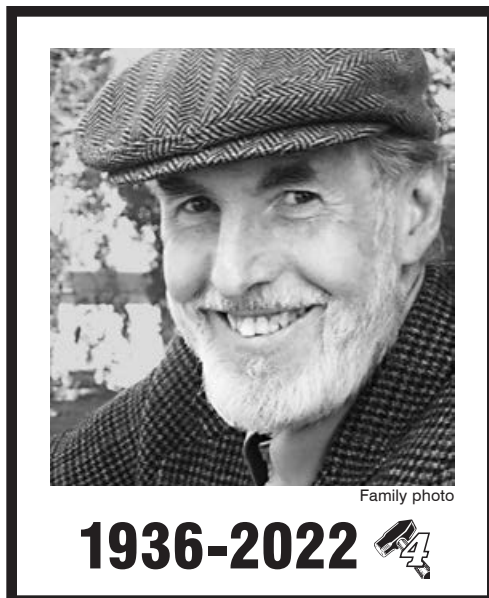
To the end of his life, George was animated by the struggle to rearm the ICL that began with the 2017 fight against Great Power chauvinism. Right before his death, he welcomed the fight in the SL/B to renounce the section's embrace of Labourite reformism and reclaim the revolutionary program on which it was founded. The SL/B 25th Conference document, published in this issue, is dedicated to comrade Crawford, noting, "His lifelong struggle for communism is an example and an inspiration."

A more comprehensive appreciation of George's life was printed in *Workers Hammer* No. 247 (Winter 2021-22).

Albert Nelson

Our comrade Al Nelson died of throat cancer at the age of 85 in the San Francisco Bay Area in February. Following the death of Jim Robertson in 2019, Al was the sole surviving member of the precursor of the Spartacist tendency, the Revolutionary Tendency in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which he joined in 1962.

Al's development as a Leninist began in the heat of an internal struggle against the SWP leadership's abandonment of Trotskyism, marked by its adulation of Cuban Stalinist Fidel Castro and its criminal abstention from the radicalizing black struggle in the U.S. South. He was one of several RT supporters bureaucratically expelled from the SWP in 1964. Notably, as part of a student trip to Cuba that year, Al confronted Che Guevara over the absence of workers democracy under the Castro regime (see "Freedom for Cuban Trotskyists!", *Spartacist* No. 3, January-February 1965).



Al was elected to the Central Committee of the Spartacist League/U.S. at its founding conference in 1966 and to the International Executive Committee of the international Spartacist tendency (now ICL) at its founding in 1979. Over the years, he headed up many of the party's most significant mobilizations. In 1989-90, he played a crucial role in leading our intervention in the DDR (East Germany) as the Stalinist bureaucracy was collapsing. We fought for a reunified "Red Germany of Workers Councils" through proletarian political revolution in the DDR deformed workers state and socialist revolution against West German imperialism.

By the early 2000s, comrade Nelson had stopped playing a leadership role and became a consultative member of the SL/U.S. A more

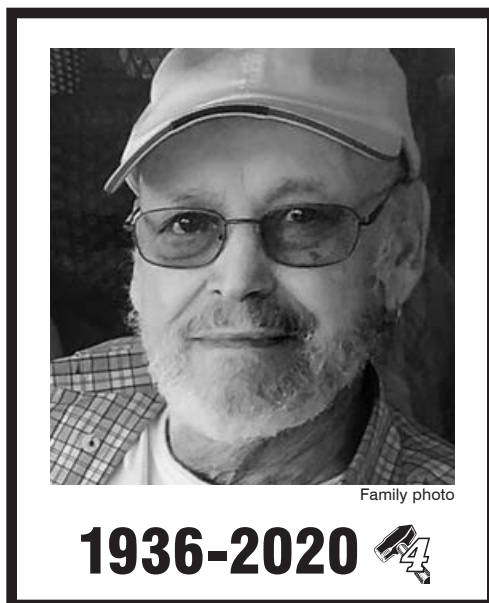
comprehensive treatment of Al Nelson's life as a Trotskyist cadre will appear in a future issue. Our condolences go out especially to his wife and comrade, Karen.

Edward "Corky" Benedict

Edward "Corky" Benedict, a cadre of the Spartacist League/U.S. and International Communist League for 43 years, died on 9 June 2020 after years of debilitating illnesses. Our deepest condolences go to his wife and comrade, Robin Hunt Benedict.

Growing up in a working-class family in Amherst, Ohio, Corky served in the Marines and was the first in his family to go to college. Radicalized by the Vietnam War, he joined the street-fighting New Leftists of the SDS/Weatherman group. Soon recognizing the futility of idiotic left-wing terrorism, Corky sought another road. Splitting with the Weathermen in late 1969, he became part of the Cleveland Marxist Caucus. In 1973, he joined the SL, committing himself to forging a revolutionary proletarian party to lead the struggle to uproot the entire system of capitalist imperialism.

For several years Corky was a member of the Militant-Solidarity Caucus, a class-struggle opposition in the National



Maritime Union. As head of the maintenance department in our central office, he schooled many members in the importance of being able to work with one's hands. A well-read Marxist, Corky in many ways embodied the communist goal of a society where the class-derived division between mental and manual labor no longer exists. He was made an alternate member of the SL/U.S. Central Committee in April 1980 and remained on the CC for 35 years.

In the U.S. and internationally, his military training, trade-union experience and maintenance skills made him a key part of our defense teams, interventions into labor battles and party construction projects. Corky could both work and play harder than people half his age, his devilish

sense of humor often lubricated by large amounts of alcohol.

In late 2015, Corky's health problems led him and Robin to move to North Carolina, where they were no longer members. But Corky's commitment to the ICL's purpose never wavered.

Ukraine...

(continued from page 4)

- “Down with NATO!” This is a necessary slogan, but raised without opposition to NATO’s economic adjunct, the EU, it only builds illusions in the possibility of imperialism without militarism. It is the “peaceful” economic plunder of finance capital which prepares the ground for war. The EU and euro are tools for this plunder. It is nothing but crass social-chauvinism to present the German/French-led EU as benign and separate from the “militaristic” American-led NATO. Lutte Ouvrière, for example, denounces NATO while lamenting that Ukraine was denied EU membership and “the few advantages it could have gained from it” (22 February). Grotesque capitulation to French imperialism! Ask the workers of Europe: The EU brings nothing but economic asphyxiation and national subjugation.
- “Against Russian imperialism” (the position of the Marxistisch-Leninistische Partei Deutschlands, among many others). Grandstanding against “Russian imperialism” serves to cover the crimes of their imperialist masters, deceiving workers as to who the main enemy truly is. The world is ruled from the centers of finance capital in New York, Frankfurt, Paris, London and Tokyo, not Moscow. While plenty reactionary, the Russian ruling class is not imperialist. It oppresses its own working class and is a regional power. In contrast, the imperialists suck the lifeblood of workers on the entire planet.
- “No to imperialist war in Ukraine” (Communist Party of Greece & Co.). Pacifist garbage with an added “anti-imperialist” twist. To present the war as imperialist is to

throw sand in the eyes of the workers. Should NATO or any imperialist power directly enter this war, it would be an obligation for any revolutionary to side militarily with Russia for the defeat of the imperialists, the main bulwark of capitalist reaction internationally. This is precisely the task which is rejected by those who agitate about “Russian imperialism.”

- “Should workers side with Russia?” Some on the left believe that since Russia is challenging the imperialists it should be supported in its war. This is a capitulation to Great Russian chauvinism. Russia is not at war with the imperialists but with the Ukrainian government. The proletarian strategy to fight imperialism in Ukraine and Russia lies in common revolutionary struggle of Ukrainian and Russian workers, not in supporting the designs of the Kremlin. The subjugation of the Ukrainian nation to Russia would further inflame national antagonisms, erecting a tremendous obstacle to this perspective.

All the pseudo-Marxists howled in outrage when the Great Russian chauvinist Putin denounced Lenin’s revolutionary policy against national oppression. That was very noble of them. But to really defend Lenin in the current war means *exposing the social-chauvinist traitors who while using “socialist” rhetoric are in fact lackeys of the imperialists.* On this count Lenin can defend himself:

“That’s the very thing the bourgeoisie wants; it wants the workers *diverted* from the revolutionary struggle in war-time by means of hypocritical, idle and non-committal phrases about peace; it wants them lulled and soothed by hopes of ‘peace without annexations’, a democratic peace, etc., etc.... The first and fundamental point of a socialist peace programme must be *to unmask the hypocrisy* of the Kautskyst peace programme, which *strengthens* bourgeois influence on the proletariat.”

—“The Peace Programme” (1916) ■

“Socialist” Stooges of Imperialism

The collage features four posters:

- Fourth International** (QUATRIÈME INTERNATIONALE / CUARTA INTERNACIONAL): "Against Russian imperialism, hands off Ukraine!" (21 February). Includes a photo of a crowd and the KKE Communist Party of Greece logo.
- LEFT VOICE** (EUROPE): "No to the War! Russian Troops Out of Ukraine! NATO Out of Eastern Europe! No to Imperialist Rearmament!" (3 March). Includes a Trotskyist Fraction - Fourth International logo and date.
- Morning Star**: "Communist Party statement Stop the war - start the peace" (25 February). Includes a Communist Party of Britain logo and date.
- JOINT STATEMENT of Communist and Workers' Parties**: "No to the imperialist war in Ukraine!" (24 February). Includes a Communist Party of Britain logo and date.

German Reformists in Crisis Throw the EU/NATO Supporters Out of the Left!



Spartacist

Berlin, May 29: Against reformist left begging the most pro-imperialist elements of labor movement for coalition, Spartakist banner demands: “Throw the EU/NATO Supporters Out of the Left! Ukrainian, Russian Workers: Turn the Guns Around!”

The following is translated from Spartakist No. 224 (Spring 2022), newspaper of the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, German section of the ICL.

The reformist left is in a massive crisis. With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the German bourgeoisie fully committed itself to NATO’s war campaign against Russia. Sending military aid to Ukraine and massively increasing the military budget represents a significant political shift for Germany. Die Linke, the German Communist Party (DKP), Communist Organization (KO) and pseudo-Marxist groups like the Revolutionary Internationalist Organization (RIO) and the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany (MLPD) are like deer in the headlights. They are shocked that their inveterate pacifism is now at odds with the government. The NATO bootlickers in Die Linke’s leadership—Gregor Gysi, Bodo Ramelow, Caren Lay & Co.—immediately lashed out at anyone who didn’t fall into line. Those who still want to hold on to Die Linke’s old program of “dissolving NATO,” like Sahra Wagenknecht’s supporters, are sitting between two stools. On the one hand, they condemn the “Russian war of aggression that violates

international law” and want to support the Ukrainian government in line with the Social Democratic Party (SPD)/Green/Free Democrat (FDP) ruling coalition. But on the other, they are reluctant to just throw their pacifism overboard.

The reason for the reformists’ crisis is simple: for decades, their positions “against rearmament” and “against foreign deployment of the Bundeswehr (armed forces)” were compatible with the goals of German imperialism. In a period when the bourgeoisie was not making significant investment in the Bundeswehr, the demand for “disarmament” was not only completely harmless to the imperialist bourgeoisie but also a pacifist cover for its economic pillage of Europe. The “peaceful” policies of German imperialism over the past 30 years were focused on exploiting and subjugating the dependent countries of Europe—from Lisbon to Athens to Riga—through the European Union (EU) and the euro, expanding its economic and political dominance in Europe under the umbrella of U.S. imperialism. As an adjunct to NATO and a tool of German imperialism, the EU worked hand in hand with U.S. imperialism in subjugating the Ukrainian working masses and provoking Russia’s invasion.

Now the bourgeoisie has abruptly ended its cozy relationship with the reformists. With its “historic turn,” the German bourgeoisie is doing everything in its power to stamp out any criticism of NATO, no matter how tepid, in order to impose its war drive. Under this pressure, a crude and distorted class line is being drawn in the left between those who have adopted an openly pro-imperialist, pro-NATO orientation and those who refuse to just dump their old pacifism. The latter stand there like whipped dogs and have no answer. We have an answer: **Throw the EU/NATO supporters out of the left!**

Those who openly support the imperialists’ tools of exploitation and oppression have no business in the workers movement. Youth and workers who really want to fight against imperialism must arm themselves with a revolutionary program. To achieve lasting peace, imperialism must be overthrown through workers revolution. The struggle to drive the EU/NATO supporters out of the left will make it easier for us Marxists to show workers and youth that it’s not the NATO-lovers who are the real obstacle to the struggle against imperialism but the bourgeois-pacifist program of Wagenknecht, the DKP & Co. Their program necessarily leads to capitulation to the EU/NATO supporters. They peddle the lie that it’s possible to be on the side of the blue-and-yellow flag wavers and at the same time oppose arms deliveries to Ukraine. Between supporting imperialism via NATO and the EU and the program of socialist revolution there is no middle ground.

Pacifism disarms the workers, not the bourgeoisie. We have a revolutionary solution. As we wrote in our *Spartacist* supplement (see page 3): “There is only one progressive way forward in the war between Ukraine and Russia: to turn this war between *two* capitalist classes into a civil war where workers overthrow *both* capitalist classes. We call on the soldiers and workers of Ukraine and Russia: Fraternalize! Turn the guns against your exploiters!” Here in Germany, this program must be tied to the struggle for workers revolution against German imperialism.

Leninism vs. Pacifism

The proletariat needs a *revolutionary* movement against war and imperialism. For that, the revolutionary Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky taught that it is necessary “to explain systematically to the workers that without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, no international courts of arbitration, no treaties of any kind curtailing arms production, no manner of ‘democratic’ renovation of the League of Nations will be able to prevent new imperialist wars” (“Theses on the Conditions for Admission to the Communist International,” 1920).

Illusions in Peaceful Imperialism

Instead of this, Wagenknecht peddles Die Linke’s position of “dissolving NATO” to the working class as a program against war. Like the DKP, she stands for a “system of collective security” with Russia, an orientation the DKP also promotes with its slogans “Peace with Russia!” and “Germany out of NATO!” Of course, revolutionaries oppose NATO—but the program of Wagenknecht and the DKP seeks to make workers believe that German imperialism would be “more peaceful” if it were not part of the U.S.-dominated NATO military alliance but in a different alliance that includes Russia. This anti-American, nationalist



ZUMA

Erfurt, June 24: Defending his pro-imperialist record at Die Linke Congress, Thuringia minister president Bodo Ramelow condemns SpAD banner “calling for people like me to be expelled from the party.”

program is nothing but an appeal for a different strategic orientation for German imperialism.

Every foreign policy of the German bourgeoisie necessarily has one single purpose: to further its class interests—that is, the exploitation of the working class and the subjugation of other nations. As Lenin emphasized in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916): “Peaceful alliances prepare the ground for wars, and in their turn grow out of wars; the one conditions the other, producing alternating forms of peaceful and non-peaceful struggle on *one and the same* basis of imperialist connections and relations within world economics and world politics.” An alliance between German imperialism and Russia would be just as reactionary as the current transatlantic alliance.

While the Wagenknecht/DKP vision of an alliance with Russia is only a distant glimmer in an uncertain future, the bulk of the left is capitulating to the supposedly “peaceful” alliance through which the German bourgeoisie currently asserts its interests: the EU. Anyone who wants to fight against imperialism must couple opposition to NATO with opposition to the EU. In contrast, in their main slogans on the Ukraine war, many reformist groups like Marx21, RIO and the DKP oppose NATO but *not* the EU. Thus they sow the illusion that German finance capital’s “peaceful” economic pillage through the EU is “progressive,” in contrast to the “militaristic” NATO alliance.

Of course, RIO, the DKP and “left critics” inside Die Linke always stress that they “oppose” the EU. The DKP characterizes it as an “instrument of German imperialism” while RIO criticizes the EU’s eastward expansion; for Wagenknecht the EU is “neoliberal” and she advocates a different alliance for German imperialism. What they all have in common is that they oppose the EU because of its reactionary policies, not out of principled opposition to German imperialism and all imperialist alliances. This is simply a reformist critique of imperialism. In contrast, we communists stand for revolutionary opposition to the EU

Motion Proposal for Die Linke Congress

The Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands distributed the following motion to delegates at the Die Linke Congress held in Erfurt, June 24 to 26. Despite the motion attracting broad attention, no delegate—not even the so-called revolutionaries—supported the proposal to drive the open supporters of German imperialism out of Die Linke.

In the context of the Ukraine war, the German capitalists want to suppress any opposition to NATO, no matter how meek. In the slipstream of the bourgeoisie, the open bootlickers of the EU and NATO in Die Linke—such as Gysi and Ramelow—are on the offensive: they are fighting to get rid of anyone who is unwilling to fall into line and swear eternal loyalty to the EU and NATO.

So far in Die Linke, what has been the answer to this offensive by the open EU/NATO supporters? Whether it's Wagenknecht or currents such as the Anti-Capitalist Left and Socialist Left, they are all avoiding struggle and trying to maintain unity with the open pro-imperialists.

Thus, none of their motions or amendments for the congress provide an answer to the reactionary offensive. We have an answer.

Motion: Effective immediately, the EU/NATO supporters like Gregor Gysi, Bodo Ramelow, Caren Lay, Susanne Hennig-Wellsow, Christiane Schneider, Jan van Aken and all others who call for support to the EU and NATO are thrown out of Die Linke.

It is urgently necessary to fight for this now! We propose to every delegate who wants to stand against German imperialism and its open henchmen in Die Linke that they support this motion and submit it to the party congress for a vote.

You don't have to be a communist to support throwing these pro-imperialists out of the workers movement. But all those who claim to be "revolutionaries" and who stand against this elementary measure of political hygiene for the working class are nothing but frauds and traitors.

—Berlin, 22 June 2022

based on opposition to imperialism: *Down with the EU and the euro! For the Soviet United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis!*

All the reformists raise slogans like "No to war!" while some also call for "negotiations" and a cease-fire. As the military historian Clausewitz remarked, "War is merely the continuation of politics by other means," i.e., a continuation of the policies followed by the belligerent powers and their ruling classes. As we say in our supplement, "No cease-fire or peace deal between capitalist robbers will address the causes of the war. Any such agreement will necessarily be directed against workers in Russia and Ukraine and prepare the ground for the next bloody conflict."

A particularly pathetic example of such faith in imperialist diplomacy is the DKP's support for the Minsk accord as a "peaceful" alternative to the war and their whining about its breach. The Minsk accord reflected German imperialism's designs for Ukraine and Russia. Negotiated under the leadership of former chancellor Angela Merkel and her foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, its aim was to keep Ukraine in German and American imperialism's sphere of influence. Support for "peace" under the Minsk accord means support for the goals of German finance capital.

"Disarmament"

All reformist groups are against the rearmament of the Bundeswehr and demand, for example, "Billions for health care, education and the climate instead of war!" RIO (part of the Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International, FT-CI) also demands, "Abolish the Bundeswehr!" Calling on the imperialists to "disarm" or abolish their army is completely utopian; the German imperialists, like every ruling class, need their army to maintain their class rule and assert their interests at home and abroad. The reformists' call for a struggle "against rearmament" in the framework of capitalism is also reactionary because it deceives the workers and oppressed with hopes of lasting peace under capitalism.

As the Bolshevik-Leninists explained in the 1930s:

"Without the slightest confidence in the capitalist programs for disarmament or arms limitation, the revolutionary proletariat asks one single question: *In whose hands are the weapons?* Any weapon in the hands of the imperialists is a weapon directed against the working class, against the weak nations, against socialism, against humanity. Weapons in the hands of the proletariat and of the oppressed nations are the only means of ridding our planet of oppression and war."

—Leon Trotsky, "Declaration to the Antiwar Congress at Amsterdam" (July 1932)

The disarmament campaign is a campaign for a different budget for German imperialism. Can it prevent war? No, obviously not. It wasn't imperialist rearmament that caused two world wars but the irreconcilable contradictions in the capitalist system. Imperialism is not a reactionary policy of arms buildup and military interventions that can be replaced by a better, more progressive policy (e.g., funding for education) within the framework of capitalism. The imperialists adjust their military budgets according to their respective needs. Imperialism is a world system in which the planet has been completely divided among monopolies and a handful of capitalist powers like the U.S., Germany and Japan. This means sharpening inter-imperialist rivalries and continual struggle among these robbers to redivide the world. This will necessarily lead to new imperialist wars unless they are stopped by workers revolutions.

Just as changing the capitalist government's budget cannot bring peace, neither can it meet the needs of the working class—in education, health care or any other area. Of course, the decrepit schools and hospitals need massive investment! But this cannot be achieved through the reformist program of juggling the numbers in the capitalists' budgets.

"Peace Movement"

The DKP has noticed that today's peace movement is openly mobilizing for arms shipments to Ukraine...so against this they advocate building a movement modeled on that of the 1970s and '80s. Now, as then, the reformists' program

of building a movement to achieve peace within the framework of capitalism is completely bankrupt and a dead end for the proletariat. At the initiative of SPD chancellor Helmut Schmidt, in late 1979 the U.S. imperialists decided to station nuclear-capable intermediate-range missiles in West Europe that were aimed directly at the Soviet Union and East Germany. We Trotskyists intervened at the time with the line: “Smash NATO! Defend the Soviet Union!”

Many workers and youth were rightly concerned that the imperialists would launch a nuclear war. But the German peace movement, led by the Greens, the churches and parts of the SPD and their reformist appendages, channeled these fears into nationalist anti-Sovietism and support for a more independent role for imperialist West Germany. This bourgeois program was against the Soviet Union’s nuclear weapons and for capitalist counterrevolution. As revolutionaries, we were then and still are today in favor of the best possible weapons—including nuclear weapons—for the states where capitalism has been overthrown. This is despite political power being in the hands of anti-revolutionary Stalinist bureaucracies. We stood for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet Union and for proletarian political revolution against the Stalinists. This is also our program today for China and the other remaining deformed workers states.

Wagenknecht and the entire reformist left summarize one of the central “lessons of fascism and German history” for the working class as: “Never again war!” It is around this slogan that they want to build their peace movement. What a fraud! Absolutely nothing was achieved through pacifist opposition to the two imperialist world wars. For the proletariat, there is one fundamental lesson from both world wars, which the Bolsheviks and German Communist Party founders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht insisted on: the only way the slogan “never again war” can be achieved is through workers revolution against the murderous German bourgeoisie.

“Russian Troops Out of Ukraine!”: A NATO Slogan

“The Alliance calls on President Putin to stop this war immediately, withdraw all his forces from Ukraine without conditions and engage in genuine diplomacy.” Which alliance is this? Perhaps RIO’s “antiwar alliance” or that of other pseudo-Trotskyists and the Maoist MLPD? Not quite—actually the quote is from NATO (“NATO’s Response to Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine,” www.nato.int, 8 April). Calling for “Russian troops out of Ukraine” means adopting NATO’s main slogan. In the current war, this slogan means being for the victory of the reactionary Ukrainian government against Russia. Zelensky and his regime, those stooges of the imperialists, are not only acting as a battering ram against Russia on NATO’s eastern flank but also trampling on the national rights of the Russian and Russian-speaking minority in eastern Ukraine. A Ukrainian government victory would not liberate Ukraine but would further subjugate it to the imperialists through its entry into the EU and NATO.

To cover up this pro-imperialist line, these peaceniks use all kinds of orthodox formulas, most prominently Karl Liebknecht’s slogan “The main enemy is at home!” Pacifist misuse of the revolutionary Spartacists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who advocated the overthrow of German imperialism by the working class during the First World War, is certainly not unique to the pseudo-Trotskyists. But it takes

some chutzpah to repeat Liebknecht’s slogan while marching under the battle cry of one’s own imperialism. Liebknecht did not march under the battle cry “*Jeder Schuss ein Russ!*” [“Every shot, one Russian!”] nor did he demand the withdrawal of the Russian army. He called on the working class of Germany to point their guns not at the Russian army but instead at the German bourgeoisie.

“Neither Putin nor NATO!” and “Russian Imperialism”

The various pseudo-Trotskyists in Germany are divided over whether Russia is imperialist or not. In practice, this does not pose an obstacle to their working together in the imperialist camp under NATO’s battle cry. A slogan that they can all agree on and have repeatedly marched under is, “Neither Putin nor NATO!” Again, this slogan is counterposed to Liebknecht’s program, i.e., that the main enemy of the working class in Germany is German imperialism—not Putin. It also equates the imperialist-dominated NATO alliance and capitalist Russia, a non-imperialist regional power. This slogan is nothing other than a pseudo-anti-imperialist fig leaf to cover for taking the side of the NATO-backed Ukrainian government.

The question of whether Russia is imperialist is not a historical-academic debate but has important programmatic implications. From his pro-imperialist standpoint, Wolfram Klein, chief theoretician of the pseudo-Trotskyist Sol (CWI/Committee for a Workers’ International), is conscious of this. He is downright apoplectic at the ICL’s revolutionary line that: “Should NATO or any imperialist power directly enter this war, it would be an obligation for any revolutionary to side militarily with Russia for the defeat of the imperialists, the main bulwark of capitalist reaction internationally” (*Spartacist* supplement).

In order to say that Russia is imperialist, Klein replies, “In 1914, did Germany dominate the world or was it a regional power? Did any country dominate the world in 1914? According to this logic, the First World War was not imperialist because it was a war between regional powers struggling to achieve global hegemony (while Great Britain had already lost its hegemony)” (*Solidarität*, “Der Ukraine-Krieg und die Linken” [“The Ukraine War and the Left”], 9 April).

Klein’s skewed equation of Putin with the German Kaiser (why not just equate him with Hitler!) is a plain and simple justification for his capitulation to imperialism. In contrast to the First World War, a NATO war against the economically backward and politically and militarily isolated Russia would *not* be an interimperialist war to redivide the world but a joint campaign by the imperialists to turn Russia into a nuclear battleground and bomb it back to the Stone Age. Russia in this case would be waging a justified defensive war against the imperialists. For this reason, it would be in the interests of the international working class to fight for the defeat of the imperialists. Russia’s reactionary war against Ukraine is also not a war for the redivision of the world but a regionally limited war in which Russia is trying to bring Ukraine back into its sphere of influence, oppressing it nationally—against the combined efforts of all the imperialists to keep Ukraine under their domination.

RIO and other organizations do not characterize Russia as imperialist but march under the NATO battle cry and



Klasse gegen Klasse

Reformist left at May 6 Berlin protest. Banner at left: “Neither Putin nor NATO!” Banner at right abuses Luxemburg and Liebknecht to cover for supporting military victory of NATO-backed Ukraine.

alongside those for whom Russia is imperialist—Sol, Socialist Alternative, the MLPD & Co. We ask RIO and all other self-proclaimed “anti-imperialists”: Will you stand for the defeat of imperialism and for the military defense of Russia in the event of NATO military intervention against Russia?

RIO’s “Karl Marx Brigade” for Zelensky

In another desperate attempt to drape themselves in the cloak of “anti-imperialism,” most reformists like RIO oppose imperialist sanctions against capitalist Russia as well as arms deliveries to Ukraine. The Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) and the Pabloites of the “United Secretariat” (ISO in Germany) are for arms deliveries. Echoing the SPD/Green/FDP government and the pro-NATO position of the Die Linke leadership, these consistent social-chauvinists expose the contradiction of the more “critical” pacifists around Die Linke. They screech: Anyone who agitates for Ukraine and the defeat of the Russian army cannot at the same time oppose arms deliveries. Indeed!

RIO talks about the need for an “independent program against the Russian invasion and imperialist NATO intervention” in order to give the impression that it does not stand on the side of the imperialists and their stooges. The pseudo-Leninist bombast from RIO & Co., their opposition to arms deliveries, their talk of “popular resistance” and the “independent mobilization” of the Ukrainian working class against Russia—all this is simply a cover for supporting the victory of the NATO-backed Ukrainian government against Russia. RIO merely opposes marching under Zelensky’s direct command, which means: The working class should form its own “Karl Marx Brigade” and, alongside the Ukrainian army and the fascist Azov regiment, fire on the Russian army.

In contrast, we are for *revolutionary proletarian defeatism on both sides*. The Ukrainian working class must fight *against the Ukrainian government*, united with their class brothers in Russia, who must come out for the revolutionary overthrow of the Russian bourgeoisie. To the working class in Ukraine and Russia, and to the German working class, the pseudo-

Trotskyists of RIO & Co. have nothing to offer except subordination to NATO.

Should Workers Side with Russia?

Sections of the DKP as well as a minority of the Communist Organization, a split-off from the DKP, take a side with Russia. In the context of the anti-Russian pro-NATO campaign—and in contrast to the left that is marching under the NATO battle cry of “Russian troops out of Ukraine!”—this position could appear to be “anti-imperialist.” But it isn’t. The only way to defeat imperialism once and for all is international socialist revolution. Instead of fighting to win the workers of Germany, Russia and Ukraine to this program, these demoralized elements pin all their hopes on the army of the Russian bourgeoisie.

A Russian victory would simply perpetuate the cycle of reaction across the whole region. In contrast, a victorious workers revolution in Ukraine or Russia would be a real blow against the imperialists and would inspire workers around the world to sweep away their own capitalist rulers.

A Revolutionary Program Against Imperialism and War

Those who do not want to simply spout pseudo-orthodox phrases in the camp of their own imperialism but really want to struggle against imperialism must do this on the basis of a revolutionary program for the liberation of the working class. The Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), fights to build a revolutionary antiwar movement on the following basis:

- *Throw the EU/NATO supporters out of the left!*
- *Down with all imperialist sanctions and embargoes against Russia! For workers action against arms shipments to the Ukrainian government!*
- *Ukrainian, Russian workers: Fraternalize! Turn the guns the other way, against your own rulers!*
- *Instead of pacifism and disarmament: Not one man, one woman, one penny for the imperialist army! Disarm the bourgeoisie, arm the working class!*
- *For the overthrow of German imperialism through workers revolution!*
- *Down with the EU and NATO! For the Soviet United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis!*
- *International law is the law of the imperialists! Down with the UN, imperialist den of thieves!*
- *For the unconditional military defense of the deformed workers states of China, North Korea, Vietnam, Laos and Cuba against imperialism and counterrevolution! For proletarian political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy!*
- *Break with the SPD and Die Linke! For a revolutionary multiethnic workers party that fights for a workers government! Reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution! ■*

Centrism and the War in Ukraine

A Polemic Against the Internationalist Group

In the current war between Russia and Ukraine, the International Communist League stands for revolutionary defeatism and calls to “turn this war between *two* capitalist classes into a civil war where workers overthrow *both* capitalist classes” (see article, page 3). The Internationalist Group (IG) is one of the only other left organizations that appears to have the same line. Its 28 February statement proclaims that they “call for revolutionary defeatism on both sides in this reactionary nationalist war” and later explains:

“We are for bringing down both the Ukrainian and Russian capitalist regimes through internationalist workers revolution. We combat Putin’s overt Great Russian chauvinism (as well as that of Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny, lionized in the West as an ‘anti-corruption activist’)—and we combat the reactionary nationalism of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie looking to be the front line of NATO and the European Union (EU).”

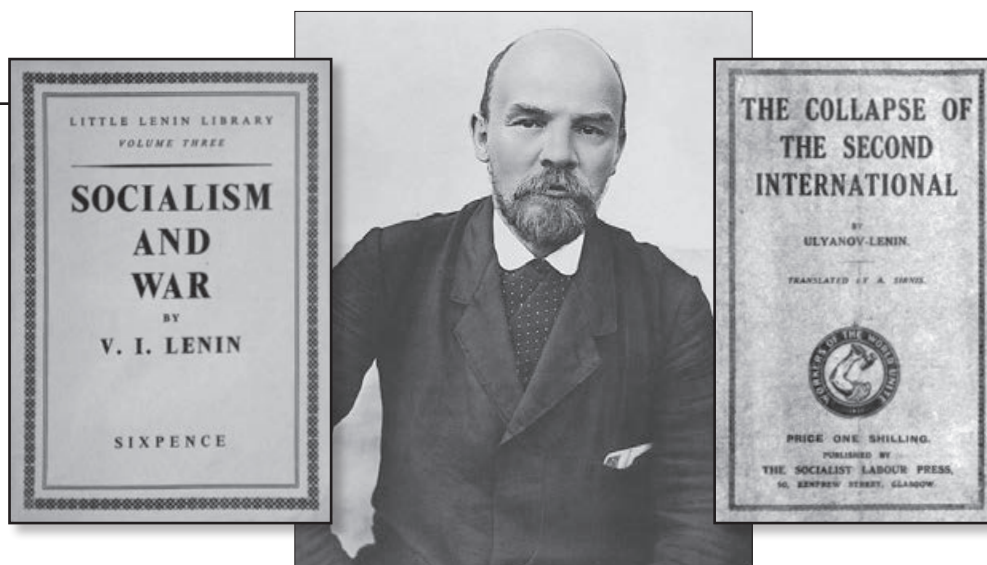
—“Behind the War: U.S./NATO War Drive Against Russia, China” (28 February 2022)

Most readers might reasonably think that the ICL and the IG have the same position and that both stand in the tradition of Bolshevism by upholding revolutionary defeatism. But in reality, while the IG might say that they are for “revolutionary defeatism,” they completely empty Leninism of all its revolutionary content and are *in practice* rejecting the

struggle for a revolutionary outcome to this war. In order to clearly see this, one first needs to understand the Leninist program against imperialism and what revolutionary defeatism really consists of in today’s situation.

Revolutionary defeatism was the program Lenin and the Bolsheviks fought for during World War I in opposition to the leaders of the Second International who betrayed the proletariat and supported their “own” bourgeoisies in the war. The Bolsheviks proclaimed 1) that authentic revolutionaries must stand for the defeat of their “own” government in the war and work to transform this reactionary war among nations into a revolutionary civil war against the capitalists; 2) that the Second International was dead, destroyed by chauvinism, and that a new, revolutionary international had to be built on the basis of revolutionary Marxism; and 3) to do this, revolutionaries needed to fight for a split from the open supporters of the bourgeoisie in the workers movement—the social-chauvinists—and *also* against the opportunists and centrists who used “Marxist” phraseology to preserve unity with the social-chauvinists and to deceive the proletariat with reformist, pacifist and other non-revolutionary solutions.

This program remained central to all of Lenin’s activities right up to the October Revolution, which represented the



Lenin’s Bolsheviks fought to split workers from social-chauvinists and centrists and to turn interimperialist World War I into civil war against capitalist rulers.



accomplishment in reality of this perspective. In one of his very first articles at the beginning of the war, Lenin summarized the Bolsheviks' perspective:

"It is the duty of every socialist to conduct propaganda of the class struggle, in the army as well; work directed towards turning a war of the nations into civil war is the only socialist activity in the era of an imperialist armed conflict of the bourgeoisie of all nations. Down with mawkishly sanctimonious and fatuous appeals for 'peace at any price'! Let us raise high the banner of civil war! Imperialism sets at hazard the fate of European culture: this war will soon be followed by others, unless there are a series of successful revolutions...."

"The Second International is dead, overcome by opportunism. Down with opportunism, and long live the Third International, purged not only of 'turncoats'...but of opportunism as well...." "To the Third International falls the task of organising the proletarian forces for a revolutionary onslaught against the capitalist governments, for civil war against the bourgeoisie of all countries for the capture of political power, for the triumph of socialism!"

—"The Position and Tasks of the Socialist International" (November 1914)

The ICL's program in the current war directly flows from this perspective. The war in Ukraine is not an imperialist war but a regional conflict between two non-imperialist capitalist classes to decide which gang of thugs will pillage Ukraine. On one side, the Ukrainian government is fighting to enslave the country to the imperialists of the EU and NATO. On the other, the Russian bourgeoisie is fighting to bring Ukraine back under its boot. In such a war, it is criminal for the proletariat to advocate the victory of one gang of thugs over the other, and revolutionary communists must fight—just like Lenin did—to turn this war between capitalists into a revolutionary civil war against all oppressors. This is why the ICL raises the call for Ukrainian and Russian workers and soldiers to fraternize and turn their guns against their rulers.

While the imperialist powers of NATO and the EU—the U.S., Britain, Germany and France—are not militarily engaging Russia on the ground, this war poses the urgent need to overthrow these robbers, whose pillage of East Europe and war drive against Russia provoked this conflict and threaten the world with nuclear annihilation. But the leadership of

the workers movement in the imperialist centers has fully embraced the imperialists' predatory ambitions and is disarming the working class, mobilizing it behind NATO and the EU. For that reason, it is *impossible* to fight imperialism without a relentless struggle against those in the labor movement who are trying to reconcile the interests of the proletariat with the interests of their "own" imperialist exploiters.

Therefore, the same task Lenin advocated in 1914 remains urgent today: revolutionaries must struggle to split the proletariat from its treacherous misleaders in order to forge a revolutionary internationalist party. *This* is what being a revolutionary means in the current war. And this is what distinguishes authentic revolutionaries from centrists who are ready to accept everything in Marxism *except* its revolutionary content and methods and the education of the working class in this direction.

The IG is in this centrist current, saying that they are for revolutionary defeatism but rejecting in practice all its revolutionary implications. Lenin often said that, in politics, those who believe words and intentions over deeds and actions are hopeless idiots. The IG claims to fight for revolution, so one has to look at what they *do* to fully grasp the non-revolutionary character of their program.

Rad-Lib Journalism vs. Revolutionary Marxism

A quick look at the IG's propaganda on the war clearly shows that the whole perspective and content of their intervention is to confuse aspiring revolutionaries with a Marxoid spin-off of liberal journalism. Since the 28 February statement quoted above, the IG has published a few articles on Ukraine. Among them are a "report from Germany," which documents the racist, differential treatment of dark-skinned and white refugees from Ukraine ("Imperialist Racism and the Russia-Ukraine War," 19 March) and two long, turgid pieces documenting how much the Ukrainian army and government are crawling with fascists ("The Truth About Ukraine's Fascist Infestation," 4 April, and "Question Answered: Who Was Behind the 2014 Maidan Massacre?", 10 April). This is how

the IG thinks they do “revolutionary” work in the current war: producing radical-liberal investigative journalism about issues that have been better documented a thousand times in the pages of the liberal bourgeois press.

The duty of revolutionaries is to reveal to workers and youth the real character of this war in order to further advance the struggle for socialist revolution by exposing reformist, pacifist and pro-imperialist deceptions. Workers should not support Ukraine in the war, not because there are fascist elements among its troops or that (shock! shock!) the imperialist allies of Zelensky are racist against dark-skinned refugees, but because the Ukrainian government is fighting to enslave Ukraine to the imperialists. Writing extensive pieces on the Azov battalion, fascism and racist migration policies is simply a way to avoid confronting this crucial issue, which would inevitably repel the petty-bourgeois, pro-EU liberals in the U.S. and Germany the IG panders to.

All variants of left liberals have no problem talking at length about discrimination against refugees or fascism in Ukraine while at the same time embracing the war aims of the imperialists in the region. Liberals agitate over these issues because they constitute a stain on the otherwise “noble” war drive of the “democratic” imperialist robbers. These liberals are thus motivated not by a hatred of their “own” imperialist butchers but by wanting to make their war claims more convincing and less hypocritical. The IG simply helps give a “Marxist” cover to this reactionary liberalism.

It is quite telling that in all of its articles on Ukraine, the IG does not make a *single polemic* against pacifism, which is the central illusion currently promoted by the reformist left and the labor leaders, particularly in the imperialist countries where both the ICL and the IG have the majority of their membership. Calls for “peace,” for “disarmament,” for a “diplomatic solution” and, in general, the illusion that the imperialists can bring about a peaceful and just solution to the war is the central tool used to keep advanced workers and youth disarmed and chained to their exploiters. Refusing to say a word against this is a rejection of Marxism.

In contrast, the whole content of the ICL’s propaganda and interventions over the war in Ukraine is explicitly directed at exposing those “socialists” who use pacifist and “anti-imperialist” slogans to mask their total subservience to the bourgeoisie. This is what conducting revolutionary work consists of, and this is what the IG rejects.

The IG Does Not Fight for Revolutionary Defeatism

The IG’s call for “revolutionary defeatism” is contradicted by the other slogans they raise. For example, the IG calls to “Defend Self-Rule in Southeastern Ukraine!” and “Smash the Fascists.” In the context of the current war, to raise these demands simply fuels illusions about the possibility of a just solution for the Ukrainian and Russian masses *without* socialist revolution.

The demand for self-rule in East Ukraine was correct before the war. But since then, this struggle has been totally subordinated to Russia’s war aims, which are to annex whole regions of Ukraine, and potentially the whole country. The only way self-rule could be achieved at the moment would be through a victory of Russia. To call now on workers to “defend self-rule in Southeastern Ukraine” is only a



French Trotskyists in WWII did what IG refuses to do: they called for fraternization with Wehrmacht soldiers, who were commanded by a truly fascist government.

form of tacit support to this outcome, which is irreconcilable with a position of revolutionary defeatism.

A victory of the Russian army would mean the national oppression of the Ukrainians at the hands of Russia, a fact the IG disappears. But a defeat of Russia would condemn the Russian-speaking minority of Ukraine to unprecedented national oppression. The crux of the matter is that neither side in this war is waging a just national struggle of liberation.

The duty of revolutionaries is to explain that, in the current situation, the progressive resolution of the national question in Ukraine is *impossible* without the overthrow of the Russian and Ukrainian capitalists. Only workers power can provide a truly democratic settlement for the Ukrainians and the Russian-speaking masses. By raising “defend self-rule in Southeastern Ukraine,” the IG is deceiving the working class.

The IG’s demand to “Smash the fascists,” which is one of their central slogans in the current war, plays a similar role. The central task for Russian and Ukrainian workers is not the fight against fascism. There cannot be any independent struggle to fight fascism in Ukraine *without* a revolutionary struggle to turn this war into a civil war against all exploiters. The burning and immediate task facing Russian and Ukrainian communists is to fight for soldiers’ and workers’ fraternization and common revolutionary struggle against the war waged by their “own” capitalist rulers. Instead of fighting to break the Russian and Ukrainian workers from their treacherous nationalist leaders, who deliver them as cannon fodder for their exploiters, the IG deceives Ukrainian and Russian workers by telling them that their central task is to purge Zelensky’s army of fascists.

Furthermore, to pose the struggle against Ukrainian fascism as the central task in this war lends credibility to Russia’s “denazification” war claims. Indeed, what is “Smash

the fascists” supposed to mean in this war other than tacit support to Russia? The IG’s articles constantly reflect this pro-Russian tilt. For example, in “The Truth About Ukraine’s Fascist Infestation,” the IG writes: “While Putin proclaimed his war aim to be ‘demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine,’ to have a lasting effect this must be accomplished by the working people themselves, on an *internationalist* basis” [emphasis in original]. How ridiculous! The Russian oligarchs are not waging some anti-fascist war in Ukraine. It is contrary to the interests of the proletariat to support Russia’s war, *not* because it won’t have a “lasting effect” on eradicating fascism, but because its aim is to enslave Ukraine to the Russian capitalist class! The IG’s claim to be for revolutionary defeatism is an utter sham because they present the Russian capitalists’ war as having a semi-progressive character.

Fundamentally, we do not believe that the IG is driven to implicitly endorse the Russian bourgeoisie’s “denazification” claims or raise calls like “self-rule in Southeastern Ukraine” out of any sort of enthusiasm for Putin’s Russia. It is just the logical outcome of refusing to rely on the proletariat as an independent revolutionary factor, which leads only to relying on one or another bourgeois force. Some in the imperialist countries, and many in the neocolonial world, are led to support Russia out of hatred for the imperialists. Fundamentally, this is driven by demoralization, by an incapacity to envisage a revolutionary outcome and by the illusion that capitalist Russia is some sort of alternative to the imperialists. This is what the IG is reflecting.

But could the IG point to its other “revolutionary” slogans to refute our arguments? Together with the demands we quoted above, the IG also raises “Oppose imperialist-provoked Russia-Ukraine war” and “For revolutionary struggle against the capitalist rulers in Moscow and Kiev!” and often calls for revolutionary class struggle against the imperialists. What beautiful words! But contrary to our slogan—calling on Ukrainian and Russian soldiers and workers to fraternize and turn their guns around—the IG’s “revolutionary” call is totally abstract and designed to be *compatible* with reformism and social-pacifism.

Countless opportunists have no trouble “opposing the imperialist-provoked war” and making meaningless proclamations about the need for “revolutionary class struggle” in Kiev, Moscow and elsewhere while *at the same time* fighting for the victory of Ukraine and the defeat of Russia, which makes them lackeys of their “own” imperialist rulers. What none of the reformists and opportunists will raise—and what the IG refuses to raise—is the historic slogan of Bolshevism, that is, for civil war against the bourgeoisie. This is the only slogan concretely charting a clear path for revolution and frontally taking a revolutionary stance against the pro-imperialist national unity in support of Ukraine.

The task of revolutionaries is not to raise vague and empty calls for “revolutionary struggle” but to provide a clear *revolutionary program* for such struggle. The Unione Sindacale di Base (Rank and File Union—USB) in Italy and PAME unions linked to the Greek Communist Party have led actions against arms shipments to Ukraine and against NATO and the imperialists. Certainly, revolutionaries must support and advocate such actions and actively participate in them. However, it is also crucial to point out that these actions were conducted under social-pacifist slogans and by reformist leaders. These leaders are no less an obstacle to

the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat than the openly pro-imperialist bootlickers. For example, in Italy the USB leaders have been constantly working to subordinate antiwar actions by the workers to the Catholic church and “antiwar” bourgeois politicians.

But not a word of this from the IG, whose article “NATO Socialists in Italy” (*Internationalist*, April 2022) uncritically hails these actions. This shows the true content of the IG’s call for “revolutionary struggle.” It does not mean class struggle on the basis of revolutionary defeatism but trade-union action under pacifist leadership. Why else would they not have a single polemic against pacifism? What the IG rejects is the struggle for revolutionary leadership, which requires breaking the working class from *all* social-chauvinist leaders, *including* anti-NATO pacifists.

Centrism Leads to Social-Chauvinism

As we have laid out, the struggle against imperialism is impossible without a struggle against the pro-imperialist agents in the workers movement. This is absolutely crucial in the imperialist centers, whose rulers are the international bulwark of reaction. Again, this understanding directly flows from Lenin’s struggle during World War I. The central lesson of Leninism is that the precondition to forging a revolutionary party—the essential tool to accomplish workers revolution—is for the proletarian vanguard to *split* from social-chauvinism and centrism and unite under a truly revolutionary banner. In *Socialism and War* (1915), one of the Bolsheviks’ crucial programmatic documents, Lenin and Gregory Zinoviev explained:

“Only he is a genuine internationalist who combats Kautskyism, and understands that, *even after* its leaders’ pretended change of intention, the centre remains, on all fundamental issues, an *ally of the chauvinists and the opportunists.*”

They later continued:

“We are firmly convinced that, in the present state of affairs, a split with the opportunists and chauvinists is the prime duty of revolutionaries, just as a split with the yellow trade unions, the anti-Semites, the liberal workers’ unions, etc., was essential in helping speed up the enlightenment of backward workers and draw them into the ranks of the Social-Democratic Party. In our opinion, the Third International should be built up on that kind of revolutionary basis.”

For decades now, the traitors who lead the working class in all advanced capitalist countries—in the trade unions and workers parties—have brought only defeat after defeat for the labor movement, managing the decline of unions and the impoverishment of the working class. During the pandemic, the labor lieutenants of capital plunged into an orgy of national unity with the bourgeoisie, supported the devastating lockdowns, advocated harsher ones and were key in disarming the proletariat while the bosses pounded workers. (The IG betrayed the working class by supporting these reactionary measures.)

And now that massive inflation is destroying workers’ standard of living at a rapid pace, not only are the labor tops barely lifting a finger against this, they are busy helping the imperialist butchers promote their war drive against Russia in the workers movement. Splitting the working class from these sellouts and reorganizing the Fourth International—that is, a new, revolutionary leadership of the international working class—is still the most burning and vital task facing revolutionaries and the central purpose of the ICL. In fact, working toward accomplishing such a break is the *only* way to

truly fight against imperialism *now*. The IG's abandonment of Leninism in practice is most clearly seen in their rejection of the struggle for revolutionary leadership of the proletariat.

In its 28 February declaration, the IG directs multiple polemics against the reformist left and pseudo-Trotskyists. The content of their polemics can be summarized in the following sentence: "The bulk of the Western left has lined up with the NATO imperialists in one-sidedly denouncing the Russians." What bothers the IG is that the German Die Linke, the French Communist Party, the U.S. Socialist Alternative (SAIt) & Co. are too "one-sided."

This buries the reformists' central betrayal: *their opposition to revolutionary defeatism and their support to Ukraine against Russia, which constitute support to their "own" imperialist masters!* A position of revolutionary defeatism is worth nothing if this is not the basis on which you denounce the reformists! But that requires fighting for "revolutionary defeatism" concretely and *in action* as opposed to some meaningless paper statement that you do not really believe in and use only to avoid openly siding with Russia. By criticizing the left for everything *except* their opposition to revolutionary defeatism, the IG capitulates to social-chauvinism.

We will give our readers one example of such a "polemic." The IG attacks SAIt by saying that they "called for 'full solidarity with the people of Ukraine' and demanded that 'Russian troops should be immediately withdrawn from Ukraine.'" The IG responds: "No call to cut off NATO arms to Kiev, however." What a grotesque capitulation to social-chauvinism! "Russian troops out" is the slogan raised by the whole social-chauvinist left in concert with the NATO/EU imperialists. The IG disagrees with this slogan, *not* because it is a pro-imperialist demand but because it goes against the IG's call for "self-rule," i.e., they are for "Russian troops in."

Contrary to the IG, revolutionaries oppose calling for "Russian troops out!" because it means advocating the victory of Ukraine, which is irreconcilable with a position of revolutionary defeatism. A withdrawal of the Russian army

is possible *only* through a military *defeat* of Russia. Such an outcome would mean the maintenance of Ukraine under the domination of the imperialists. With this slogan, SAIt is not defending the Ukrainian masses but is instead defending the "right" of "their" imperialists to exclusively pillage Ukraine as a lesser evil to pillage by the Russian capitalists. So the IG's criticism of SAIt is a total alibi and capitulation to social-chauvinism. Even if SAIt would add a call to oppose NATO arms shipments to Kiev—a cheap position among pacifists—this would not at all change the fact that their position is thoroughly social-chauvinist.

The Bolsheviks in World War I did not demand "German troops out of Russia," which was the slogan of the Tsar (and later the bourgeois Provisional Government of Kerensky). They fought to mobilize German soldiers in revolutionary fraternity with the Russian workers and peasants, against both the Russian and German capitalists. But *crucially*, the Bolsheviks denounced the Social Democrats precisely for rejecting this revolutionary program. This is what the IG refuses to do!

Opportunism in Action on the German Terrain

How the IG's centrism leads straight into social-chauvinism is even more clearly seen on the German terrain. Since the beginning of the war, the German left has been in an intense crisis, and in reaction to this our comrades of the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SpAD) have launched a campaign among the left under the slogan "Throw the EU/NATO supporters out of the left" combined with our slogan, "Ukrainian, Russian workers: turn the guns around!" (see article, page 11). At the SpAD's public forum in Berlin on May 12, the IG intervened in the discussion to denounce this perspective as reformist because it supposedly fuels illusions in a "reformed" social democracy. In order to understand the revolutionary character of our German comrades' slogans and how the IG's criticism is a defense of social-chauvinism, we must first explain in some detail the current situation in Germany.

The war in Ukraine has forced German imperialism to carry out a sharp and sudden change in its strategic orientation. Since the counterrevolution that destroyed the USSR, Germany has carefully balanced its commitment to the U.S.-dominated EU/NATO transatlantic alliance and developing sizable economic ties with Russia. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made this situation untenable, and the German bourgeoisie is now forced to break with Russia, fully commit to the U.S./NATO war drive and send heavy weapons to Ukraine.

One aspect of this major shift is Social Democratic Party (SPD) Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of a massive rearmament of the German military. Germany massively strengthened its economic dominance over Europe through the "peaceful" pillage of East and Southern Europe, using the EU and the euro. With the Americans and NATO guaranteeing stability on the continent, Germany had no need of major military expenditures. For decades, the pacifism of the German reformist left, with its commitment to "disarmament" and opposition to foreign interventions by the German army, was completely in line with the policy of the German imperialists. But this happy honeymoon has now come to a sudden end, with the bourgeoisie filing for divorce through its SPD lawyers who are carrying out this shift, rearming German imperialism and aligning the workers movement behind this.

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Viktor Bulla

Lenin at Communist International's Second Congress, 1920. Congress resolution required break from reformists and centrists as condition for admission to Comintern.

Faced with this sharp turn, the German left has been in a crisis unseen in other imperialist countries, with almost all organizations embroiled in internal fighting. There is a lot of discontent at the base of the SPD. Scholz was booed and insulted by the crowd of trade unionists gathered for his speech on May Day in Düsseldorf. In the reformist Die Linke, a substantial part of the leadership wants to scrap its historic call to “dissolve NATO” and fully embrace the imperialist war drive. But a sizable opposition is resisting this course and wants to cling to the pacifism of the past period while seeking to avoid a split at all costs. Far-left organizations (German Communist Party, Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany, Communist Opposition, etc.) have no clue about what to do and are deeply divided, with pro-NATO/EU/Ukraine factions on one side, pro-Russian factions on the other, and a center desperately trying to maintain unity. In a sense, the crisis of the German left is a reflection of the crisis in the German ruling class.

It is against the crawling of all the pacifist-reformist left in front of the imperialists' social-democratic running dogs that our German comrades raised the slogan, “Throw the EU/NATO supporters out of the left!” We say that those who openly support the imperialist tools of exploitation should be driven out of the workers movement. But our call is centrally directed against those reformists and pacifists who will inevitably betray and capitulate to the open apologists for imperialism in the name of “unity” and whose pacifist program is both the source of the crisis in the left and the central obstacle to the development of a revolutionary Marxist pole against German imperialism.

So are we trying to “reform” Die Linke instead of building a revolutionary party, as the IG claims? As Lenin teaches, the only way to forge a revolutionary party is by breaking the working-class base of social democracy from its treacherous, reformist leadership. Our goal is to deepen the polarization in Die Linke—and in all other left organizations—to push the polarization further and to give it clarity by showing that the *only* way to fight imperialism

consistently is on the basis of a *revolutionary* program, aiming to *split* Die Linke along this line.

To do so, we are indeed demanding that the left wing of Die Linke drive out those who openly embrace NATO, the EU and German imperialism. The most likely outcome is that they will refuse to do so and work to maintain unity with the pro-imperialist Gregor Gysi & Co., thus exposing themselves as agents of imperialism. However, if they do drive out the right wing, this would also be a good thing. Driving Gysi, Bodo Ramelow and all the other imperialist bootlickers out of the workers movement is an act of basic political hygiene that only spineless opportunists oppose.

Such a split would not make Die Linke a revolutionary party. It would not be *our* split. But we would favor it because it would put Sahra Wagenknecht and her pacifist acolytes in charge of the party. Unable to hide behind the right wing

anymore, the bankruptcy of their program for “disarmament,” “peace” and defense of “international law” would be much more easily exposed as a completely pro-imperialist dead end. The successful application of our tactic would open up the opportunity of a split in Die Linke along the lines of reform versus revolution, destroying it as a reformist obstacle and laying the basis for forging a revolutionary workers party in Germany.

Under the cover of left-sounding accusations that we are trying to reform social democracy, what the IG denounces is simply the application of Leninism to living reality. The duty of revolutionaries is not to stand on the sidelines by abstractly preaching for “revolutionary class struggle,” as the IG would have it, but to intervene into the rifts shaking up the working class and the left in a way that will *objectively* advance the struggle for revolution.

At the Berlin forum, one IG speaker, hammering the same false point about “reforming” social democracy, said that this was particularly criminal since World War III is around the corner. But in fact, what the IG is denouncing is the struggle to expose before the working class *both* wings of social democracy: the pro-imperialist bootlickers *and* the pacifist conciliators. By denouncing our call to throw out the former, the IG is helping the latter. The true logic of such sectarian “purity” is to cease struggling against social democracy, particularly against its left wing. *This* is the real crime, whether World War III is coming or not.

When world war was imminent, Leon Trotsky fought tirelessly to cohere a revolutionary international through the struggle against Stalinism, the main deception of its time. Trotsky explained:

“We have not and cannot have any other means or levers to counteract the war but the revolutionary organization of the proletarian vanguard. The main hindrance to the unification and education of this vanguard is at the present time the so-called Comintern. The struggle for a new revolutionary organization capable of resisting the war cannot, therefore, consist in anything but the struggle against the poison that Stalinism is introducing into the workers' movement. Whoever, under



Willy Römer

January 1919 workers uprising in Berlin in aftermath of German imperialism's defeat in WWI.

the pretext of the danger of war, recommends stopping the war against Stalinism is in fact deserting the revolutionary tasks, covering himself with loud phrases about world catastrophe. We have nothing in common with this fundamentally false view.”

—“A False View” (October 1938)

In Germany at the present time, the main hindrance to the unification of the revolutionary vanguard is the poison of liberal reformism and pacifism, introduced into the workers movement by the social democrats. Those “socialists” like the IG who, on paper, claim to be for revolutionary leadership but who denounce the struggle to purge the workers movement of the agents of imperialism are objectively helping to maintain *peace* and *unity* with the pro-imperialist traitors currently leading the working class. While covering themselves with loud phrases about “class struggle,” they are in fact reinforcing the subordination of the proletariat to its exploiters by leaving intact the grip of the social-chauvinist leaders on the workers movement.

“Revolutionary defeatism” on paper, social-chauvinism in action—that is what characterizes the IG’s position on the war in Ukraine.

The Struggle for Workers Revolution Is Posed

The central argument many fake Marxists have made against the ICL’s position on the Ukraine war is that our call to turn this reactionary war into a revolutionary civil war is incorrect because there is no revolutionary situation in Ukraine or Russia at the moment. Others have condemned it as impossible and utopian, which is really a more honest way to say the same thing.

To say that such a perspective is utopian is pure demoralization, and one simply has to look at the facts to realize it. Russian and Ukrainian workers are getting more hammered and squeezed every day by their own rulers in order to sustain the war effort. In Russia, the sons of working-class mothers come back in body bags in the service of the oligarchs’ ambitions. In Ukraine, Zelensky and his imperialist masters do not want any end to the conflict because the war

weakens Russia, and if Ukraine must be flooded by rivers of blood, so be it—all in order to join the rapacious clubs of the EU and NATO and work as cheap labor for German, American and British companies. On both sides, workers in uniform are told to kill each other, even if they share a common history in the Soviet Union and, often, even common relatives. Meanwhile, the working population is drafted into the army and getting trained in the use of weapons. In the imperialist countries, workers are bled by mounting inflation and the explosion of energy bills and are told to stomach the massive attack on living standards in the name of the fight for “freedom” against “authoritarianism.” One has to be willfully blind to reject the possibility of a revolutionary situation coming out of this.

History shows that the reactionary forces of nationalism and chauvinism, which temporarily cloud the minds of

workers at the outbreak of war, do not last under mounting pressure. We cannot know if a revolution will come out of this. But we know that what is preventing the raw anger of the exploited from being channeled against their exploiters are the social-chauvinist and reformist leaders of the working class, who are deceiving them. We know that objectively all the elements necessary for a revolution exist *except* a revolutionary party capable of leading it. And what is certain is that revolutionary parties are built by those who fight for revolution, not by those who think that revolution is impossible.

Constantly throughout World War I, Lenin was attacked by social-chauvinists with the exact same arguments. “Hopes for a revolution have proved illusory, and it is not the business of a Marxist to fight for illusions,” says the fake socialist who is only justifying going over to the side of the bourgeoisie. Lenin responded:

“Will this situation last long; how much more acute will it become? Will it lead to revolution? This is something we do not know, and nobody can know. The answer can be provided only by the *experience* gained during the development of revolutionary sentiment and the transition to revolutionary action by the advanced class, the proletariat. There can be no talk in this connection about ‘illusions’ or their repudiation, since no socialist has ever guaranteed that this war (and not the next one), that today’s revolutionary situation (and not tomorrow’s) will produce a revolution. What we are discussing is the indisputable and fundamental duty of all socialists—that of revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation, explaining its scope and depth, arousing the proletariat’s revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary determination, helping it to go over to revolutionary action, and forming, for that purpose, organisations suited to the revolutionary situation....

“The present parties’ failure to perform that duty meant their treachery, political death, renunciation of their own role and desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie.”

—“The Collapse of the Second International” (1915)

It is precisely the renunciation of this same duty that the IG, as well as all the other centrists and social-chauvinists, are guilty of. ■

Truckers...

(continued from page 7)

class, who sought to stave off in a cheap way the total collapse of their decrepit health care systems. The union tops offered their “full collaboration” to the bosses and their state, fostered “national unity” with the bosses and shoved the lockdowns down the throats of their members; the federal NDP has been unwaveringly upholding Trudeau’s minority government; and the B.C. [British Columbia] NDP government has outright enforced the lockdowns! For their part, the fake socialists of Fightback not only supported lockdowns but have been clamoring to make them *harsher!*

All those class traitors claimed that supporting the lockdowns of the bourgeoisie was necessary in order to “save lives,” that there is some sort of “universal,” transclass concept of public health to which we are all beholden; that we need “solidarity” (with the bosses) in order to “fight the pandemic” and “protect each other”—in other words, that the workers must accept putting their struggles on hold and getting screwed.

No! The interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are at all times *irreconcilable*, no less during a pandemic. The immediate response of the workers movement to the Covid crisis ought to have been: We need to fight for *more* health care, *more* education, *more* housing, *more* infrastructure, and to fight for workplaces that *we* deem safe, not stay at home, holed-up, isolated and powerless. In-person union meetings, street protests, strikes is how class struggle against the bosses is done in the real world (not on Zoom). It’s the *only* way for the working class to defend its health and safety and to confront what fuels this crisis, the capitalist system. But these are the very class-struggle means that lockdowns aim to prevent: Lockdowns *weaken* in every possible way the fighting ability of the working class. Opposing them is the precondition for labour to address this crisis from the perspective of *its* interests. *Down with the lockdowns!*

From miserable health care systems to housing and public services which are in shambles, the pandemic has shown for all to see that the supposed “Canadian welfare state” is but a sham. Production for profit, anarchy of the mar-

ket, international imperialist competition and domination, exploitation of labour at the cheapest possible rate, austerity attacks on health, education, welfare services: It is the very nature of capitalist class rule which has fueled the health and social crisis. The pandemic has only made clearer that to even begin to address these basic human needs workers must control society and organize it under a rationally planned, centralized socialist economy.

At every turn, the vital interests of workers and the masses run up against the capitalists’ private ownership of the factories, mines and banks and their overall control of the productive forces of society, power which they protect with the full force of their state—composed at its core of the army, the cops, courts and prisons. The bourgeoisie won’t peacefully relinquish any of its fundamental interests and accept giving up its power: capitalism cannot be reformed. The working class cannot lay hold of this state machinery (through elections for instance) to meet its interests—it needs its own state, a *workers state*, to confront the resistance of the bourgeoisie and assert its own class rule.

What’s urgently called for is a communist opposition to the government, which means *breaking* with the current treacherous reformist leaderships and building a new, revolutionary party which can lead the working class to victory in its struggle for power. The Trotskyist League and its comrades internationally are the only ones on the left today that advance such a revolutionary perspective in the pandemic. *Reforge the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution!*

For a Revolutionary Program in the Pandemic!

While the anger of the truckers and protesters against the government is entirely legitimate, the watchwords of “Freedom” and “Fuck Trudeau” as well as the defense of “Canadian values” which dominate these protests offer no way forward for the working class and lead straight to support for another wing of the same, oppressive Canadian bourgeoisie. It is because of the labour traitors’ betrayal in the pandemic that the anger at the base of society has found only amorphous and non-proletarian expressions. The catastrophic effect of their politics has been to strengthen the hold of the bourgeoisie on the workers, channeling them behind

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Trudeau, and letting right-wing forces present themselves as the only opponents of the government's measures.

In the absence of a clear working-class pole during the pandemic, vaccination and vaccine mandates have become major social issues, and the truckers' protests have polarized society mostly on this question. Either you support anything the government does if it is done in the name of increasing the vaccination rate or you oppose any encroachment on civil liberties, any form of mandatory vaccination and sometimes the vaccines themselves. As communists, we reject both sides of this debate. Our guiding principle is *the interests of the working class*. It is in the interest of the working class that everyone on earth be vaccinated against Covid-19. We are for mandatory vaccination, i.e., being forced to get a jab in your arm. It is not a democratic right to refuse to be vaccinated and spread the virus. But we oppose its enforcement through policies which *attack the working class* in the name of vaccination. We oppose Trudeau's imposition of vaccine mandates on the trucking industry, which would condemn unvaccinated truckers to lose their ability to make a living, just as we oppose similar measures against nurses and other workers. Mass layoffs are an attack against the working class and the unions; we oppose them no matter the reason. We also oppose the vaccine passports, which track every movement of the population and turn every bar employee and shopkeeper into a cop auxiliary. Cutting through all bourgeois polarizations in society, we advance a revolutionary program of struggle, *class against class*, taking the immediate needs of the workers and linking them with the necessity of proletarian power to fulfill them.

The current situation cries out for a massive public works program to build new hospitals and health care infrastructure, new schools, and quality, spacious, low-cost housing. *Seizing all Crown land from coast to coast, as well as the best office towers on Toronto's Bay Street and in downtown Vancouver and Montreal* is a good place to start. In addition, we need a massive union-run hiring and training campaign to shore up decrepit public services and develop new social programs. A realistic way to do it: *expropriate the bankers and industrialists!* Small shopkeepers, bars and restaurants as well as students are choked by debt. *Cancel all their debt!*

All these demands are utterly counterposed to the reformist left's pipe dream of "putting the NDP in power on a socialist program" with their "tax the rich" schemes to get a few more crumbs, or their support to Québec Solidaire, an outright bourgeois party. Any party taking power in Her Majesty's parliament administers a bourgeois government which will defend the capitalists and attack the working class. We need a *workers government*, based on workers councils!

Against the massive attacks on working conditions and the increasing cost of living, unions urgently need to *organize the unorganized* and fight for *a major, across-the-board wage increase pegged to inflation!* Against the overwork of many and the unemployment of others, unions must fight for *a 30-hour workweek paid like 40* to spread work among all hands. Against racial divisions fostered by the bosses, the unions must fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants in order to unify the working class in its struggle against capitalist class rule.

All this is counterposed to the reformists' program of pressuring the existing trade-union bureaucracies. The fundamental problem of the labour movement is not its lack of militancy, but the pro-capitalist program of the current

union leaderships who seek only to renegotiate the terms of exploitation of the working class under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. No amount of pressure will make them relinquish their program of chasing an illusory "partnership" between labour and capital. They must go! What we need is a new, *revolutionary leadership* which can harness the immediate struggles for the most elementary needs of the workers to the necessity for them to take control of the whole of society, which is the only means to fulfill these needs.

In opposition to the labour traitors' program of sending everybody home, begging for more plant and school closures and stricter Covid protocols enforced by the bosses' health agencies, there is an urgent need to fight for *union control of health and safety!* Relying on the capitalist state agencies such as the [Ontario] WSIB and the [Quebec] CNESSST to "protect" workers is suicidal! The unions, *not* the capitalist state, should determine what conditions are safe to work under. As long as the bosses are in command, profits will always come before safety. The capitalist state is the armed fist of the bosses. It exists to enforce the exploitation of the working class, not to provide safe working conditions! Anybody who thinks that the bosses and their state are there to defend your health is not a socialist but a numbskull.

If there's such a thing as "true Canadian values," it is certainly not "freedom" and "democracy," but the Anglo-chauvinist national oppression of Quebec and allegiance to the British monarchy. These are the *cornerstones* of the Canadian capitalist state—the very state which today is coming down on the truckers. That the repressive state powers of the War Measures Act used by Pierre Elliott Trudeau against Quebec's *indépendantistes* in October 1970 are the same ones used by his offspring today shows clearly that workers in English Canada and Quebec have a common enemy in the Canadian ruling class. For their part, the NDP, Fight-back and the rest of the Canadian reformist left stand just as united in their opposition to Quebec's national rights as they stand united behind Trudeau's attack on the truckers. We say: *For independence of Quebec now!*

Advancing the struggle for Quebec's national liberation on a revolutionary basis is crucial to both break workers in English Canada from their Anglo-chauvinist leaderships, and workers in Quebec from their bourgeois-nationalist leadership. Workers in English Canada have a vital interest in championing this struggle and using it as a lever to remove the bourgeoisie from power and establish working-class rule. There's no question that breaking the yoke of English Canada's domination over Quebec would be progressive, even under capitalism. And in Quebec, separation would only make clearer to the working class that the nationalist bourgeoisie is its sworn enemy. The Quebec bourgeoisie has made it plain, time and again, that it will fight for independence only insofar as it wants to be in a better position to exploit its own working class. Workers in Quebec won't be free under an independent capitalist Quebec, they need a *workers republic of Quebec!*

The pandemic has shown once more that the present leadership of the working class in Quebec and Canada is totally prostrated in front of their respective bourgeoisies. From the NDP to the union tops, it is their program of *upholding capitalism* which leads them to betray the working class. *Break with the NDP, break with all bourgeois-nationalist parties in Quebec! For a binational revolutionary workers party!* ■

“Socialist” Fightback: Social-Trudeauites

The following accompanies the article that appears on page 7.

Among the pseudo-Trotskyist swamp in Quebec and Canada, members of the Fightback group have distinguished themselves as the most ardent supporters of Trudeau’s lockdowns and vociferous opponents of the truckers and protesters. There’s simply no difference between the line Fightback has been pushing and the hysterical campaign of the bourgeoisie and its subservient media. In a disgusting slander on social media against our organization intervening at a Toronto rally in support of the truckers, a Fightback leader accused us of “supporting the far right,” adding “There is no way that they could have mistaken the far right nationalist and Trumpite nature of this rally which included Trump flags and ‘Make Canada Great Again’ placards.” Painting these entire demonstrations as being of a “far right nature” by pointing to a few right-wing individuals, Fightback parrots the very lie that the government uses to justify its crackdown.

And Fightback is not just talk: They have actually *joined and helped organize* counterprotests calling for *more* state repression of the truckers and protesters! A statement from the organizers of one of these counterprotests in Toronto makes clear their reactionary political basis:

“Torontonians will watch closely how effectively and how quickly the Ontario government acts. *We’re still waiting for a resolute federal government.... We expect nothing less than immediate removal of the border blockades, liberation of Ottawa and shutdown of the convoys.*” (our emphasis)

—Toronto Star, 11 February

One of Fightback’s recent articles also whined that “the politicians and police have proven themselves unable to deal with the far-right of the ‘Freedom’ Convoy” (marxist.ca, 14 February). Well, they got what they asked for: Trudeau has now invoked the Emergencies Act, a “resolute” response to “deal with” the convoy. Fightback’s hypocritical “opposition” to the Emergencies Act should fool no one. What they’ve been *doing* since the beginning of the truckers’ pro-

tests has been to actively mobilize support for the repression of the convoys. It comes as no surprise to read in their article “opposing” this Act that:

“There has been some confusion amongst people, including on the left, about whether or not to support the Trudeau government cracking down on the convoys and blockades.”

—marxist.ca, 17 February

We bet more than a few Fightback members were indeed rather confused that their leadership didn’t openly support the Emergencies Act, since it’s the *logical conclusion* of the politics they’ve been pushing!

To give itself a populist or workerist cover for supporting state repression, Fightback calls for community vigilante groups to “take matters into their own hands” and for the working class to “mobilize to defeat the convoys.” If taken seriously, this would mean turning citizens and workers into adjuncts of the cops in repressing the truckers. As repulsive as it is, this is not strange coming from these cop-loving “socialists” who hold the position that cops are “workers in uniform.” If you doubt that this position is even possible for a group claiming to be socialist (or if they deny it, as they often do), just look at their article titled “RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] union wins large pay raise: Every union must demand the same or better!” (marxist.ca, 7 October 2021). Against Fightback’s criminal position that the cops are part of the workers movement, we say: *Cops, security guards, screws out of the unions!* This is a most basic, elementary demand in the fight for the *complete independence of the unions from the bosses and the capitalist state!*

Fundamentally, what has gotten Fightback in such a feverish state is its hardcore support for the national unity behind the government’s health care measures. That Fightback is now doing the legwork to crush dissent against the government is but the logical place where their unwavering support to “Canadian unity” and the lockdowns would lead them. Indeed, since the beginning of the pandemic, these fake socialists have pleaded for more, harsher lockdowns! A statement from the



Fightback

Above: Toronto, February 5. Championing the lie that truckers’ demonstrations were far-right mobilizations, Fightback built, joined reactionary counterprotests for more state repression. Right: They got what they asked for as thousands of cops occupied Ottawa, attacked anti-government protesters under Trudeau’s Emergencies Act, February 19.



The Canadian Press

International Marxist Tendency (of which Fightback is the Canadian section) demanded: “All non-essential production should be immediately brought to a halt. Workers should be sent home with full pay for as long as it is necessary” (marxist.com, 20 March 2020). One of their recent articles against the convoy shamelessly parroted the moral blackmail of the bourgeoisie, saying that “Removing all pandemic-related health measures immediately would mean another wave and more deaths” (marxist.ca, 5 February). Any pretension by these reformists of struggling for anything which would be in the interest of the working class in the pandemic is an utter sham given their support for lockdowns.

As the NDP and the union bureaucracies stand completely exposed in front of the working class for their betrayal of supporting and enforcing the lockdowns, Fightback is yet again advising these traitors on how to better fool the workers. They write,

“This has been the problem throughout the entire pandemic. The labour movement has been silent, accepted the handling of the pandemic by the government in the interests of the capitalists, and has been absent from the struggle for a working class approach to the pandemic.”

—marxist.ca, 5 February

This is a total *whitewash!* The present leaderships of the working class were *actively rallying* behind the bourgeoisie’s onslaught against the workers throughout the pandemic, as was Fightback! What Fightback is really worried about is

that the NDP is so indistinguishable from the Liberals that they will lose electoral support. Communists say: good if the NDP is discredited! The pandemic shows clearly that today’s leaders of the workers movement must go and a new, *revolutionary* leadership must be forged in its place. Fightback’s program of upholding unity with the Canadian social democracy at all costs is also at the root of their own Anglo-chauvinist opposition to Quebec’s independence and Law 101 (see “Behind the Mask of Fightback: Neither Socialism nor Independence,” *Workers Tribune* No. 2, Summer/Fall 2019).

The pandemic has been an acid test for any group who claims to fight for socialist revolution: either you use the crisis to advance the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, or you’re trying to reconcile class antagonisms by promoting an alternative bourgeois program to manage the pandemic. Fightback clearly opts for the latter way. The pandemic has only made clearer the defining feature of these would-be socialists: unapologetic defenders of Canadian capitalist “democracy.” Not workers power, but siding with the state to restabilize capitalist order; not a revolutionary party, but the continued subordination of the workers to pro-capitalist leaderships; not independence for Quebec, but maintenance of Anglo-chauvinist “Canadian unity.” This is what you get with “socialist” Fightback. Breaking with such reformist politics is a precondition for anyone who wants to fight to get rid of Canadian imperialism. ■

Lockdowns...

(continued from page 6)

not fight for the workers to stay home. Contrary to this, in many countries the leaders of the teachers unions have fought for governments to keep schools shut in order to “protect” teachers and students. This is a craven refusal to fight for safe schools. Against the “stay home and wait” politics of the union bureaucrats, a class-struggle leadership must be built based on mobilizing the union ranks and the whole labor movement against closures, for better schools and safe workplaces.

Union organizing drives are urgently needed to unite and strengthen the proletariat. Temporary and subcontracted workers need to be brought into the unions with full union wages and benefits. Unionizing employees with little social power—in retail, restaurants, bars, delivery services, etc.—will bring them under the protection of the organized working class.

Reopen the Economy! Fight Unemployment!

Tailing the labor traitors, the pretenders to Trotskyism have been prostrating themselves before the bourgeoisie. Lutte Ouvrière, the International Marxist Tendency (IMT), the World Socialist Web Site, the Internationalist Group, the Trotskyist Fraction—Fourth International & Co.: all have embraced the lockdowns, betraying the proletariat.

The IMT, for example, demanded: “All non-essential production should be immediately brought to a halt. Workers should be sent home with full pay for as long as it is necessary” (marxist.com, 20 March 2020). This is an utterly reactionary call that could only lead to more layoffs! The IMT wants to throw whole layers of the working class out of work and onto welfare.

The working class derives its social power from its role

in production. The labor movement needs to *oppose* layoffs and furloughs by fighting for union-run hiring and training, and for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay in order to spread work among all hands. The current crisis cries out for *increased* production and services: more and better medical care; mass construction of public housing; spacious and well-ventilated buildings for schools and day care; better public transport. Reopening and expanding the economy is necessary to meet the needs of working people and to combat unemployment and pauperization.

For Quality Health Care, Free at the Point of Service!

The system of production for profit cannot provide adequate health care. Expropriate without compensation the private and religious hospitals and pharmaceutical companies! For mass, union-run training and hiring of medical and hospital workers! Abolish patents, so vaccines and medicines can be mass-produced throughout the world!

Facing the crumbling ruins of the health care systems, reformists of all stripes have raised calls to nationalize health care. For one, Left Voice, U.S. section of the Trotskyist Fraction, calls to “nationalize all health-related industries under workers’ control” (*Left Voice*, 13 April 2020). Don’t be fooled by the left-sounding rhetoric of these social democrats. Left Voice advocates *stricter* lockdowns, which would further inhibit any kind of mass action by the proletariat, rendering the fight for better health care impossible.

Here is Left Voice’s model for workers control: “In Argentina, workers are showing us how this can be done. Worker-controlled factories without bosses across the country are beginning to produce for need instead of greed.” What Left Voice is talking about is the takeover of a few bankrupt and peripheral factories in capitalist Argentina. This is *not*

a model for what is needed. Left Voice's perspective is for workers management of a nationalized health care system in the framework of capitalism, i.e., institutionalized class collaboration. Freeing health care from the profiteers can only be achieved through sweeping away the bourgeois state, replacing it with the dictatorship of the proletariat and expropriating the capitalist class.

The Working Class Must Defend All the Oppressed!

The lowest layers of the middle class are being devastated. The criminal support of labor leaders and all the reformist left to the lockdowns has ceded the ground to the far right, allowing sinister reactionaries and outright fascists to posture as defenders of democratic rights and champions of the ruined petty bourgeoisie. A revolutionary party would mobilize the working class to defend all of the oppressed and rally them to the workers' side in the fight against the bourgeoisie.

In Asia, Latin America and Africa, millions of poor peasants are bled dry by landlords and banks while street traders are being starved by the lockdowns. Everywhere, small shops, bars and restaurants as well as students are choked by debt. **Cancel all their debt!**

Millions of white-collar workers have been forced to work from home. "Remote" work fuels layoffs and unpaid overtime, atomizes the workforce and makes anti-union attacks easier and union organizing virtually impossible. Strikes are not won on Zoom but on picket lines. Any union worthy of its name needs to oppose "remote" work schemes.

Immigrants form a crucial component of the working class and are disproportionately employed in the hard-hit service industries with miserable pay. To unite its ranks, the working class needs to fight **for full citizenship rights for all immigrants!**

Socialize the Functions of the Family!

The bourgeoisie is trying with all its might to turn back the wheel of history. The lockdowns are dumping childcare, education and care for the elderly entirely onto the family, mainly on women's shoulders. Women are forced back into the home, losing jobs in greater numbers than men, and are victims of a sharp increase in domestic violence. Children and teens are imprisoned with their parents. Elderly people are left to die alone in lousy care homes.

If the lockdowns have shown one thing, it is that the feminist program of redistributing household tasks inside the family is a dead end. What is needed is to take household chores out of the family: free 24-hour day care, collective kitchens and laundries, quality retirement centers.

The lockdowns have reinforced capitalism's pillar institutions—the state, the church as well as the family. The emancipation of women can only be achieved as part of a worldwide socialist transformation that will include replacing the family with socialized childcare and housework. **For women's liberation through socialist revolution!**

Down With Imperialism!

The world imperialist system, where a few great powers compete over the division of the world, exploiting billions, is the very source of the current global crisis. The pandemic cries out for a coordinated international response. But in



gazeta.ru

Soviet Commissar of Public Health Nikolai Semashko addresses miners, 1920.

a system based on interimperialist rivalries and competing nation-states, this is impossible. Imperialism has crushed and stalled the economic, social and cultural development of the world in the interests of the stock exchanges of Wall Street, Tokyo, London, Frankfurt and Paris. The imperialists are using this crisis to tighten the stranglehold of international finance capital on the dependent countries. **Cancel the imperialist-imposed debt! Down with the UN, IMF, NATO, NAFTA 2.0 and the European Union!**

Defend China! The imperialists are redoubling their efforts for capitalist counterrevolution to overturn the 1949 Revolution and open the Chinese deformed workers state for their depredation. For workers political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy!

For New October Revolutions!

South Korea, Sweden, Australia? The bourgeois press is filled with never-ending debate about which country has better balanced mass death and mass repression. We Marxists have an entirely different model: the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. By breaking the shackles of capitalist exploitation, the working class under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks made a giant stride for human progress. The Soviet workers state's public health system was one of its great achievements, despite being forged in the crucible of civil war and imperialist invasion in a landscape already laid waste by world war. The man who led its creation, Nikolai Semashko, wrote in 1919:

"To move the urban poor from musty dungeons to spacious rooms in well-built houses, to really struggle with social disease, to create normal conditions of work for the worker—all this is unattainable if we are to regard private property as something holy and inviolable. The old health system hesitated before it as before an insurmountable barrier; Soviet power—Communist power—has broken this barrier."

—"The Tasks of Public Health in Soviet Russia," published in William G. Rosenberg, ed., *Bolshevik Visions: First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990) ■

Spartacist League/Britain Rearms

In Defence of the Revolutionary Programme (II)



Workers Hammer
Spartacist banner outside Labour Party Conference, October 1983. We called to drive out Labour's pro-SDP right wing and put Tony Benn's left wing in power in order to more effectively expose the Labour lefts. Inset: First issue of Spartacist Britain announces 1978 founding of SL/B.



The introduction to the document printed below is taken from Workers Hammer No. 247 (Winter 2021-2022), newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain. It has been adapted for publication in Spartacist.

Reprinted below are the main sections of the document unanimously adopted at the 25th National Conference of the Spartacist League/Britain. This historic conference marked a sharp political turn, putting forward a revolutionary programme in the pandemic for Britain and repudiating the years-long reformist course that our organisation followed under its previous leadership. Its title, "In defence of the revolutionary programme (II)", is a direct reference to the SL/B's founding document of the same name (printed in Spartacist Britain no 1, April 1978), embodying our com-

mitment to reclaim the original programme of the section and defend the revolutionary continuity of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

The publication in April 2021 of the IEC statement "Down with the lockdowns!" (reprinted on page 5) uniquely on the left put forward a class-struggle perspective in the pandemic, in opposition to lockdowns, national unity and the ruling-class assault on the international proletariat. Before the publication of this statement, the ICL had capitulated to national unity by supporting the lockdowns. In the SL/B, this capitulation was prepared by years of opportunism and the rejection of the central tenets of its revolutionary programme. This included (but was not limited to)

rejecting the fight for a Leninist vanguard party by capitulating to Jeremy Corbyn throughout his leadership of the Labour Party and embracing the Labourite programme of parliamentary socialism and “little England” imperialism. The conference document is the product of a hard-fought struggle against the previous SL/B Central Committee and constitutes a decisive break with the section’s previous course. It puts forward indispensable elements for the forging of a revolutionary party in Britain against the politics of Labourism, which plague the British far left. The document was the basis to elect a new Central Committee composed of a new layer of cadres who waged this internal struggle and who are committed to forging a Trotskyist nucleus in the British Isles.

The document is dedicated to our comrade George Crawford, who died shortly before the conference and whose lifelong struggle for communism is an example and inspiration (see his obituary on page 8).

* * *

II. For a Revolutionary Programme in the Pandemic!

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a worldwide health, economic and social crisis. In Britain as elsewhere the last year and a half has been disastrous for the working class and oppressed: over 150,000 Covid deaths, brutal lockdowns, repression, massive layoffs, furloughs, speed-ups, school closures. The leadership of the workers movement betrayed the proletariat in this crisis, shackling it to the capitalists and collaborating in their devastating offensive. The Labour Party—from its Corbynite wing to the Starmer leadership—the trade union tops and the reformist left all supported the lockdowns and joined behind Johnson’s Tory government in preaching national unity and class collaboration. The Labour Party administered lockdowns in cities throughout Britain and is directly responsible for bringing devastation and misery upon working people.

The position of the British pseudo-Marxist left—the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Communist Party of Britain, Socialist Appeal, Revolutionary Communist Group, etc—has been not only to support lockdowns but to crusade for harder and longer lockdowns on the Australian zero-Covid model. Any pretension by these reformists of struggling for anything which would be in the interest of the working class in the pandemic is an utter sham given their support for lockdowns.

This conference repudiates the SL/B Central Committee’s June 2020 motion, which capitulated to the government’s national unity by supporting lockdowns. That position was based on the argument that “in the absence of more meaningful public health measures, it [the lockdown] has some efficacy towards the extremely minimal goal of slowing the spread of Covid-19.” This means accepting the moral blackmail of the bourgeoisie, which dictates that the only way to defend public health is to support the government’s anti-working-class measures. It also fuelled illusions that the bourgeois state is an instrument to protect the people rather than an apparatus of violence to subjugate the proletariat.

The only way the working class can genuinely protect its health and combat the social causes of the crisis is through

class-struggle means against the bosses and the state. Lockdowns are reactionary public health measures which impede this struggle in every way. They not only have devastating social consequences but also leave the working class disarmed and chained to the bourgeoisie.

We oppose the lockdowns on the basis of a *revolutionary* working-class programme. Any other basis for opposing lockdowns, whether on a scientific, civil libertarian, conspiracy-theory or trade unionist basis, simply promotes alternative bourgeois programmes to manage the pandemic. Revolutionaries do not seek to reconcile class antagonisms but to use the crisis to advance the struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. If the pandemic shows one thing clearly it is that capitalist class rule is utterly bankrupt and cannot even begin to address the needs of the masses. The working class must fight for its interests *now*, starting with its most minimal and basic needs. But to be successful this struggle must be tied to that for international socialist revolution.

The leadership of the workers movement in Britain have been standard-bearers for the ruling class’s national unity campaign, parroting its cries to “Stay home! Protect the NHS! Save lives!” Everyone knows the Tories don’t want to save the NHS [National Health Service] and are happy to “let the bodies pile high”. Only with the complicity of the labour traitors could the bourgeoisie feed workers the lie that in the pandemic there is a common interest which stands above all classes.

In this crisis, just as at all times, the class interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are *irreconcilable*. Workers obviously have an interest in protecting themselves and their families from a dangerous disease, but safer working and living conditions can only be achieved by fighting *against* the bosses and the government, not by working with them. “Protecting the NHS” cannot be achieved by relying on those who have gutted it: the Tories, Labour and the capitalist parasites.

Behind its noble slogans the bourgeoisie pushes its own class interests. It wants to limit the spread of the virus because it is bad for business. It advocates staying home to save the NHS because it is a cheap way to stave off the total collapse of the decrepit healthcare system. The working class has every interest in defending the NHS and fighting to obtain a healthcare system of the highest quality, particularly in a pandemic. But to advance *its interests* it must cast off the bourgeoisie’s ideological blackmail, which presents any struggle against its rule as a dangerous public health hazard.

The complete subservience of the Labour Party and the trade union bureaucracy during the pandemic has meant that anger against the government, particularly against its brutal lockdowns, has found only non-proletarian, amorphous and heterogeneous expressions. In the spring and summer of 2021, massive anti-lockdown demonstrations took place in London under the slogans of “democracy”, “individual rights” and “medical freedom”. The government, media and Labourite swamp have all united in condemning these demonstrations, presenting anybody who opposes the bourgeoisie’s measures as necessarily reactionary.

While the programme of such movements is entirely bourgeois, they are fuelled by legitimate anger at the government. We must condemn the pro-government propaganda barrage against these demonstrations as well as their repression. Our aim in intervening in such movements is to win

the opponents of the devastating government measures to the programme of communism, breaking them away from the civil libertarian, conspiracy-theory and sometimes reactionary politics of these movements.

Given the absence of a polarisation along class lines during the pandemic, the questions of vaccination and vaccine mandates have become major social issues. On one side of the debate are those who will support anything the government does if it is done in the name of increasing the vaccination rate; on the other side are those who oppose any encroachment on civil liberties, any form of mandatory vaccination and sometimes the vaccines themselves. As communists, we reject both sides. We seek to break through this polarisation fostered by the government by posing a class axis. Our guiding principle is *the interests of the working class*.

It is in the interest of the working class that everyone on earth be vaccinated against Covid-19. We are for mandatory vaccination, ie being forced to get a jab in your arm. It is not a democratic right to refuse to be vaccinated and spread the virus. But we oppose its enforcement through policies which *attack the working class* in the name of vaccination. We oppose the government firing NHS workers or any other worker because they aren't vaccinated. Mass layoffs are an attack against the working class and the unions; we oppose them no matter the reason. We also oppose the vaccine passports, which would track every movement of the population and turn every pub employee and shopkeeper into a cop auxiliary.

Trotskyists vs. Reformists

The pandemic has shown two central truths: 1) that the bourgeoisie is utterly reactionary, cannot even start to meet the needs of the working class and must be overthrown, replaced by workers rule; 2) that the current leadership of the British working class—in the trade unions and the



Wiktor Szymanowicz/AP

London, 29 May 2021: Mass outpouring of rage against devastation caused by government's lockdowns was condemned as reactionary by Labourite swamp.

Labour Party—is totally prostrated before the bourgeoisie and the government. It is the task of revolutionaries to show clearly to class-conscious workers and youth seeking an alternative that all of the British self-proclaimed socialist groups share the *same* fundamental politics as the labour traitors and continue to betray the working class. To expose this, we offer a point-by-point programmatic counterposition to the reformist left over some of the key questions of the hour:

a. Healthcare is even more miserable now than before the pandemic, the housing crisis is as bad as ever and the school system is in ruins. The workers movement must be mobilised to fight for *a massive public works programme to build new schools, low-cost quality housing and healthcare infrastructure!* To get immediate funds, land and buildings for schools, healthcare facilities and housing, *seize the estates of the monarchy and the church!* To fund the NHS, to reindustrialise Britain and establish a planned economy, *expropriate the bankers and industrialists!* These demands are utterly counterposed to the reformist left fantasy that workers' needs will be met by the election of a left Labour government in Parliament which will "tax the rich" and nationalise the "commanding heights of the economy".

The bosses will not be voted out of power or gradually dispossessed and the monarchy will not be abolished by a law in Her Majesty's Parliament. Labour administering the capitalist state is a bourgeois government. The working class needs a *workers government*, ie the *dictatorship of the proletariat* to *expropriate* the bourgeoisie and *break the resistance* of the exploiters, on the model of the 1917 Russian October Revolution.

b. The bourgeoisie is waging massive attacks on working conditions: NHS workers are getting their pay cut by the Tories, inflation is rampant, wages are miserable and millions work in part-time and precarious jobs. The unions urgently need to *organise the unorganised* and fight for *a major, across-the-board wage increase pegged to inflation!* Scrap zero-hours contracts! Against overwork and unemployment, unions must fight for *a 30-hour workweek paid like 40* to spread work among all hands. For trade union control of hiring! Against racial divisions fostered by the bosses, the unions must fight for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants* in order to unify the working class in its struggle against capitalist class rule.

Communists fight to build fractions in the unions based on the full transitional programme, connecting the most immediate economic demands with the need for a workers government. This is contrary to the British fake socialists, whose programme in the trade unions is based on supporting left-talking bureaucrats like Sharon Graham [Unite] against right-wing ones and on pushing a minimum programme of reforms and trade union militancy.

All wings of the trade union bureaucracy are committed to a programme of class collaboration: seeking to renegotiate the terms of exploitation of the working class while upholding capitalist class rule. Against the reformists, whose entire perspective is to pressure the current pro-capitalist labour bureaucracy, we counterpose the need to build a new *revolutionary* leadership of the working class. We say: *Oust the labour bureaucrats, left and right! For a class-struggle leadership of the unions!*

c. Throughout the pandemic, all of the pseudo-revolutionaries —echoing the trade union tops— have preached the lie that the capitalist state is there to protect workers. Their programme to protect health and safety has been to advocate harsher and longer lockdowns, more plant and school closures and stricter safety rules and Covid guidelines enforced by the health agencies of the bosses. *This is suicidal and a betrayal of socialist principles!*

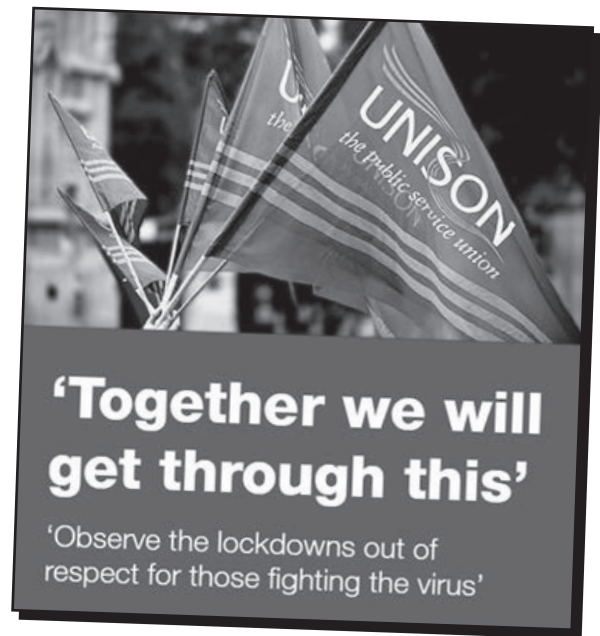
Unions are the elementary defence organisations of the proletariat. Their purpose is to defend workers on the job, not fight to send them home! Unions must fight now for *trade union control of health and safety!* The unions, *not* the capitalist state, should determine what conditions are safe to work under. Fake socialists always talk about “workers control” of safety or production. But if it is not based on class independence of the proletariat, an irreconcilable opposition to the capitalist state and a programme for proletarian power, “workers control” amounts to workers management *in partnership* with the capitalists and their state, ie institutionalised class collaboration.

The capitalist state is the armed fist of the bosses. It exists to enforce the exploitation of the working class, not to provide safe working conditions! Revolutionaries fight for the *complete independence of the unions from the bosses and the capitalist state!* *Cops, security guards, screws out of the unions!*

d. While the labour movement is on its back—thanks to its treacherous leadership—the British imperialists have increased their depredations abroad. To strengthen their position and deflect anger away from them, they are whipping up working people against China. *The enemy of British workers is the British capitalists!* Opposition to British imperialism is posed pointblank with the need to *defend China* against the intensifying imperialist counterrevolutionary drive. China is a bureaucratically deformed workers state and the international proletariat must *defend the gains of the 1949 Chinese social revolution!* In order to defend and extend these gains, Trotskyists fight for a proletarian political revolution to oust the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy. But *all* fake socialists in Britain oppose this perspective.

While some Stalinists support the reactionary Chinese Communist Party bureaucracy, the social democrats and fake Trotskyists beat the drums for the British and US imperialists’ programme of capitalist counterrevolution by ranting about “Chinese imperialism” and campaigning for “democracy” and “human rights”. It was under the same watchwords that the imperialists pushed for the capitalist counterrevolution which destroyed the USSR, a stunning blow to the world proletariat that *all* pseudo-Trotskyists applauded. Now they are doing the same with China, North Korea and all remaining deformed workers states. *Down with British imperialism and all its alliances! Down with NATO! Down with AUKUS! Donate Trident to North Korea!*

e. The Labour Party has shown once more its total subservience to capitalist rule during the pandemic. From Starmer’s right wing to the Corbynites’ left wing, they *all* betrayed the workers and have been a crucial help to Johnson’s Tory government. Workers need a new, revolutionary party fighting for workers rule, part of a reformed Fourth International. The fake Marxists in Britain are a



Labor traitors collude with capitalists’ attacks on proletariat during pandemic, supporting lockdowns and lining up union members behind bourgeoisie’s “national unity.”

political obstacle to this. For over a century, their whole strategy has been to pressure Labour’s left wing to adopt a socialist programme. They do this either from inside the Labour Party (like Socialist Appeal, when they are not forced out) or outside the party (like the Socialist Party, whose strategy is to build a new mass reformist obstacle to revolution). This has led only to defeats and betrayals.

From [Nye] Bevan to [Tony] Benn to Corbyn, the Labour lefts’ *bourgeois programme* of administering the British capitalist state necessarily leads to the betrayal of the working class’s interests—this is the central lesson of Corbyn’s leadership. Against the reformists who fuel illusions in the Labour left, revolutionaries must *break* the working class from Labour—right and left—on the basis of a *revolutionary programme* in order to build a Leninist vanguard party.

III. Leninist Vanguard Party vs. Corbynite “Broad Church”

After Corbyn’s catastrophic showing in the 2019 elections, Sir Keir Starmer took over as Labour leader. Amidst Starmer’s campaign to break with his predecessor’s legacy, the left-Labourite swamp is mired in impotent soul-searching about “what went wrong”. By placing their hopes in a more radical version of Corbynism, in building a new mass reformist Labour party or in left-talking bureaucrats and trade union militancy, they are only recycling worn-out Labourite myths. Only Leninism can provide a road forward for workers and youth disappointed and disillusioned by Corbyn. The current social crisis triggered by the pandemic and the utter subservience of the Labour Party, the trade union tops and the reformist left to the capitalists’ attacks make the task of

putting forward a revolutionary programme for the British Isles ever more burning. But to do this, the SL/B needs to repudiate its capitulation to the Labour Party.

The SL/B's Rejection of Its Strategic Task

The 2015 election of Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party marked a sharp turn to the left after decades of Blairite domination of the party and represented a major change in the political landscape in Britain. In the course of his nearly five years at the head of Labour, Corbyn rendered invaluable services to the British ruling class. He betrayed the working class by campaigning against Brexit and successfully channelled the huge social discontent caused by decades of attacks away from class struggle into the dead-end of electoralism. His leadership was characterised by continuous conciliation of the Blairites—despite their never-ending plots to overthrow him—and a repudiation of practically every position which made him popular in the first place.

The Corbyn experience was a unique opportunity for communists to demonstrate the utter bankruptcy of left Labourism and motivate the need for a Leninist party. Instead of doing this the SL/B spent five years capitulating to Corbyn. This conference repudiates every article about Jeremy Corbyn which appeared in *Workers Hammer* from issue numbers 232 to 246 (Autumn 2015 to Spring 2020).

Corbyn's 2015 leadership campaign generated massive illusions by repudiating Blair's record of austerity and imperialist war. In this context it was entirely appropriate to employ the tactic of critical support. That said, any tactic is necessarily subordinated to the overall strategy. In 1982 the SL/B retrospectively gave critical support to Tony Benn with the slogan "Labour can betray without the CIA connection." We explained:

"The situation dictated that a Trotskyist propaganda group which seeks to split Labour's working-class base from its pro-capitalist misleaders to a *revolutionary* programme should have extended critical support to Tony Benn—in order to exacerbate and follow through the split begun with the formation of the SDP, *drive out the blatantly pro-imperialist CIA-connected right wing* and place Benn in a position where

his left-reformist politics could be more effectively exposed and combatted."

—“Labour's Cold War”

(*Spartacist Britain* no 41, April 1982)

Whereas in 1982 our tactical stance flowed from our objective of splitting Labour's base from the tops on a revolutionary programme, the SL/B's intervention towards Corbyn was premised on the explicit rejection of this task.

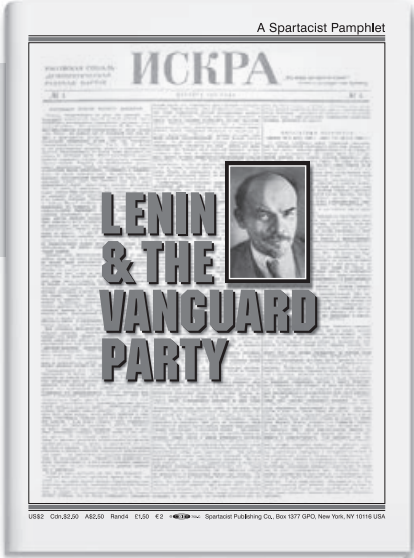
The May 2015 SL/B National Conference held a few months before Corbyn ran for leader stopped short of characterising Labour as a bourgeois party due to the International's intervention. However, it nonetheless codified a change of programme in regard to Labour. The conference document stated: "From the time this motion [a 2002 motion characterising Blairism] was passed, our propaganda ceased calling to split the base from the top of the Labour Party—*which was previously strategic* to our perspective of constructing a revolutionary workers party in Britain" (published in *WH* no 231, Summer 2015; our emphasis).

By stating that splitting the base from the tops was "previously" strategic, the SL/B was openly rejecting the only way to build a revolutionary party in Britain. This conference repudiates this statement and reaffirms that Labour is a bourgeois workers party and that strategic to building a revolutionary party in Britain is to split the working-class base from its pro-capitalist leadership on the basis of a revolutionary programme, as codified in "Revolutionaries and the Labour Party" (*Spartacist* [English edition] no 33, Spring 1982).

When Corbyn came along in mid-2015, the SL/B's "tactics" and its call to "drive the Blairite wing out" were not aimed at exacerbating the contradictions in Labour towards splitting it along class lines. The strategic perspective became to "revive" Labour as a bourgeois workers party. This was explicit in our repeated statements that driving the Blairites out would be akin to the formation of the Labour Party in the 20th century. Our mantras became that "a split with the right wing would constitute a step towards the political independence of the working class" and that "the schism within the Labour Party mirrors the two opposing classes in bourgeois society" (see all *WH* issues in 2015-17 starting with number 232). In other words, driving the Blairites out would mean a step towards the proletariat no longer being subordinated politically to the bourgeoisie.

This presents Corbyn as having an authentic working-class programme, rejecting the Leninist understanding that the programme of both wings of the Labour Party is bourgeois. Far from maintaining at all times "strict *programmatically* independence from *all* wings of the Labour bureaucracy" ("Revolutionaries and the Labour Party"), the SL/B *politically supported* the programme of one wing against the other.

The reason the SL/B gave for supporting Corbyn was basically that the Blairites were qualitatively different from previous right-wing factions in



First published in 1978, this pamphlet provides a detailed historical and theoretical account of Lenin's struggle for a vanguard party.

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Y. Shteinberg

the Labour Party. The SL/B presented the Blairites as if they no longer had the contradiction of having a bourgeois programme and an organic link to the working class but had a *purely* bourgeois class character despite being inside the Labour Party. This is simply false; Blair was not the first Labour leader wanting to separate himself from the working-class base of the party (which is different from being able to do so). The liberal bourgeois programme of Labour means that the tops are constantly driven into conflict with their working-class base, which constitutes both the source of their power and a shackle to their bourgeois ambitions.

Most importantly, this characterisation of Blairism was a theoretical justification for a permanent bloc with the left of Labour against the right. It is a classic example of the reformist programme of “making the lefts fight” and a break in the SL/B’s programmatic continuity. The 1978 founding document of the SL/B, “In defence of the revolutionary programme”, is a direct polemic against the SL/B’s approach to Corbyn:

“The central strategy of the leadership [of the Workers Socialist League (WSL)] with relation to the existing leaders of the working class is summed up by the phrase ‘Make the Lefts Fight’. The slogan derives from an ill-formed conception that the Labour Party falls into two quite distinct wings, left and right, seen by the leadership as in some way representing the proletariat and the bourgeoisie respectively. Hence the ‘critical’ support given to the ‘Lefts’. Rather than offering an alternative to the betrayals of the right, the ‘Make the Lefts Fight’ slogan only serves to lend our authority to the ‘left-wing’ credentials of the thoroughly rotten counter-revolutionary parliamentary cretins in the Tribune group and thus serves to tie the political development of the working class to a wing of social democracy.”

—*Spartacist Britain* no 1 (April 1978)

That the SL/B had a *permanent* bloc with Corbyn is most clearly shown by its support to him in the second leadership contest *after* he campaigned to remain in the EU (see “Let Jeremy Corbyn run the Labour Party”, *WH* no 236, Autumn 2016). Corbyn betrayed the working class on *the* decisive political question of the time, but for the SL/B support for Corbyn against the Blairites came before its “principled” opposition to imperialism. This was a total capitulation.



Der Spiegel

Blood line between communism and reformism. Left: Third International founded in March 1919 to lead fight for workers revolution internationally. Above: German SPD leader Gustav Noske reviews Freikorps, April 1919. He unleashed these fascistic butchers to crush insurgent workers and murder Communist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

It is inherent in Labour that the left wing conciliates the right, and it is perfectly appropriate to expose the left when it chooses unity over its “principles”. The point of revolutionaries raising calls such as “Drive the Blairites out” and “Drive out the SDP fifth column” (*Spartacist Britain* no 52, September 1983) is to show concretely how the programme of left Labourism necessarily leads to conciliation and capitulation. Our aim is to *expose* the left Labourites, not *pressure* them to have better politics (“make the lefts fight”). In 1982-83 we wanted to “put the Benn/Meacher Labour ‘lefts’ in power *where they can best be exposed before the workers!*” (*Spartacist Britain* no 52, our emphasis).

It is also essential to be clear at all times that our aim is a Leninist party with a revolutionary programme, not a Labour Party without the right wing. In the 1980s the SL/B was crystal clear that a split with Denis Healey & Co “would not be *our* split; a Labour Party denuded of the Denis Healeys would not be *our* party; but it would be a good thing for the working class if the hard NATO/CIA-loving right wing was hounded from the labour movement” (*Spartacist Britain* no 52). But towards Corbyn the SL/B, just as the rest of the left, presented a split with the Blairites as the ultimate aim.

The SL/B was thus throwing away the Leninist conception of the vanguard party. This is clearly shown in the way the SL/B counterposed Corbyn’s “broad church” party to the type of party we fight for. The only objection put forward to the “broad church” is that it means conciliating Blairites and backward elements: “In today’s terms, reconstituting the ‘broad church’ means Corbyn’s supporters will co-exist side by side with the Blairites including Tony Blair himself, who many regard as a war criminal over Iraq” (“Corbyn landslide, Blairite backlash”, *WH* no 232, Autumn 2015). The SL/B in effect transformed the Leninist opposition to the party of the whole class into another version of “make the lefts fight”.

The reason Leninists oppose the “broad church” (or party of the whole class) is that the *revolutionary wing* is subordinated to the *reformist wing*, not that the social-democratic left is hampered by the social-democratic right. Hence for Leninists, fighting against the Labourite “broad church” does

not mean fighting Corbyn's conciliation of the Blairites. It means fighting against aspirant revolutionaries (for example, the SL/B) preaching unity with Corbyn.

Lenin's break with the conception of the "party of the whole class" came from his understanding that the pre-WWI opportunist trend in the Second International, just as the social-chauvinists in the war, had a material basis in "the small group of labour bureaucrats, labour aristocrats and petty-bourgeois fellow-travellers" which received a "few crumbs" from the imperialists. From this Lenin drew the conclusion that "it is absurd to go on regarding opportunism as an inner-party phenomenon" and that:

"Unity with the social-chauvinists means unity with one's 'own' national bourgeoisie, which exploits other nations; it means splitting the international proletariat. This does not mean that a break with the opportunists is immediately possible everywhere; it means only that historically this break is imminent; that it is necessary and inevitable for the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat; that history, which has led us from 'peaceful' capitalism to imperialist capitalism, has paved the way for this break."

—"Opportunism and the collapse of the Second International" (January 1916, translated from German)

Corbyn is a traditional parliamentary reformist and is entirely within the tradition of the opportunist wing of the Second International. The fundamental lesson of Leninism on the party question is that the revolutionary wing of the workers movement must split from the opportunist wing as a precondition for a successful revolution. This means fighting to split the Labour Party along the lines of reform v revolution, not right v left, Blair v Corbyn or backwards v progressive as argued in recent *Workers Hammer* articles.

In the 1980s the purpose of the SL/B's tactics was to win the base of the Labour Party to the programme of Trotskyism against Bennism. Our tactics served to illustrate that Benn's programme was utterly incapable of addressing any of the fundamental questions which faced the workers movement and that what was necessary was a revolutionary party with a revolutionary programme. The SL/B's rejection of the

fight for a Leninist party in the Corbyn period necessarily went hand in hand with rejecting a Marxist programme on every other fundamental question for revolution in this country (imperialism, the state, the national question, oppression of minorities, etc).

The SL/B's "criticisms" of Corbyn on these fundamental questions were entirely subordinated to the strategic aim of supporting him. Under this umbrella most of the "criticisms" are simply left-Labourite; the few points made which were more or less "orthodox" are totally meaningless given the political line of the articles. To thoroughly break with Corbynism entails reasserting every one of the key tenets of our programme in Britain, which this document begins to do. Also necessary, but beyond our current capacity for this conference, is to reassert the Marxist programme against national oppression as well as our programme against racial and immigrant oppression in Britain.

The 2017 Whitewash

At the time of the 2017 international fight [see *Spartacist* (English edition) no 65, Summer 2017], the SL/B had gone so far on the course of political and organisational liquidation that it was restricting its activities (sales, polemics, subscription drive) because the leadership deemed that they would be harmful to Corbyn. Our very existence was basically treated as an obstacle to class struggle (which the Corbyn campaign was equated with). While the 2017 fight in the SL/B restrained the liquidationist course and corrected certain particularly egregious capitulations, it was premised on *upholding* the basic programmatic content of our revisionist orientation towards Corbyn. An International Executive Committee member's 8 January 2017 letter which oriented the fight started off by stating, "In my opinion, the SL/B had generally been doing a good job in addressing Corbyn and the EU/Brexit."

The SL/B's January 2017 CC motion totally whitewashed the section's opportunist Corbyn campaign, claiming it was

Key Articles for Trotskyism in Britain

EEC: Reactionary Utopia, Anti-Red Alliance

Britain and the Common Market

Workers Vanguard no 71, 20 June 1975

"Britain and the Common Market"

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"Theses on Ireland"

Spartacist no 24, Autumn 1977



Theses on Ireland

The theses on Ireland printed on the top page were adopted by the International Executive Committee of the US on 3 August 1977. They are a product of the political work which the IEC has devoted to dealing with the complex series of national questions in Europe and are especially important to people. As such, they should be widely read and discussed. It is a pleasure to publish them in the English edition of Spartacist. — Workers' Mass Campaign Secretariat

From British Spartacist Tasks and Perspectives

Revolutionaries and the Labour Party

Spartacist no 33, Spring 1982

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Major Clement Attlee's Labour government, hailed as model by reformists today, waged counterrevolutionary war in Korea as junior partner in U.S. imperialism's anti-Soviet Cold War. Right: Gloucestershire Regiment in Korea, 1951.

“premised on maintaining political independence from Corbyn's Labour Party and offering a programmatic counterposition to his left-Labourite politics”. It went on to say that the leadership “*lost sight* of our ultimate purpose which is not a Corbynite Labour Party but to set the base against the top in order to forge a revolutionary vanguard (Leninist) party” [our emphasis]. First, the leadership did not “lose sight” of its purpose but rejected it from the get-go. Second, the above “orthodox” reaffirmation of our programme was a centrist cover-up based on defending the thoroughly opportunist political bloc with Corbyn against the Blairites.

The article “Shame on Corbyn for supporting the EU” (*WH* no 238, Spring 2017) published after the fight only corrected the claim made in *WH* no 236 that there was a class difference between Corbyn and Owen Smith on the EU and that *WH* no 237 (Winter 2016-2017) buried Corbyn's support for “remain”. However, it explicitly upheld the entire revisionist framework of the previous articles, reasserting that driving the Blairites out “would constitute a step towards the political independence of the working class”.

In autumn 2017, there was another discussion on the Labour Party. The series of motions passed at the December 2017 SL/B CC meeting stated that Labour was a bourgeois workers party, that it was no longer moribund, and reaffirmed that “our strategic perspective is to win Labour's working-class base away from the party's leadership to the programme of revolutionary Marxism and to build a Leninist party in counterposition to the Labour Party.” This is a perfectly correct statement, which resulted in the SL/B mentioning at least twice in the last five years that it fights to split the base of Labour from the tops. But to reaffirm these correct positions while defending the SL/B's political bloc with Corbyn against the right, its unprincipled support to him in the second leadership election, its revisionism on the “broad church”, etc was yet again a centrist cover-up.

The articles which come the closest to an assessment of Corbynism are the two articles in *WH* no 246 (Spring

2020), “For a multiethnic revolutionary workers party!” and “Election 2019: no choice for workers”. The central argument made in these articles is that Corbyn had an authentic working-class programme which he subsequently betrayed. This is explicit in *WH* no 246, which asserted that Corbyn's unionism and his campaign for a “remain” vote “left the nearly 40 per cent of Scottish leave voters *without any working-class political representation* and was a gift to the SNP” [our emphasis]. According to this statement, the Labour Party would represent the interests of the working class if Corbyn kept his “little England” opposition to the EU and had a less chauvinist position on Scotland. This is once more a rejection of the Leninist understanding that all wings of the Labour Party have a thoroughly *bourgeois* programme.

To the extent that these articles give an explanation as to why Corbyn “betrayed”, it is the circular argument that “Corbyn's fealty to the EU stands in the long tradition of Labour's betrayals.” A thread throughout *WH* no 246 is that Labour is chauvinist, pro-imperialist and always betrays. While not wrong per se, it is an utterly sterile explanation. It does not explain why Labour always betrays, nor why it sometimes strikes an apparently radical posture.

The main conclusion the reader draws from this issue of the paper is that Corbyn's programme was initially good but the Labour Party was not the correct vehicle to implement it, or that Corbyn personally bent too much to the Blairites. The other conclusion is that what is needed is trade union militancy. All of these are entirely within the framework of “make the lefts fight” and are compatible with the lessons drawn by the rest of the left on the Corbyn era. They blame Corbyn's failure on everything except what actually counts: *Corbyn's programme*.

It is Corbyn's reformist programme which paved the way for his capitulations. Instead of exposing this, the articles embrace his reformist opposition to the EU—based on it being “neoliberal” and an obstacle to British imperialism



Lindsey Parnaby/Getty

Jeremy Corbyn's campaign for EU imperialist cartel in 2016 Brexit referendum was betrayal of working class.

implementing social-democratic policies [see section IV under "The SL/B's Labourite Opposition to the EU"]. In the same vein, the articles present Corbyn's unionism as a product of the backward prejudices of the Labour Party as opposed to making clear how the Labour Party's chauvinism on Scotland stems from the Labour tops' defence of British capitalism, a central component of which is to maintain national oppression within the reactionary United Kingdom. The whole framework of these articles is not what programme the working class needs for its emancipation but what programme Labour needs to win the elections.

Lessons of the Corbyn Betrayal

From the moment Jeremy Corbyn won the Labour leadership elections to his eventual demise following the 2019 elections, the task of revolutionary Marxists was to show concretely through the course of events how Corbyn's programme was inherently incapable of addressing the needs of the working class, motivating the need for a *Leninist party* armed with a *Marxist programme*. This necessarily required a correct understanding of the dynamics behind Corbyn's initial astonishing rise as well as the factors which caused his equally spectacular collapse. The initial articles the Spartacist League wrote about Corbyn were jubilant, the later articles were critical. But since the section never broke from its Labourite capitulation, it was never able to give a programmatic explanation as to why Corbyn was initially so successful and why he failed so miserably. The explanations given as to why Corbyn was "defiant" or "capitulated" necessarily fell on personal characteristics and actions instead of programme and class forces.

Corbyn won a landslide victory in Labour's 2015 leadership race, surprising everyone including himself. How did

an MP [Member of Parliament] who had spent his entire career being a marginal backbencher manage to win? There was huge accumulated discontent in the working class and in particular in the base of the Labour Party against the decades of austerity and military interventions. In *Where is Britain going?* (1925), Trotsky explained the reason behind the success of the Independent Labour Party after World War I:

"Behind the democratic pacifist illusions of the working masses stand *their awakened class will, a deep discontent with their position and a readiness to back up their demands with all the means that the circumstances require*. But the working class can build a party out of those ideological and personal leading elements which have been prepared by the entire preceding development of the country and all its theoretical and political culture."

Given the reactionary nature of the last decades, the leaders available in 2015 to channel this discontent were particularly feeble and incompetent. Neither Corbyn himself nor his programme had anything exceptional; he just happened to be the lightning rod which was available at the time to channel the huge, built-up social pressure.

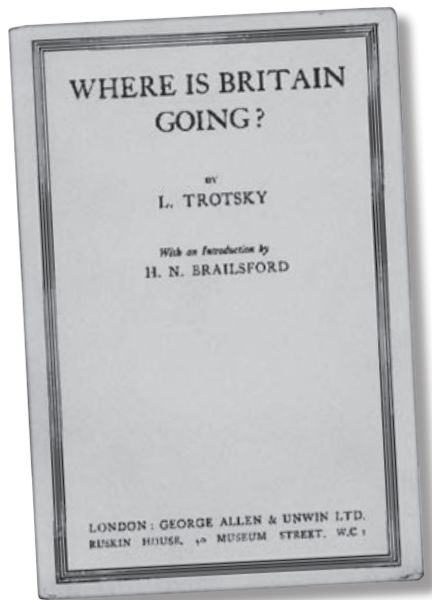
To paraphrase what the SL/B wrote in "Labour's Cold War" (*Spartacist Britain* no 41, April 1982), the 2015 leadership elections became a major showdown on the key issues tearing the Labour Party apart, albeit expressed negatively: against the Blairites, against the architects of military interventions and austerity. While a wave of young people supported Corbyn, crucially he was also able to rally the support of a sizable part of the trade union bureaucrats. This was to evacuate pressure from their base on the one hand and was driven by frustration at not having been given a "seat at the table" under the Blairites on the other.

As long as he was an irrelevant backbencher, Corbyn could afford to denounce the government for its austerity, its nuclear weapons, its wars; he could denounce the EU for



Getty

Ramsay MacDonald (front center) seated with cabinet of Britain's National Government, 1931. MacDonald also started out as a pacifist in opposition...



Hulton-Deutsch

In 1925 pamphlet, Trotsky put forward program for workers revolution in Britain, excoriating pacifist and gradualist program of Labour and union misleaders.

being neoliberal and support Palestine against the Zionist state. His liberal-utopian programme of “peace on earth” and “ending poverty” was never a threat and provided in fact a thin cover for the blood-drenched Labour government of Tony Blair. But this changed when he became leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition.

In *Where is Britain going?* Trotsky explains the rapid transformation of Ramsay MacDonald from pacifist oppositionist to the war to social-chauvinist in government, building “light cruisers in anticipation of the day when he will have to build heavy ones”:

“The Independent Labour Party [of MacDonald], as has already been said, could not have been better adapted to the role of an irresponsible centrist opposition which criticizes but does not cause the rulers great damage. However, the Independents were destined in a short time to become a political force and this at the same time changed their role and their physiognomy.”

While Corbyn was never a centrist, his winning of the leadership of the Labour Party had a similar character. The minute he won the leadership contest his function and role changed and he started to be ripped apart by the contradictions of his new position.

Not only did Corbyn have to provide concrete answers to the problems of the day, but people cared about what he said. In the context of the British imperialist strategic dependence on the US and the international austerity offensive following the 2008 crisis, Corbyn’s positions on a series of questions (NATO, Ukraine, the “war on terror”, Trident, nationalisations) were not acceptable to the bourgeoisie. This is what gave him broad popular support and what provoked a major reaction from the bourgeoisie as well as an ongoing insurgency from the Blairite wing of the party. The only options were to frontally confront the ruling class or to capitulate. But given that Corbyn’s bourgeois programme was not based on the material interests of the working class but vague notions of “peace” and “justice”, he had no firm ground to stand on and quickly capitulated on one question after the other.

Moreover, due to the fact that Corbyn was elected only on a negative programme of opposition to Blairism, his supporters were fractured and divided as soon as concrete questions came up: the EU, Russia, “anti-Semitism”, etc. Corbyn’s programme of parliamentary socialism also meant he approached every question in terms of electoral success, making him sway according to changes in public opinion and tying him to the Blairite majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party. As though this wasn’t enough, at the end of the day it is the trade union bureaucracy that calls the shots in the Labour Party. Whatever Corbyn did needed to be acceptable to the conservative, pro-capitalist leaders of the trade unions. All of this taken together gives a clear picture of the utter impotence of left Labourism.

The role of Trotskyists in this situation was to explain that the fundamental problem lies with Corbyn’s programme. In “Opportunism and the collapse of the Second International” (1916) Lenin explained the continuity between the programme of prewar reformism and open support to the ruling class during the war:

“Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the same political content, namely, class collaboration, repudiation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, repudiation of revolutionary action, unconditional acceptance of bourgeois legality, confidence in the bourgeoisie and lack of confidence in the proletariat. Social-chauvinism is the direct continuation and consummation of British liberal-labour politics, of Millerandism and Bernsteinism.”

Applied to the context of Corbyn, what we needed to explain is that Corbyn’s support to British imperialism, his defence of the EU, his English chauvinism towards Scotland, his support to the lockdowns *are the direct continuation and consummation of his left-Labourite programme*. When push comes to shove, there is no middle ground between a proletarian and a bourgeois programme. Imperialism cannot be managed “peacefully”, the capitalist state cannot “serve the people” and the ruling class won’t be voted out of power. Only a communist programme fought for by a Leninist party can provide the path to fight capitalist misery.



Spartacist Britain

London, June 1980: Against Labourite anti-Soviet pacifism, SL/B opposed British imperialism and all its alliances, defended Soviet Union in Cold War II.

At the tactical level, taking a side with Corbyn against the Blairites could have been a way of exploiting the contradiction between the aspirations of the masses which were driving Corbyn's rise and his utter incapacity to fulfil these aspirations. There is no fundamental programmatic difference between the left and the right of the Labour Party. It was not Corbyn's programme which was driving the class war in the Labour Party but the aspirations of the base which ran against the policies of the leadership. The Blairites were *open* advocates of anti-working-class policies and the main targets of the anger. This pressure from the base could have led to the Blairites being driven out despite Corbyn's best efforts. Such an outcome would have made it clearer that the real obstacle to the aspirations of the masses wasn't the right wing but the bourgeois programme of Labour, including of its left wing. It would have been easier to illustrate concretely the need for a revolutionary party and to polarise Labour along class lines.

In his remarks at a May 1981 SL/B Central Committee meeting, comrade Jim Robertson noted that there is a cyclical quality to British political life in regard to the Labour Party. Since at least 2015, the SL/B has been consistently tailing left Labourism and simply following the rest of the left around this cycle: revulsion for Blair, enthusiasm for Corbyn, back to revulsion with Keir Starmer. In the recent period members of the SL/B CC, just like the rest of the reformist left, have argued that there are no illusions in Starmer's Labour Party, that Keir Starmer is transforming Labour into a bourgeois party and that Labour is basically reactionary through and through.

Keir Starmer is now attacking the left in the party in order to restore Labour's "respectability" and has done so relying heavily on the trade union bureaucracy. While the reformists have been whining and complaining about Starmer, on the main question of the hour—the pandemic—the Labour lefts have no major difference with Starmer and utterly support the devastating policies of the bourgeoisie. While the tactical approach currently appropri-

ate is to "throw rocks" at the Labour Party, our fire needs to be aimed at the whole Labour Party, particularly at its left hangers-on who play up the credentials of "left" bureaucrats inside both the party and the trade unions.

IV. For a Revolutionary Opposition to British Imperialism!

At least since the election of Corbyn as Labour leader, the SL/B has consistently embraced Corbyn's liberal pacifist programme for British imperialism as well as a Labourite framework on the EU, promoting an alternative policy for British imperialism. As part of rearming the SL/B, we need to repudiate these capitulations and put forward a proletarian, revolutionary and internationalist opposition to imperialism in clear counterposition to "little England" Labourism.

Embracing Corbyn's Labourite Pacifism

Starting with issue no 232, *Workers Hammer* consistently presented Corbyn's opposition to NATO, to Trident, to British and US military interventions as if they were principled stances against imperialism instead of what they really were: Labourite pacifism promoting an alternative policy for the management of British imperialism. *WH* articles uncritically praised Corbyn for his "history of opposing the US-led NATO military alliance" (*WH* no 232), for being "not convinced that a bombing campaign will actually solve anything" (*WH* no 233, Winter 2015-2016) and for not wishing "to go to war" (*WH* no 236). Instead of doing the elementary revolutionary duty of exposing Corbyn's programme as totally utopian and reactionary—which is central to a critical support campaign—the SL/B gutted Marxism in order to promote Corbynism.

When *WH* did make criticisms of Corbyn's foreign policy, it often repeated that Corbyn wants British imperialism to adopt a "more 'rational' strategy". But never did *WH* explain what is wrong with wanting a "more rational

avert or end war is the disarmament of the bourgeoisie by the workers. But to disarm the bourgeoisie, the workers must arm themselves.”

Pacifism directs its fire not so much towards the armed apparatus of the capitalist state as towards the working masses; it is the violence of the *oppressed* against their oppressors that the pacifists revile. They will never take a side for the defeat of their “own” imperialist government in armed conflicts. Preaching the harmfulness of arms and of violence to those who are disarmed and victims of the bourgeoisie’s violence is thoroughly reactionary from the standpoint of the working class. Thanks to the pacifism of [George] Lansbury, Bevan, [Michael] Foot, Benn, Corbyn & Co, Britain has both one of the most powerful armies on earth and some of the strictest gun control laws in the world.

Getting rid of Trident or opting out of NATO are avenues that the British imperialist bourgeoisie refuses to even discuss. As a declining imperialist power, British imperialism has had no choice since the end of the Second World War but to rely on its alliance with the US to maintain its status, thus supporting most of the US military interventions abroad. Any prime minister who implemented policies that would endanger Britain’s foreign investments, its nuclear deterrent or its alignment with the US and NATO would in all likelihood be overthrown through parliamentary or extra-parliamentary means. Even Corbyn’s timid programme to get rid of Trident and to question Britain’s commitment to NATO was met by the open threat of removal by top generals of the British armed forces. While it was necessary to defend Corbyn against such threats, *WH* did so by essentially endorsing Corbyn’s politics.

The SL/B’s Labourite Opposition to the EU

Up until the pandemic, the issue of Brexit had dominated British politics for years. The SL/B’s position to vote “leave” in the 2016 Brexit referendum was absolutely correct as a concrete expression of our opposition to the EU and *the only* principled position for revolutionaries. That said, the arguments used by the SL/B to support “leave” and to oppose the EU were not based on a Marxist opposition to imperialism and all imperialist alliances. Instead, the SL/B opposed the EU on a “little England” Labourite basis, ie an opposition to the EU based on its particular anti-worker *policies* and promoting an alternative strategy for British imperialism.

Over 100 years ago, Lenin defined the Marxist basis upon which we must oppose the EU:

“Of course, *temporary* agreements are possible between capitalists and between states. In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the *European* capitalists...but to what end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty *against* Japan and America.”

— “On the slogan for a United States of Europe”
(August 1915)

Lenin’s basic principle here is the one that *WH* disappeared and rejected: *we oppose the EU because we are opposed to imperialism*. While it is certainly correct to point to the EU’s pillage of the European proletariat, the defining principle for communists — why we say that we oppose the EU “on principle” — is based not on the particular policies of the EU but on the fact that the EU is an alliance of imperialists and their victims, and for communists opposition to



Martin Mayer/reportdigital.co.uk

Tony Benn opposed Common Market, predecessor of EU, on “little England” nationalist basis. Labour lefts promote illusions that an alternative policy for British imperialism would benefit the working class.

all imperialist alliances is a question of principle. Coalitions of imperialist powers are nothing but truces in between wars. “Peaceful” imperialist alliances grow out of wars and prepare new ones. The elementary statement that we oppose the EU because we oppose British imperialism and all its alliances *never* appeared in recent issues of *WH*.

The SL/B often stated that it opposes the EU “on principle”, but the “principle” invoked was basically that the EU’s “founding commitments” and its policies since its inception have been anti-worker. *WH* explained that the EU is an “enemy of workers and immigrants”, that it “strangles Greece” and that its “free movement” is a lie (*WH* no 243, Autumn 2018); that it “attack[s] the jobs, wages and conditions of workers throughout Europe” (*WH* no 244, Winter 2018-2019); that it was “founded on the commitments to privatise nationalised industries and to reduce government spending on social services” (*WH* no 246). While all this is true, it is *not* a principled revolutionary opposition to imperialism. It does not distinguish ourselves from the Labour lefts, who might oppose the EU based on its anti-worker policies but are not opposed on principle to imperialist alliances.

The SL/B’s treatment of the EU stands in sharp contrast to the founding articles of our movement like “Labor and the Common Market” (*Workers Vanguard* no 15, January 1973) and “Britain and the Common Market” (*Workers Vanguard* no 71, 20 June 1975). Both of these articles were written to counterpose a Leninist opposition to the EEC [European Economic Community, the EU’s predecessor] and all imperialist powers and alliances to the bankrupt reformist opposition to the EEC. “Britain and the Common Market” opens with what reads like a polemic against the recent issues of *WH*:

“It is important that revolutionaries oppose British membership in the Common Market, but no less vital that they do so

for the *right reasons*. It is not enough to condemn the chauvinist opposition to ‘Europe,’ and it is necessary to go beyond the Labour lefts’ argument based on the immediate economic disadvantages for British workers. *For communists, opposition to the Common Market is a principled, not a conditional or empirical, question*. We are no less opposed to German or French membership than to Britain’s joining.” [our emphasis]

Our recent articles condemned the chauvinist opposition to the EU and opposed the EU because of its immediate economic disadvantages for British workers. But going beyond these and presenting a principled opposition to all imperialist alliances is precisely what *WH* hasn’t been doing.

A clear example of this is seen in the fact that throughout the Brexit years, *WH* never connected opposition to the EU with opposition to NATO. A key axis of our polemics against the Labour lefts and the trade union bureaucracy in the 1970s was precisely their refusal to do this. Then and now, the Labour left campaign against Britain’s membership in the Common Market was premised on accepting the framework of US-designed imperialist cartels, shown either in their refusal to oppose NATO or their promoting alternative “progressive” imperialist alliances like a “social Europe”. In “Britain and the Common Market” we noted:

“A genuinely revolutionary anti-Market campaign must aggressively link opposition to the EEC and all other imperialist alliances and expose the impotent reformism of the Labour left: ‘Out of the Common Market—Out of NATO! Expropriate the Bourgeoisie—For a Workers Government!’”

Instead, recent *WH* issues focused their fire uniquely on the EU and its reactionary policies while disappearing the question of opposition to all imperialist alliances and opposition to British imperialism.

A non-Leninist basis to oppose the EU is not merely a problem of “incorrect formulations”. It means adapting to Labourism and *burying the class line* between revolutionary opposition to imperialism and promoting an alternative policy for British imperialism. This adaptation is clearly seen in the SL/B’s giving “critical” support to Corbyn in the second leadership election of the Labour Party *right after* he had campaigned in favour of the EU imperialist cartel. At the time, *WH* went as far as to claim that fighting imperialism required supporting Corbyn in order to defeat the “warmongering Blairite hawks in the upcoming leadership election” (*WH* no 236).

Adaptation to Labourism is also clearly seen in *WH*’s treatment of the Labour lefts’ long-standing opposition to the EU. While *WH* criticised Corbyn for campaigning for “remain”, it frequently and uncritically referred to “his lifelong opposition to the EU project” (*WH* no 244). *Never once* did recent issues explain that the Labour lefts’ opposition to the EU has always been reformist, ie based on nationalism and opposition to the Common Market limiting state interven-

tions and social policies. *WH* never exposed that at the heart of “little England” hostility to the EU has always been the class-collaborationist idea that if British imperialism pursues a path outside of the Common Market, British workers would be better off.

Another aspect of the Labour left’s opposition to the EU which was never exposed in the pages of *WH* is its conjunctural nature. For back-bench MPs or when Labour is in opposition, it has always been quite cheap to oppose the EU. However, it is something else to do so as head of the Labour Party seeking to administer British imperialism, ie when it concretely involves responsibility. Corbyn repudiated his “lifelong opposition” to the EU as soon as he became head of Labour because that represented a “red line” for the Blairites that he could not cross without provoking a split. This is nothing new for the Labour tops: Harold Wilson, Labour leader in the 1960s and 1970s, literally changed position “for” and “against” the EEC three times, depending on whether he was in power or in opposition.

While capitulating to Labourite opposition to the EU, *WH* also adapted to liberal pro-EU pressure by its repeated use of the slogan “For a workers Europe!” This is a slogan used by all sorts of reformists who are both anti- and pro-EU, like the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty or No2EU. In popular understanding, there is no difference between being for a “social Europe” and for a “workers Europe”, which fuels illusions that the EU could somehow be reformed into a more “progressive” alliance or that it should be replaced by a new, “pro-worker” imperialist alliance. This conference rejects the slogan “For a workers Europe” as an opportunist capitulation to these illusions.

This conference adopts the revolutionary Comintern’s historic slogan for the “Soviet United States of Europe”, to which we should add “united on a voluntary basis”. This slogan, which should be coupled with a clear opposition to



The slogan “For a workers Europe” is used by both anti- and pro-EU reformists to peddle illusions in a “pro-worker” imperialist alliance.

the EU, explicitly underlines that a progressive unification of Europe can *only* be based on a succession of victorious socialist revolutions. By explicitly referencing soviets, this slogan also draws a line against pro-EU liberals as well as against anti-communist Labourites who might oppose the EU. This slogan does not replace our historic call “For a Socialist United States of Europe, united on a voluntary basis!” The two slogans can be used interchangeably.

Brexit: Wanting a Better Deal for British Imperialism

The fervent debate that raged for years over Brexit reflected a disagreement in the British bourgeoisie over which path is best for the future of British imperialism. One wing of the imperialists wanted to maintain membership in the EU, another wanted to leave it. Because the SL/B did not draw a clear line against British imperialism, against all its alliances and all wings of the British imperialists, it ended up simply taking a side with the pro-Brexit wing of the bourgeoisie.

This is most explicit in the article “Brexit now!” in *WH* no 245 (Summer 2019), where *WH* equated opposing the Tories’ Brexit deal with opposing Brexit. The polemic of this article against the Socialist Party is quite explicit:

“The March 2018 editorial in *Socialism Today* insists: ‘The workers’ movement must maintain an independent class opposition to a Tory Brexit, “soft”, “hard” or “no deal”.’ All this comes down to *opposing Brexit when it’s actually posed*. To paraphrase Lewis Carroll’s White Queen, it’s Brexit tomorrow and Brexit yesterday — but never Brexit today.”

This is a polemic *from the right*. The implicit position defended here by *WH* is that Marxists must *support* whatever Brexit deal the Tories will cut in the name of “Brexit today”, which amounts to political support to the Tories.

This support to a “hard” Tory Brexit against Labour and

its hangers-on who were committed to “remain” mirrored a shift happening in society, particularly in the electoral base of the Labour Party. In the absence of an *independent working-class pole* against the EU, the 2019 elections saw over a million ex-Labour voters (particularly in the “red wall”) voting for the Tories because they saw this as the only way to get out of the EU.

The Socialist Party was not wrong to say that workers must maintain an “independent class opposition to a Tory Brexit, ‘soft’, ‘hard’ or ‘no deal’”. But they advocated a “left exit” negotiated by Corbyn, which is also a total betrayal of the proletariat. Any Brexit deal, “soft” or “hard”, Tory or Labour, can only be a deal reflecting the balance of power between the imperialists, setting the terms of their competition and spheres of influence and dividing their shares of the spoils from the exploitation of the proletariat in Europe and Britain.

From the standpoint of the working class, supporting *any* Brexit deal is utterly reactionary and pro-imperialist. Equally reactionary is to put conditions on Britain immediately getting out of the EU, which amounts to a rejection of unconditional opposition to imperialist alliances. Against the Tories’ anti-worker agenda, against Labour’s betrayal and against the fake socialists promoting an alternative policy in support of British imperialism, the obvious counterposition revolutionaries should have made was to put forward a programme for working-class struggle to force Britain to get out of the EU *now* and utilise the government crisis over Brexit to advance proletarian revolution.

The SL/B’s capitulation to the Tory Brexit also shows the logic of abandoning a revolutionary opposition to imperialism. The article “Brexit now!” notes: “The prolonged crisis of the Tory government has created an advantageous situa-

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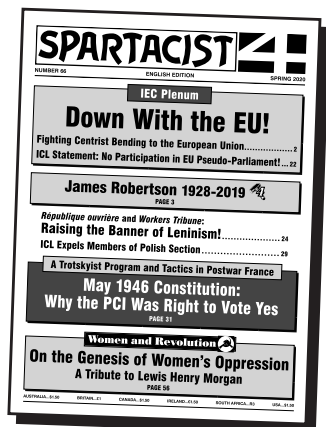
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tion for working-class struggle, which *could also* drive Britain out of the EU” [our emphasis]. Mobilising workers in struggle against the British bourgeoisie and all its imperialist alliances is presented in *WH* as an abstract hypothesis. But this was the *burning task* posed for revolutionaries!

We should have fought to cancel the debts of oppressed countries, reverse privatisations, scrap all anti-union laws, for good and sufficient pensions at a decent age to counter destruction of pension plans across Europe, etc. On all these questions, the British bourgeoisie has worked hand in hand with the EU. Such a perspective, linked with the demands for a workers government and a Soviet United States of Europe united on a voluntary basis, would have connected the immediate economic needs of workers—in Britain and in all of Europe—with the burning need for a struggle against imperialism. While Britain is now formally out of the EU, such a revolutionary perspective is still urgently needed.

V. A Very British Reformism

Parliamentary Socialism

A central aspect of the SL/B’s capitulation to Corbyn was the conciliation of his reformist programme of parliamentary socialism. The main criticism made of Corbyn was that “while the demands posed by the Corbyn campaign are supportable, they cannot be achieved through old Labour parliamentarism” (*WH* no 232). This presents the difference between reform and revolution as a simple difference over the means to achieve the same goal. *Workers Hammer* never made clear that Corbyn’s programme wasn’t just ill-advised or mistaken but was a *pro-capitalist programme* which serves to *deceive* the working class and maintain bourgeois class rule. As Rosa Luxemburg explained:

“People who pronounce themselves in favor of the method of legislative reform *in place of and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society.”

—*Reform or revolution* (1898-99)

The main illusion in Jeremy Corbyn was that if elected prime minister he would enact major reforms in the interest of the working class. The pseudo-Marxist left pushed that while Corbyn’s election would probably not lead immediately to socialism, he could be pressured to transform Labour into a “genuine socialist party” and to enact “socialist policies”. Against this, the task of revolutionaries was to expose that no matter the pressure applied, Corbyn’s pro-capitalist programme would *necessarily* lead him to do the bidding of the capitalists and *betray* the interests of the working class. *WH* never made this elementary point. The aim of the critical support tactic is precisely to prove the correctness of the Bolshevik programme by warning at all times “of the inevitable betrayals and counterposing our programme for proletarian power” (“Revolutionaries and the Labour Party”). But while *WH* wrote about the crimes of “all previous Labour governments”, it always kept the door open for the illusion that under Jeremy it could be different.

The capitalist state consists of special bodies of armed men whose purpose is to defend through violence the domination of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. The British



Elliott Brown

Oliver Cromwell, leader of English bourgeois revolution, was no believer in gradualism.

capitalist state—its cops, army, prisons and courts—can only be wielded to defend the interests of British finance capital: increasing its profits, defending its borders, securing its foreign interests, repressing strikes and pitting the oppressed against each other. The necessary Leninist point to make against Corbyn and his left cheerleaders is that no matter how “left” the election platform of a workers party elected to govern the capitalist state happens to be, it is not a workers government. It is a workers party administering the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, which will necessarily *attack* the working class and *defend* the bourgeoisie. *WH* capitulated to Labour Party lesser evilism by never making this elementary argument, instead criticising Labour because it does not give enough reforms and “contains” the struggle for such reforms. Thus, its assertions that running the capitalist state in the interest of the working class is “impossible” and a “losing strategy” are window-dressing for promoting the illusion that the Labour Party running the capitalist state can be pressured to advance the interests of the working class.

WH’s references to Marx that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes” (*The civil war in France*, 1871) are rendered moot given that the whole framework of the SL/B’s propaganda was based on *fostering* lesser-evil illusions in Corbyn. For Marxists, the only reason it would be preferable that the capitalist state be run by a left-Labourite government is that it would be an opportunity to expose the bankruptcy of parliamentary reformism.

The central illusion of the British reformist left is that it is possible to bring about socialism peacefully through



RGA/KEO

Red Army soldiers celebrating first anniversary of 1917 October Revolution carry banner reading “Communism.” It was armed workers and peasants who crushed the resistance of the bourgeoisie, not a vote in parliament.

Parliament. In the early days of Corbyn’s leadership *WH* responded to these illusions by making a purely liberal critique of bourgeois democracy:

“The idea that socialism can be achieved through Parliament rests on the illusion that exploiter and exploited, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, all have an equal vote in how society is run. But it is not the working people and minorities who control the mass media, the economy, or for that matter the cops, courts and military.”

—“Corbyn landslide, Blairite backlash”, *WH* no 232

More recently, *SL/B* propaganda has covered up this liberalism with statements about “breaking the power of the bourgeoisie” and the need to “sweep away the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state and establish a workers state” (*WH* no 246). However, at no point did *WH* make the most basic Marxist point that the bourgeoisie *will not let itself be peacefully voted out of power*. As Trotsky explained, “The workers’ majority in parliament can be destroyed if armed force is in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Whoever does not understand this is not a socialist but a numbskull” (25 December 1925). Against the reformist programme for a Labour majority in Parliament, communists fight for a workers government based on soviets, ie the armed proletariat organised as the ruling class.

From its most liberal expressions to its most centrist ones, a constant thread throughout all recent *WH* propaganda is to disappear that the bourgeoisie will use violence to defend its class rule and that the working class must use force to defend itself and establish its own rule. In *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky* (1918), Lenin explained that:

“If we argue in a Marxist way, we must say: the exploiters inevitably transform the state (and we are speaking of democracy, i.e., one of the forms of the state) into an instrument of the rule of their class, the exploiters, over the exploited. Hence, as long as there are exploiters who rule the majority, the exploited, the democratic state must inevitably be a democracy for the exploiters. A state of the exploited must fundamentally differ from such a state; it must be a democracy for the exploited, and a means of *suppressing the*

exploiters; and the suppression of a class means inequality for that class, its exclusion from ‘democracy’.”

WH explained repeatedly that the parliamentary system is a democratic facade for the dictatorship of the capitalist class and that a workers state based on soviet democracy is necessary. However, only one article—which isn’t about Corbyn (“Britain’s prison hell”, *WH* no 244)—explains the fundamental reason revolution requires the establishment of a workers state: *to suppress the resistance of the bourgeoisie*. To omit the key programmatic points that the bourgeoisie will not let itself be peacefully voted out of power and that the purpose of a workers state is to break the resistance of the bourgeoisie means not exposing but in fact capitulating to illusions that socialism can be achieved peacefully through Parliament.

Trade Union Reformism

The *SL/B*’s capitulation to parliamentary socialism and left-Labour lesser evilism necessarily went hand in hand with capitulation to the classic British reformist programme of pressuring the Labour Party through trade union militancy. *WH* criticised the current leadership of the unions for having “spent decades isolating and containing strikes while diverting workers’ anger into illusions in the EU and the losing strategy of electing a Labour government” (*WH* no 246), for keeping struggles “limited to demonstrations and local, time-limited strikes” (*WH* no 242, Summer 2018) and for pushing the illusion of “class peace with the bosses” (*WH* no 238). However, on each of these questions *WH* did not counterpose a programme based on Marxist principles on the state, imperialism and class independence, but simply advocated more militant trade unionism.

Put simply, *WH* abandoned the construction of a *revolutionary opposition within the trade unions*, a necessary task to split the Labour Party. As “Revolutionaries and the Labour Party” argued: “Given its organic base in the trade unions, ultimately Labour cannot be split without a success-

ful political struggle against the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracy.”

Deindustrialisation, capitalist attacks and decades of backstabbing by the trade union leadership have left the British working class weakened and demoralised. In this context the SL/B reduced its perspective towards the unions to simply fighting for more trade union struggle. In *What is to be done?* (1902) Lenin pointed out that one does not need to be a communist to advocate more militant economic struggles—to lend “the economic struggle *itself* a political character”. The crucial point is to link the struggle for the most immediate economic needs of the working class to the necessity of overthrowing capitalist class rule. As he explained:

“Social-Democracy leads the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms for the sale of labour-power, but for the abolition of the social system that compels the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich. Social-Democracy represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organised political force. Hence, it follows that not only must Social-Democrats not confine themselves exclusively to the economic struggle, but that they must not allow the organisation of economic exposures to become the predominant part of their activities. We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness.”

The post-Soviet reaction and the low level of class struggle in Britain do not change the fundamental tasks of communists in regard to the trade unions.

Only leaderships in the unions built on a revolutionary programme can transcend the narrow sectoral interests of a particular industry, union or country and lead fights which will advance the interests of the working class as a whole. This requires exposing the class-collaborationist programme of the current leadership of the unions *and* the more militant version of this same programme pushed by the reformist left. A programme limited to trade union demands, however



John Sturrock/reportdigital.co.uk

Heroic 1984-85 British miners strike demonstrated limits of militant trade unionism and need for revolutionary leadership of the unions.

“militant”, is based on *upholding* capitalist class rule and is thus necessarily reformist, seeking solely to negotiate “better terms for the sale of labour-power”. Furthermore, as Trotsky explained, in the epoch of imperialist decay:

“[The trade unions] can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.”

—“Trade unions in the epoch of imperialist decay” (1940)

Opposition to the trade union bureaucracy based solely on its lack of militancy obliterates the fundamental dividing line between revolutionary and reformist politics and thus inevitably leads to a political bloc with one wing or another of the union bureaucracy. Such an opposition immediately collapses when the union tops lead militant actions—which they will be compelled to do, as seen in the 1984-85 British miners strike. The trade union bureaucracy can be pressured to struggle, but no amount of pressure can change its pro-capitalist programme and reactionary role as agents of the bourgeoisie in the working class. Against the reformist programme of *pressuring* the existing leadership of the unions, Trotskyists fight to *replace it* with a revolutionary leadership. Our perspective to do so is through the building of fractions based on the *full transitional programme*, including the call for a workers government.

Minimum/Maximum Programme: Burning the Bridge

Revolutionaries must show *concretely* that fulfilling the needs of working people is possible *only* with the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and expose reformist deceptions which suggest the contrary. The SL/B has done neither of these and at times *explicitly* promoted the notion that decaying capitalism *can* provide decent healthcare and fulfil the needs of workers if enough pressure is applied. The article “Capitalism: danger to your health” (*WH* no 242) is a particularly explicit example of the SL/B’s reformism:

“Quality healthcare, free at the point of delivery; top-class government-provided care for children and the elderly; excellent schools, job training programmes and housing—fulfilling the basic needs of the population requires massive investment. The bourgeoisie has racked up enormous wealth from the exploitation of workers. But the ruling class never gives anything up without a fight. Sharp class struggle, not pleading to Westminster, could convince the ruling class to fund the NHS.”

Workers can obtain partial and reversible gains under capitalism. However, “fulfilling the basic needs of the population” is not a matter of pressuring the decaying British capitalist class to pump more money into the healthcare system but requires *proletarian revolution*.

Sharp class struggle could convince the bourgeoisie to invest more in public services. Like any ruling class faced with a workers upsurge, they might resort to concessions under pressure as a “lesser evil” to social revolution. In *The lessons of October* (1924), Trotsky explained the attitude of revolutionaries towards pressuring the bourgeoisie:

“Ought a revolutionary party to refuse to ‘exercise pressure’ on the bourgeoisie and its government? Certainly not. The exercise of pressure on a bourgeois government is the road of reform. A revolutionary Marxist party does not reject

reforms. But the road of reform serves a useful purpose in subsidiary and not in fundamental questions. State power cannot be obtained by reforms. 'Pressure' can never induce the bourgeoisie to change its policy on a question that involves its whole fate."

The problem with the SL/B's recent propaganda, just like the British reformist left, is that it advocated *only and exclusively* pressuring the bourgeoisie in order to secure such concessions. This is a rejection of the *Transitional Programme* and an embrace of the minimum programme of the Second International.

When *WH* does mention socialism (the maximum programme), it is either to present it as an abstract and distant prospect or to openly capitulate to the "parliamentary socialist" programme of the British left. For example, in "Capitalism: danger to your health":

"The pharmaceutical giants make a mint by using their monopolistic patents to demand extortionate prices. Such blackmail poses the urgent need to expropriate the pharmaceutical industry as a *step* towards overturning the profit-driven capitalist system as a whole." [our emphasis]

This presents the expropriation of the bourgeoisie as a gradual process. It mirrors the programme of British reformism: socialism through step-by-step nationalisations of the "commanding heights of the economy" by Her Majesty's Parliament. Revolutionaries are not opposed to calling for the expropriation of specific industries. However, in doing so, as Trotsky explained in the *Transitional Programme*, 1) we reject indemnification; 2) we do so while exposing reformists and Labourites who claim to be for the nationalisation of the economy, but are in fact defenders of capitalist rule; 3) we do not rely on achieving a majority in the bourgeois talk-shop of Westminster but on the revolutionary mobilisation of the proletariat; 4) we link the question of expropriations with that of seizure of power by the workers.

Against the minimum programme restricting the aims and activities of the working class to the winning of reforms, the founding of the Third International (Comintern) decisively broke with the division of the minimum and maximum programme, establishing the task of the Communist vanguard as being to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist class *through* the mobilisation of the proletariat for its most basic interests. Transitional demands need to be used as tools to mobilise the working class in revolutionary struggle, expose the bankruptcy of social democracy and motivate the need for a workers revolution. The *Transitional Programme* of the Fourth Interna-



Graphic from U.S. Trotskyists' *Socialist Appeal* (22 October 1938) announces founding of Fourth International, continuator of revolutionary Leninism against Stalinist perversion of Third International.

tional represented this continuity against the Stalinised Comintern.

The substitution of the minimum/maximum programme for the transitional programme, as the SL/B did, is the *essence* of reformism. In the period of imperialist decay, where there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses' living standards, putting forward a programme to fulfil the burning needs of the masses *divorced* from the fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat is not only *impossible*, it is *reactionary*. The SL/B was founded in defence of the *Transitional Programme* against its opportunist deformation by the WSL and the rest of the pseudo-Trotskyists in Britain. It is vital to defend and reclaim this programmatic continuity. ■

Reactionary Electoral Circus in the Philippines

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SUPPLEMENT
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Reaksyonaryong Elektoral na Circus sa Pilipinas

Huwag Mag-ilusyon sa mga Burges na Liberal—Para sa Proletaryong Himagsikan!

Editorial...

(continued from page 2)

Internationally, all the liberals dressed up as “socialists” spent the years 2020 to 2022 advocating (on Zoom meetings) longer and harsher lockdowns, demanding that the capitalist states control and suppress the movement and activities of the proletariat even more in the name of “saving lives.” Our own organization succumbed to these pressures for the first year of the pandemic. Only in April 2021, after fierce internal struggle, were we able to correct our course and publish our international statement, “Down With the Lockdowns!” (see page 5). This remains the only Marxist position worldwide opposing the lockdowns on the basis of a revolutionary class-struggle program.

Throughout the last two years, in many countries demonstrations against lockdown measures and threats of mass layoffs in the name of mandatory vaccination were opposed and spit on by the liberal-reformist misleaders of the proletariat and the “socialist” left, who often called for them to be crushed by the state. One of the most polarizing was the truckers movement in Canada, which was condemned by the bourgeois press internationally and by many “socialist” groups as fascist and reactionary simply for opposing the government and mass layoffs. In contrast, our article titled “Labour Must Defend the Truckers!” (see page 7) took a stand in defense of the demonstrations while counterposing the need for a communist opposition to the capitalist government.

* * *

China is center stage in world events, as the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic and the main target of U.S. imperialism, which is determined to maintain hegemony over the Pacific region with the help of Japanese imperialism and its other allies. The last two years have been marked by a dramatic escalation of the U.S.-led war drive against the People’s Republic of China. The imperialists’ final goal is the overthrow of the gains of the 1949 Revolution, just as they accomplished 30 years ago in the USSR. In China itself, the ruling

Communist Party (CCP) bureaucracy has responded to the Covid-19 crisis by imposing the most drastic and brutal lockdowns on earth, which are a disaster for workers and peasants and a threat to the very survival of the People’s Republic.

Internationally, two false programs regarding China dominate the left. On the one hand, particularly in the Western world, the majority of fake-socialist groups consider China to be capitalist and even imperialist, a counterrevolutionary position that negates the need to defend the gains of the 1949 Revolution and capitulates to the imperialist great powers. On the other hand, many so-called communists (and even “Trotskyists”) hail the Stalinist bureaucracy and promote the false idea that opposing the CCP amounts to opposing China. With the outbreak of Covid, these two opposite wings met in common agreement by hailing the CCP’s brutal lockdowns as a “model” for the world. Our organization jumped on this opportunist bandwagon.

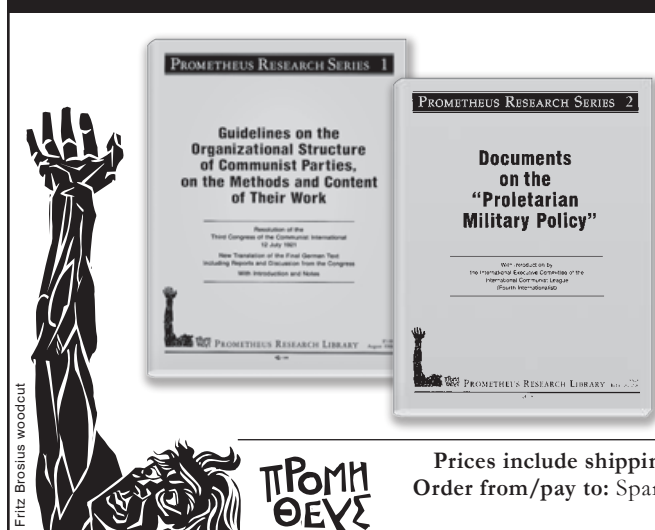
Against all these political dead ends and correcting our previous erroneous course, our article “Pandemic in China: Trotskyism vs. Stalinism” (see back page) reaffirms the only program that can clear the way for international socialism—Trotskyism. The article opposes the CCP’s disastrous “zero-Covid” policy, combining the unconditional military defense of China with the struggle to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy through a political revolution in order to replace its rule with an internationalist, truly revolutionary leadership.

* * *

As the pandemic seemed to be slowing in early 2022, Russian troops crossed the Ukrainian border in an all-out invasion. The outbreak of war in Europe has brought to the fore the threat of a global confrontation between the imperialist powers and Russia. Years of NATO provocations, including the 2014 U.S.-orchestrated regime change in Kiev, provoked this war, which constitutes the first significant pushback against the U.S.-dominated world order since the fall of the USSR.

The imperialist bourgeoisies, outraged at this challenge to their exclusive right to pillage Ukraine, made yet another attempt at pushing national unity to rally their populations behind NATO and behind Ukraine. In lockstep, the leaders

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(See page 55 for international addresses.)

of trade unions and workers parties, along with most pseudo-Marxists, came to the defense of Ukraine against “Putin’s war,” demanding the defeat and withdrawal of the Russian army. This is a call for the victory of Zelensky’s government and open support to the imperialists’ aims in the region. Others on the left, particularly in countries under the imperialist yoke, have come out in support of Russia under the false claim that it is waging a legitimate war of defense against the imperialists.

Our statement on the war in Ukraine, “Ukrainian, Russian Workers: Turn the Guns Against Your Rulers!” (see page 3), is a direct application of V.I. Lenin’s program during World War I. Despite the help Ukraine is receiving from the imperialists, this is a war between two non-imperialist countries. Ukraine is not fighting a just struggle of national liberation but is instead fighting to enslave the country to the U.S./EU/NATO imperialists. Russia is not fighting a legitimate war of national defense against imperialism but is fighting to bring Ukraine back into its sphere of influence. In the struggle over which gang of thugs will lord it over Ukraine, Marxists must fight for revolutionary defeatism, i.e., to transform this reactionary war between nations into a revolutionary civil war against the Ukrainian and Russian capitalists.

As Lenin showed over a century ago, this means, particularly in the imperialist countries, waging the most resolute struggle against the leadership of the workers movement, which subordinates the working class to the aims and interests of its exploiters. In Germany, where the polarization in the left over the war has been particularly acute, our comrades have been at the forefront of the struggle against social-chauvinist and pacifist deceivers among the left. Their article, “Throw the EU/NATO Supporters Out of the Left!”, along with their proposal for a motion at the Die Linke party congress (see pages 11 and 13), is a concrete and living application of Lenin’s struggle to split the workers movement

between authentic revolutionaries on one side and reformists, social-chauvinists and pacifists on the other.

Lenin’s struggle during WWI was crucially directed against the centrists—that is, those who are revolutionary in words but social-chauvinist in deeds. In this spirit, this issue includes a substantial polemic against the Internationalist Group (IG), “Centrism and the War in Ukraine” (see page 16). While the IG is numerically insignificant, its program and actions, which have the appearance of orthodox Marxism, in fact capitulate to and cover for social-chauvinism. Just like Karl Kautsky during WWI, such centrism is the biggest obstacle to cohering an authentically revolutionary nucleus.

* * *

It is no secret for anyone following our organization that we have been conducting intense internal discussions and qualitative political realignments over the last few years. (This is reflected in the changed composition of the *Spartacist* Editorial Board.) One of the most politically substantial pieces in this issue of *Spartacist* is the document adopted at the December 2021 National Conference of the Spartacist League/Britain. “In Defence of the Revolutionary Programme (II)” (see page 28) is a powerful reaffirmation of revolutionary Marxism against the course followed by our British section during the years when Jeremy Corbyn was leader of the Labour Party.

The document contains indispensable elements of Leninism for anyone seeking to be a revolutionary in Britain, or anywhere else for that matter. In the context of the growing popularity of trade unionism in the U.S., Britain and elsewhere, it is worth highlighting the document’s insistence on the need for revolutionary leadership in the unions as opposed to the reformist program of simply pressuring unions to be more militant (see the section “A Very British Reformism,” page 43). Against the reformism of the British Labour Party and the “socialist” left that revolves around it, “In Defence of the Revolutionary Programme (II)” applies to today’s reality key lessons of Bolshevism, the early Comintern and Trotskyism on the questions of the state, imperialism and the revolutionary party.

* * *

Whether it is the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war, inflation, China or any other burning issue facing the proletariat today, there is one unavoidable question connecting them all: *the question of revolutionary leadership*. There is a profound contradiction between the urgent needs of the working class internationally and the state of its leadership. Having faced attacks on their living standards for decades, workers everywhere now face massive inflation, the threat of war and economic crisis. But the leadership of the class in all countries is made up of the worst sort of treacherous, anti-revolutionary scoundrels. And the ultimate aim of the fake socialists is to advise and pressure the existing leadership of the working class, or to simply dress up in new clothes the same dead ends of the past.

We, the ICL, are dedicated to resolving this contradiction through a resolute struggle for leadership of the international proletariat, based on a clear program for the establishment of the world socialist order. We hope this issue of *Spartacist* can further the necessary political clarity to advance in this direction. ■

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China...

(continued from page 56)

International Communist League was no exception, and it is worth quoting at length what we wrote in “China Mobilizes to Contain Coronavirus” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 1171, 6 March 2020):

“Despite initial bureaucratic inertia and outright cover-ups, Beijing has made Herculean efforts at containment through quarantines, a regional lockdown of some 60 million people, the severe curtailing of travel and the closure of factories and schools in much of the country.

“China’s government has also allocated significant medical and other resources to fight the disease. These measures appear to have had some success, and the rate of new cases within the country has begun to fall. The head of the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) delegation that went to Wuhan and other cities in China praised its ‘all-government, all-society approach’ as ‘probably the most ambitious and agile’ in history....

“Thus, these measures taken by China to combat COVID-19, although belated, have been vitally necessary.”

These lines are nothing but an uncritical endorsement of the policies of the CCP. Uncritical, since our only criticisms of the bureaucracy were that its measures were “belated” and followed attempts at a cover-up, but when “Beijing” (i.e., the central government) finally moved, our differences vanished. Grotesquely, the article relies on the W.H.O., an arm of the imperialist UN, to sing the praises of the CCP. We repudiate this article, which was a betrayal of Trotskyist principle.

While the capitalist countries have moved away from lockdowns toward a strategy of “living with the virus,” the CCP is firmly clinging to its reactionary “zero-Covid” strategy. This now provokes the anger of the imperialist powers, who feel its impact on their economic growth. In lockstep, the majority of the “socialist” left internationally has now either flipped 180 degrees to condemn China’s policies or is simply remaining silent on the issue. But for most fake socialists worldwide, this situation is very awkward since the CCP is implementing what they have been advocating for over two and a half years: harsh and long lockdowns until cases are zero.



Alden/Bloomberg

Xi Jinping in Davos, January 2017. In defense of its privileges, CCP bureaucracy opposes fight for world socialism, pursues anti-revolutionary “peaceful co-existence” with imperialists.



Alamy

Communist troops march through Beijing, 1949. Chinese Revolution expropriated capitalists and landlords, but workers state was bureaucratically deformed from inception.

Since April 2021, the ICL has made a clear case as to why the proletariat in capitalist countries must oppose the lockdowns, how its interests collide at every step with bourgeois class rule and why the capitalist response to the pandemic is counterposed to any progressive struggle by the working class to better its conditions (see “Down With the Lockdowns!”, page 5). We now apply this basic approach to China. The main argument that has been made for supporting the Chinese lockdowns, including within our organization, is that since China is not a capitalist state, its lockdowns have a more progressive character than those of the capitalists. It is true that the collectivized core of the economy allows China to confront the threat of Covid-19 by mobilizing resources on a scale impossible in capitalist countries. However, these resources are not mobilized in accordance with the interests of the working class but according to the interests of the privileged bureaucratic caste that has ruled the People’s Republic of China (PRC) since its founding. This bureaucracy is fundamentally of the same nature as that which ruled the Soviet Union since 1924 and which was best analyzed by Leon Trotsky. He explained:

“The bureaucracy is not a ruling class. But the further development of the bureaucratic regime can lead to the inception of a new ruling class: not organically, through degeneration, but through counterrevolution. We call the Stalinist apparatus *centrist* precisely because it fulfills a dual role; *today*, when there is no *longer* a Marxist leadership, and none forthcoming *as yet*, it defends the proletarian dictatorship with its own methods; but these methods are such as facilitate the victory of the enemy *tomorrow*. Whoever fails to understand this dual role of Stalinism in the USSR has understood nothing.”

—“The Class Nature of the Soviet State” (October 1933)

The social roots of the bureaucracy lie in the backwardness and material poverty of an isolated workers state. With the development of the productive forces too low to provide for everyone’s wants, the bureaucracy derives its power from its role as the arbiter of scarcity, deciding who has and who goes without. As opposed to a ruling capitalist class, whose power is based on its ownership of the means of production, the bureaucracy exists as a parasite on the collectivized property forms, making its rule unstable and brittle. It is

caught between two powerful forces: the giant Chinese proletariat, which is necessarily hostile to the privileges of the ruling clique, and world imperialism, whose goal is the final overthrow of the gains of the 1949 Revolution (and the CCP itself) for the purpose of pillaging China.

The maintenance of the bureaucracy's privileged position forces it to balance untenable contradictions. On the one hand, it will defend state property "only to the extent that it fears the proletariat" (Trotsky). On the other, it seeks to appease world imperialism through concessions, in the pursuit of an illusory "peaceful coexistence." The primary goal of the bureaucracy is always to navigate these contradictions with the purpose of maintaining its privileged position, a task rendered particularly difficult in times of acute social crisis like the pandemic.

The Trotskyist approach to the pandemic in China starts with the unconditional defense of the collectivized forms of property from internal and external counterrevolutionary threats. It is also based on the understanding that the rule of the CCP bureaucracy, by suppressing the proletariat, fostering inequalities and rejecting international revolution, fuels social, economic, military and political threats to the workers state. When a crisis grows from the fertile ground plowed by the bureaucracy, the CCP responds with its short-sighted and brutal methods, which in turn sow the seeds of the next crisis. Therefore, the Trotskyist defense of the workers state—whether in a pandemic, wartime or any other crisis—is based not on supporting the policies of the bureaucracy but on the struggle to overthrow the anti-socialist, bureaucratic CCP clique through a proletarian political revolution, and to replace its rule with workers councils led by a revolutionary, authentically Leninist party. Such a perspective is obviously irreconcilable with supporting the CCP's reckless and anti-proletarian "dynamic zero-Covid" policies.

The Social Causes of the Pandemic

The social crisis in China triggered by Covid-19 is rooted in the general want, oppression and barbarity brought about by decaying world imperialism and, as in every other country, takes its particular national physiognomy from domestic social and economic conditions. Before hailing the "Her-

culean efforts" of Beijing in response to the outbreak of Covid-19, those who call themselves socialists might want to reflect on the social conditions at the root of the current crisis. Social and living conditions in China have improved tremendously in the last decades, made possible by the gains of the 1949 Revolution. But the rule of the bureaucracy has meant that the growth of productivity and wealth has disproportionately been funneled into its own hands and those of a rising domestic capitalist class. This limits and undermines social progress and has laid the ground for the current crisis.

The bureaucracy has explicitly argued from the beginning that lockdowns are the only option given the poor condition of the health care system. For decades, the PRC had free, universal health care under conditions of "socialized misery." But the market reforms pursued by successive CCP leaderships over decades have privatized and starved health care. While the bureaucracy claims that 95 percent of Chinese citizens are covered by medical insurance, this is a deception: for hundreds of millions of Chinese workers and peasants, seeing a doctor or receiving basic medical treatment is either a very expensive nightmare or simply impossible. The various insurance schemes usually cover only a fraction of costs, and it is common for families to have to spend lifelong accumulated savings for treatment.

In the countryside, many regions do not have even basic medical infrastructure, and the hated *hukou* household registration system means the vast majority of migrant workers in the cities receive little or no treatment where they work. China has a very low number of doctors (in 2017, 2 per 1,000 people compared with 2.6 in the U.S. and 4.9 in the European Union [EU]); a low number of nurses (2.7 per 1,000 compared with 15.7 in the U.S. and 9.1 in the EU); and a low number of critical care beds (3.6 for 100,000 compared with 25.8 in the U.S. and 11.5 in the EU). In 2019, China spent \$535 per capita on health care, compared with almost \$12,000 in the U.S. and \$3,500 in Europe.

The scarcity of medical resources means that the health care system is rife with corruption and profiteering. In order to make up for the scarcity of real medical services, particularly in rural regions, the bureaucracy openly promotes traditional medicine. In the land of "socialism with Chinese



Aijibe/AFP



Wang Tianzhu
Socialized misery under Mao (above), bloodsucking medicine-for-profit under "market reforms" (right: Shenzhen hospital, 2008). CCP rule cannot provide decent health care for toilers.

characteristics,” adequate medical treatment is reserved for those capitalists and privileged bureaucrats who can afford it, while poor people often simply die of treatable diseases.

Having devastated the health care system, the market reforms have also privatized real estate in cities, which is under the control of parasitic companies whose sole purpose is speculation, as exemplified by the recent downfall of the Evergrande Group. For many urban working people, housing is tremendously expensive, leading to overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions that necessarily fuel the spread of Covid-19 and other diseases.

The other factor leading to the spread of Covid-19 and generally affecting the health of working people is the workplace. Central to the market reforms has been the opening of China to foreign investment and the conscious development, through the encouragement of the CCP, of a domestic capitalist class. One of the main consequences of this policy has been the passage of hundreds of millions of peasants into the proletariat. While this is a historically progressive development, these workers make up a vast pool of cheap labor for capitalist companies.

Brutal working conditions are widespread in China—as seen in the vicious “996” system of 72-hour workweeks—and the unprecedented rise of China is fueled by superexploitation of workers. The state-owned enterprises have not been spared the harsh conditions. Many workplaces operate under a quasi-military system of labor, approved and implemented by the CCP-controlled trade unions and party committees in the companies, under which, needless to say, workers have no say on health and safety or their general working conditions. Unemployment and homelessness are a common plague in the People’s Republic. Air pollution caused by bureaucratic mismanagement and unrestricted capitalist pillage has become such a problem in large cities that respiratory disease occurs at a much higher rate than in most countries, which places large sections of the population at greater risk of complications from Covid-19.

This is the tinderbox that was lit by the outbreak of Covid-19. As for the origins of Covid itself, there is still a heated dispute over the question. The bureaucracy is adamant that the “lab leak” theory is pure lie and conspiracy theory. Lawyering for the CCP, the Internationalist Group (IG) has written a long piece against this theory, implying that raising any doubt about the bureaucracy’s narrative means attacking China (“U.S. Big Lie Over Wuhan Is War Propaganda,” internationalist.org, December 2021). There is no scientific consensus as to the origins of Covid-19. But even if we take the IG and the CCP’s preferred version that it originated in the Wuhan wildlife food market—and this is the most likely one—it is still just as incriminating of the bureaucracy! Lack of hygiene and controls and the mixing of wild animals in highly dense urban areas have already led to outbreaks in the past, as in 2002 with SARS. The outbreak of Covid-19 was not an “act of God” but was totally preventable, starting with cracking down on wildlife markets selling live bats in major urban centers.



Qilai Shen/Bloomberg

Above: Evergrande luxury apartments under construction, Jiangsu province. Below: Protests denouncing “Evergrande fraud” swept Chinese cities in September 2021. CCP privatizations cause disaster.

Twitter



The false view promoted by the CCP and its apologists is that its lockdowns and policies are the best and only solution to confront the pandemic. The truth is that the current economic, social and health crisis is in fact largely the *result* of the bureaucracy’s policies.

How to Address the Social Causes of the Pandemic

The most immediate measure to address the underlying social causes of the crisis is to drastically reduce inequalities within China and redistribute resources in order to improve living conditions. For example, liquidating the capitalist class and confiscating the wealth of the bureaucracy could fund massive improvements in the health care system, particularly in rural regions, with the short-term aim of providing free health care of the highest possible quality on an egalitarian basis. Living conditions could be improved with the immediate redistribution of housing stock according to social needs, privileging workers instead of well-connected bureaucrats. To have safe workplaces, workers need to control health and safety. But all of these elementary and essential measures directly clash with the bureaucracy. This is not only because they mean an open repudiation of decades of bankrupt policies; more fundamentally, they run directly against the interests of the bureaucracy, whose entire existence is based on ensuring material advantages

for themselves at the expense of the working class and peasantry. Furthermore, many individual bureaucrats are related to or are themselves capitalists.

While redistributing the existing resources can provide immediate relief, the only solution to break out of the material backwardness of China is the international extension of socialist revolution, particularly to the imperialist countries. The transition to socialism can only be assured with an international planned economy, in which the threat of imperialism has been removed and development is based on the highest level of technology and labor productivity, which currently is monopolized by the most powerful imperialist countries. Such a perspective can only be realized through the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat in China and internationally, a perspective that is antithetical to the Stalinist bureaucracy because it would unleash forces leading to the overthrow of the privileged caste. This is why the hallmark of Stalinism has always been the program of building “socialism in one country,” which goes hand in hand with the dogma that “China does not export revolution.”

This anti-Marxist program is a reflection of the position and interests of the bureaucracy and is conceived explicitly to appease imperialism. Limiting socialist construction within set national borders is a pledge to the imperialist powers that the workers state will not be a threat to the international capitalist order. This program has led to the strangulation of the Chinese (1927), German (1933), French (1936 and 1968), Spanish (1937) and Indonesian (1965) revolutions, and more. But as Trotsky explained in regard to the USSR:

“For the bourgeoisie—fascist as well as democratic—isolated counterrevolutionary exploits of Stalin do not suffice; it needs a complete counterrevolution in the relations of property and



Moscow, August 1991: Boris Yeltsin's counterrevolutionary coup. As in USSR, the alternatives for China are workers political revolution against Stalinist bureaucracy or capitalist counterrevolution.

the opening of the Russian market. So long as this is not the case, the bourgeoisie considers the Soviet state hostile to it. And it is right.”

—“Not a Workers’ and Not a Bourgeois State?”
(November 1937)

This totally applies to China and is at the heart of the renewed U.S.-led imperialist drive against the PRC. No matter how “reliable” and “moderate” the CCP bureaucracy presents itself, no matter how much it represses the Chinese working class, in the eyes of the international bourgeoisie it will always be stained by the mark of social revolution. Far from securing the gains of the Chinese Revolution, the CCP rejects the only way to truly guarantee their defense: the international extension of the revolution. This basic cornerstone of Trotskyism was decisively proved in the negative with the capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet Union in 1991-92. Similarly in China, either CCP bureaucratic rule will be swept away and replaced by a revolutionary leadership or else counterrevolution will bring another “century of humiliation.”

The CCP's Response

The CCP and its apologists are singing the praises of China's “dynamic zero-Covid” approach. Here is one of the countless examples to be found in the CCP press:

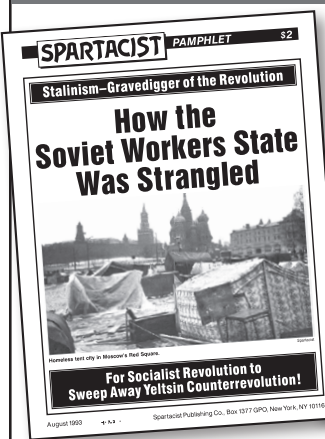
“Wang Wenbin, spokesperson of China's Foreign Ministry, said at Friday's regular media briefing that the reason why China adopted the dynamic zero-COVID approach is because ‘we put 1.4 billion people's lives and health before anything else. It's a testament to the governance philosophy of the CPC and the Chinese government, which is to give top priority to protecting our people and their lives.’”

—*Global Times* (19 June 2022)

The criteria the CCP uses to gloat about the “success” of the party are the low mortality rate, the suppression of the virus inside China's borders and continued economic growth. If your whole approach is dictated by ticking these boxes, the CCP has indeed done great.

But this is not how revolutionaries evaluate the successes and failures of a workers state. In response to the Stalinist bureaucracy boasting about the industrialization of the USSR

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and the successful liquidation of the kulaks (rich peasants), Trotsky explained:

“There is no other government in the world in whose hands the fate of the whole country is concentrated to such a degree. The successes and failures of an individual capitalist depend, not wholly of course, but to a very considerable and sometimes decisive degree, upon his personal qualities. *Mutatis mutandis*, the Soviet government occupies in relation to the whole economic system the position which a capitalist occupies in relation to a single enterprise. The centralized character of the national economy converts the state power into a factor of enormous significance. But for that very reason ***the policy of the government must be judged, not by summarized results, not by naked statistical data, but by the specific role which conscious foresight and planned leadership have played in achieving these results.*** [our emphasis]

—*The Revolution Betrayed* (1936)

Weighed on the scale of “conscious foresight and planned leadership,” the CCP’s response to the pandemic is a failure at every level. As explained above, the policies of successive CCP regimes have greatly increased the risk of the emergence of a new dangerous virus, of its rapid propagation to an epidemic level and of the collapse of the health care system. As for its response since the outbreak of the virus, the CCP’s actions have at every step exacerbated the crisis.

Its immediate reaction to the outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan, as widely recognized (even by the pro-CCP *Workers Vanguard* article), was one of cover-ups, denials and crack-downs on those raising the alarm.¹ As it became obvious that the virus was sparking a major social crisis with hospitals in Wuhan overflowing and popular discontent rising, the CCP drastically changed its stance, introducing draconian measures and mobilizing massive resources to suppress the outbreak.

The bureaucracy’s measures do indeed suppress the propagation of the virus (for a time). These are driven not by some moral commitment to “save the people” but by a need to suppress the social contradictions highlighted and exacerbated by the virus. Covid-19 posed in a burning way the social and economic needs of the proletariat: better health care, housing, working conditions. But these needs collided with the realities of China, an isolated workers state plagued by scarcity, bureaucratism, inequality and a parasitic political regime.

What was posed for the working class was to tie the immediate struggle against the threat posed by Covid-19 to the struggle to resolve the social conditions at the root of the crisis. For the bureaucracy, what was posed was to contain the outbreak in order to maintain social stability, assure the CCP’s political control over the response to Covid-19 and, centrally, crush any social aspirations of the working class that would put its rule in question. These were and still are the political considerations guiding the bureaucracy’s response to Covid-19 outbreaks. The one new element is that, now that it is heavily invested in the “dynamic zero-Covid” policy that proves the “superiority” and “omniscience” of the Xi Jinping-led CCP, no turning back is possible without major discredit to the regime. That said, as the disastrous consequences of its policy pile up, the bureaucracy may very well be forced to make an about-face, as is characteristic of Stalinist zigzags.

The CCP claims its policies are put in place to protect



Frayer/Getty

Beijing, February 2020: Woman accepts package through opening in barricade in front of residence under CCP’s draconian “zero-Covid” policy.

the people. But why is it that the people are forcibly locked in their homes against their will, subject to the surveillance of drones, robots and neighborhood committees? Why is it that when the people raise criticisms, complaints and suggestions, they are subject to total censorship and sometimes imprisonment? Is it for the people that workers are being locked in their factories, prevented from getting home? If “dynamic zero-Covid” is supposed to be “for the people,” why is it being implemented *against* the people?

The answer is simple: the CCP bureaucracy’s entire existence is based on oppressing the people. Its accumulation of privileges is outright theft, an abuse of power that flies in the face of all socialist principles. Since its rule is based on absolute political control of the governing apparatus, any independent expression of the workers’ needs and interests necessarily challenges the legitimacy of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It cannot let the workers speak their minds because the first words out of their mouths would be a condemnation

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1. We are eagerly awaiting the article promised in the IG’s December 2021 “lab leak” piece, which will apparently expose “the Big Lie” that “Beijing early on supposedly tried to hide, cover up errors and repress information about the pandemic.”

of inequality, bureaucratic mismanagement and political repression. For the sake of its own maintenance, the bureaucracy suppresses any sense of initiative, critical thought or constructive input from the masses of workers.

The CCP has indeed been successful in keeping the death rate low. But what this statistic hides is the real horror caused by the bureaucracy's policies. It conceals the hundreds of millions locked up in their homes for weeks on end without proper food, medication or other basic necessities. Hospitals overflowing, refusing treatment, with medical staff pressed to the extreme limit. Imprisonment in Kafkaesque quarantine centers, separating families, including children from their parents. Workers chained to their machines and locked up in factories. Unemployment and the devastation of small businesses. Widespread censorship and arrest of anyone who dares question any of this. And all done in the name of building "socialism with Chinese characteristics," which can only contribute to discrediting socialism in the eyes of workers and the poor and help the camp of counterrevolution.

The Trotskyist Answer

Contrary to the lies of the CCP, it is perfectly possible to protect the population's health and defend the People's Republic without the brutal and anti-proletarian methods imposed by the bureaucracy. Fighting Covid-19 is necessarily a political task. The CCP mobilized the population behind Chinese nationalism and support for the infallibility of Xi Jinping. For Trotskyists, the struggle against Covid-19 starts under the banner of socialist revolutions in the capitalist countries, unconditional defense of China against counterrevolution and political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucrats. Here is what authentic communists must fight for in China:

Down with the lockdowns! Mandatory vaccination now! The CCP bureaucracy is perfectly willing to lock up millions for months with endless mass testing, but they won't even take the basic measure of vaccinating the entire population. While Shanghai was under a brutal lockdown for over two months, 38 percent of its population aged 60 and above was not fully vaccinated.

For workers control of safety and production! Workers must be the ones deciding what is safe and how factories should be run, not some pen-pushing bureaucrat or blood-sucking capitalist. **For trade unions free of bureaucratic**



Visual China Group

Thousands of heroic nurses were mobilized to fight Covid under nationalist bureaucratic CCP leadership. Above: Farewell ceremony in Xiamen, April 2022.

control and committed to defending collectivized property!

For the revision of the planned economy from top to bottom in the interests of producers and consumers! This must ensure the establishment of free health care and education for all, as well as quality housing for working people. **Away with the hukou system!**

Expropriate the domestic capitalist class! These leeches are the embryos of capitalist counterrevolution, incubated by the CCP bureaucracy. **End the "one country, two systems" policy by expropriating the Hong Kong tycoons!**

Workers of the world, unite! The ally of the Chinese working class is the international proletariat, crucially in the imperialist centers, the U.S., Germany and Japan. The bureaucracy's reactionary international policy of conciliation and capitulation to the imperialists must be replaced by the policy of proletarian internationalism. Publish the complete diplomatic correspondence of Beijing. **Down with secret diplomacy!**

Oust the Stalinist bureaucracy! For a Leninist egalitarian party, part of a reformed Fourth International! The road forward for the Chinese workers and peasants is that of Lenin and Trotsky, not Mao or Stalin. This means **soviet democracy** and **revolutionary internationalism** on the model of the great 1917 October Revolution! ■

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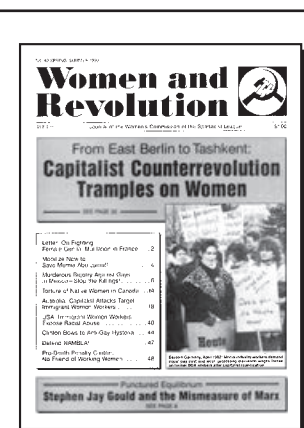
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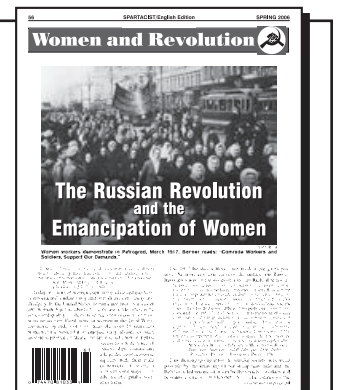
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Pandemic in China

Trotskyism vs. Stalinism

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2019, China has been the scene of some of the most brutal and dystopian lockdowns in the world, with tens of millions locked up for weeks on end, lacking the most basic necessities and under constant police repression. It has also been the scene of the most impressive mobilization of resources to fight the virus: production of health care equipment was dramatically ramped up, hospitals were built in a matter of days, and thousands of medical staff were transferred to crisis areas.

This highlights the deeply contradictory nature of China, which is not a capitalist state but a deformed workers state. On the one hand, the state still rests on the gains of the 1949 Revolution, which liberated the country from imperialism and established a planned economy. On the other, the country is ruled by a bureaucratic caste led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that oppresses the working class and undermines these gains. With the U.S. and its allies' constant ramping up of military and economic threats against China, and with the social contradictions within the country heating up to a boiling point, it is more important than ever for Marxists to have a correct understanding of China and to fight for a program in the pandemic that will further the cause of Chinese workers, as well as that of the entire international working class.

So far, the Marxist left has utterly failed at this task. During the initial phase of the pandemic, the CCP's "zero-Covid" policy of strict lockdowns, travel bans and massive testing was the model for the whole left, from Stalinists to social democrats to so-called Trotskyists. As the decaying capitalist classes around the world were utterly incapable of doing anything properly, the Chinese bureaucracy was hailed internationally as showing the way. The

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STR/CNS/AFP

Above: Covid quarantine center under construction, Hebei province, January 2021. Below: Police descend on traveler suspected of Covid infection, Jiangsu province, August 2021.

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