
Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League

—a bulletin series of opponent material

NUMBER 11

David North's "ICFI"

From Support to Capitalist Counterrevolution in the USSR to Great Russian Chauvinism

Introduction

"Why Marxists Do Not Raise the Call 'Restore the Soviet Union'"

Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 638 and 639,
2 and 16 February 1996

"The Spartacists Reject the Slogan of the Restoration of the USSR"

Translated from *Rabochii-Internatsionalist*, bulletin of the
Chelyabinsk Bureau of the ICFI, May 1996

"Afghanistan, Poland, Chechnya 'ICFI'/Northites: Counterfeit Trotskyists"

By the Spartacist League, 7 October 1997

Spartacist Publishing Company
Box 1377 GPO
New York, New York 10116
USA



October 1997
whole no. 11
US\$1.50 Cdn\$2 Mex\$5
FF8 DM2.50 £1 L.2.300 zł2
Reais.75 Rand3.50 ¥150 A\$2

Introduction

Since 1975, the Spartacist League has published several bulletins entitled *Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League*, containing material critical of the SL written by ostensibly Marxist opponent organizations. Through this series we have sought to make available, to our members and others interested in our organization, representative arguments against our politics, particularly by left-sounding centrists and critics.

In keeping with this tradition, we are printing an exchange with David North's "International Committee of the Fourth International" (ICFI). The first item in this bulletin was written in response to a letter from a correspondent in the former USSR, and originally appeared in our Russian-language journal, *Biulleten Spartakovtsev* (Supplement No. 12, November 1995). A translation was published in *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 638 and 639, 2 and 16 February 1996. The second item is our translation of an article that appeared in *Rabochii-Internatsionalist* (*Worker Internationalist*), the Northites' Russian-language publication. The Spartacist League's response to this article makes up the last item in this bulletin.

The "ICFI," headed by U.S. Workers League *líder máximo* David North, is one of the decomposition products of the now-infamous Gerry Healy's "international" organization of the same name. We have characterized charlatans like North and the late Healy as political bandits because of their manifest willingness to say literally anything, taking widely divergent political positions to serve their own convenient and grotesque opportunistic appetites. For example, in 1979 their "international" tendency extolled the murder of 21 Iraqi CPers by Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime as a blow against "counterrevolutionary Stalinism." Heralding the murder of Communist worker-militants paid big dividends for the Healyites, who raked in millions in pounds sterling for their services on behalf of

various oil-rich Middle East dictators.

Consummate hatred for the Soviet Union has been the one political constant in Healy/North's "ICFI." They supported every imperialist-inspired "movement" that aimed at destroying the remaining gains of the 1917 October Revolution, from Khomeini's viciously anti-communist "Islamic revolution" to the barbarous CIA-backed *mujahedin* in Afghanistan, to Lech Walesa's company "union" Solidarność in Poland. But after the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state through capitalist counterrevolution, the "ICFI" refused to call for the military defense of Chechnya and the defeat of the Russian army in that neocolonial war. Thus, for the first time in their history, the Northites came out for the Russian army—now that it is the army of a capitalist Russia!

Other bulletins in this series with material on Healy/North are *Hate Trotskyism* No. 3, which contains Tim Wohlforth's 1973 pamphlet, *What Is Spartacist?* This pamphlet was written by the then-head of the Workers League before he was unceremoniously dumped by Healy. Bulletin No. 6, "From Malice to Provocation," is centered on the events in East Germany in 1989-90, and contains material by North's German group, the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA), as well as by the German branch of the "International Bolshevik Tendency" (IBT), and the late Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat. Bulletin No. 10 contains articles by the IBT and North's Workers League, now flying under the flag "Socialist Equality Party," on the matter of the defection from the ICL by several longtime members, who now call themselves the Internationalist Group. Finally, readers may be interested in the article "David North 'Abolishes' the Right to Self-Determination," published in *Workers Vanguard* Nos. 626 and 627, 28 July and 25 August 1995.

—14 October 1997

Why Marxists Do Not Raise the Call “Restore the Soviet Union”

Capitalist Counterrevolution and the Russian Stalinist “Patriots”

In your letter, you advocate the slogan of “restoration of the USSR,” which is raised by a number of Russian-nationalist groups which originated as splinters of the defunct Stalinist bureaucracy.

There are a number of considerations, both conjunctural and historical, to be addressed in explaining why proletarian internationalists would not raise this call today. First and foremost for Trotskyists is a correct understanding of the state. Russia, the Ukraine and the other states on the territories of the former Soviet Union are bourgeois states that appeared as a result of capitalist counterrevolution. We stand for socialist revolution in these countries, that is, for mobilizing the working class under the leadership of an internationalist revolutionary party, to sweep away these capitalist regimes. This position has been in the forefront of our propaganda in the former USSR since we drew the conclusion that the counterrevolution which took the ascendancy in August 1991 had, in the absence of working-class resistance, gone on in the year that followed to destroy the remnants of the Soviet degenerated workers state.

As we explained in “How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled,” responsibility for this world-historic defeat lies above all with the Stalinists. We noted that the preservation of proletarian power depends principally on the *consciousness* and *organization* of the working class. At the time of the October Revolution, this was in its quintessence embodied in the Bolshevik Party’s leadership, which was imbued with the Marxist understanding that an isolated workers state—moreover, an economically weak and backward one—could only survive for any length of time by spreading the revolution internationally.

The kind of revolutionary vanguard party which Lenin built in tsarist Russia did not exist elsewhere in Europe in 1914, when the outbreak of World War I signaled what Trotsky later called the epoch of capitalism’s death agony. Reaction to the mass slaughter of the first imperialist world war combined with the inspiration of the Bolshevik Revolution produced revolutionary turmoil throughout Europe, centrally Germany, between 1918 and 1923. However, given the weakness and inexperience of the nascent Communist parties, the European bourgeoisies were able to restore order—with the indispensable aid of the social-democratic bureaucracies.

Thus Soviet Russia emerged from the Civil War bled white—its industry in a shambles—internationally isolated and besieged by world imperialism. Many of its most conscious worker cadres had been lost on the fronts of the Civil War. Decades of Stalinist falsification to the contrary, at that time not only the Bolshevik leadership but the mass of Soviet workers understood that extension of the revolution was critical, particularly through the seizure of power by the German proletariat, the strongest in Europe. The definitive defeat of the anticipated German revolution in 1923, due to the conscious counterrevolutionary policies of the Social Democratic bureaucracy and the incapacity of the Communist leadership, led directly to the ascendancy of a conservative and nationalistic bureaucracy in the Soviet workers state. Trotsky later explained in his 1940 “Letter to the Workers of the USSR”:

“The October Revolution was accomplished for the sake of the toilers and not for the sake of new parasites. But due to the lag of the world revolution, due to the fatigue and, to a large measure, the backwardness of the Russian workers and especially the Russian peasants, there raised itself over the Soviet Republic and against its peoples a new oppressive and parasitic caste, whose leader is Stalin.”

In pushing the lie that Stalin was Lenin’s heir, the Stalinists are particularly wont to point to the fact that in 1921, at the Bolshevik Party’s 10th Conference debate on the role of the trade unions, Lenin himself headed the opposition to Trotsky, which included Stalin. (In any case, this was a conjunctural factional dispute carried out according to the norms of Bolshevik inner-party democracy, utterly counterposed to the bureaucratic and murderous conception of “factional struggle” later imposed under the Stalin regime.) However, as increasing evidence of bureaucratism and Great Russian chauvinism in the party, directly attributable to Stalin, came to the fore, Lenin definitively shifted over to Trotsky and sought to remove Stalin from his position of power as general secretary. Trotsky was not sufficiently vigorous or programmatically decisive in picking up the gauntlet, although the increasingly ill and incapacitated Lenin urgently urged him to do so.

By the time of Lenin’s death and the party’s 13th Conference in January 1924, Stalin was able to impose qualitative measures in the strangulation of the Bolshevik Party. He suppressed party democracy and with it, the revolutionary vanguard, the Trotskyist opposition. This was a defeat of that very force which was key to the maintenance and renewing of the revolutionary consciousness and organization which had made the October Revolution: revolutionary leadership. The party

could have been reformed at that time, but only through the decisive ousting of the bureaucratic clique consolidating around Stalin. Instead, Stalin prevailed. This defeat of the Bolshevik vanguard was soon given unambiguous programmatic expression, as Stalin/Bukharin abandoned the program of international proletarian revolution in favor of the utopian notion of “building socialism in one country.”

This anti-internationalist doctrine, which Khrushchev called “peaceful coexistence” and Brezhnev called “détente,” was the political hallmark of Stalin and his successors. In the '20s, this resulted in a disastrous careening from ultraleft adventures to class collaboration. Trotsky characterized Stalin as the “gravedigger” of revolutionary struggles abroad, from the second Chinese Revolution in 1925-27 and the British General Strike of 1926 (where the Comintern amnestied the labor traitors who ran the British trade unions) to Germany, where the CP, as well as the Social Democrats, allowed Hitler to come to power without firing a shot. Stalin may not have started out plotting to become the murderous head of an anti-revolutionary bureaucracy. But after the Kirov assassination and by the time of the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, the repeatedly purged gang remaining in power consciously beheaded the Spanish workers revolution, with the GPU butchering leftists who were seen as any sort of opposition to the popular-front *bourgeois* republican regime. The bureaucracy’s central role in strangling proletarian revolution was a policy carried out as a “guarantee” to Stalin’s then-allies, the “democratic” imperialist governments of France and Britain. And by selling out revolutionary opportunities at the end of WW II, particularly in Italy, France and Greece, Stalinism enabled capitalism in West Europe to survive.

Having initially argued for a perspective of reforming the CPSU from within, by the 1930s Trotsky believed that a *proletarian political revolution* was necessary in the USSR to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy and restore workers (soviet) democracy (see “Stalin Drowned the Communist Party of Lenin and Trotsky in Blood,” *Biulleten Spartakovtsev* No. 4, Spring 1993 [translated in Spartacist pamphlet, *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*, August 1993]). The founding document of the Trotskyist Fourth International stated:

“The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a *degenerated workers’ state*. Such is the social diagnosis. The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back into capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.”

— *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938)

These were the alternatives facing the Soviet proletariat up to the very moment when capitalist restoration triumphed. However, more than six decades of Stalinist bureaucratic rule politically disarmed and demoralized the Soviet working class in the face of the relentless and ultimately successful drive of the

imperialists to restore capitalism in Russia and the surrounding regions.

Real Soviets Are Organs for Workers Rule

So what does it mean when the degenerate Stalinist fragments of the gravediggers of the revolution, like the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and the Russian Communist Workers Party (RKRK), claim to be for “restoring the Soviet Union”? Certainly, amidst the all-sided economic and social devastation and the wars of national fratricide which now beset the peoples of the ex-USSR, the days not long past when there was order and the factories worked can look pretty good. But such nostalgia, which today is almost universally a harking back *not* to the October Revolution but to the Soviet Union under the Stalinists, is not a program for socialist revolution. We Trotskyists defended the Soviet Union against capitalist counterrevolution as long as it existed. This was based on its class character, the fact that it was a workers state, albeit bureaucratically degenerated since 1924. But the Stalinist remnants who helped undermine proletarian power are trying to salvage only the perks they once enjoyed as cogs in the bureaucratic machine which administered the degenerated workers state. And today they couldn’t care less whether their sinecures derive from a proletarian or a bourgeois state.

The reason for this is to be found in the character of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It was a parasitic caste that rested on the proletarian property forms of the Soviet degenerated workers state. It had a dual nature, compelled at times to defend those property forms in a bureaucratic fashion—with methods that, as Trotsky observed, “facilitate the victory of the enemy *tomorrow*” (“The Class Nature of the Soviet State,” October 1933)—while simultaneously undermining them because it also served as a transmission belt for the relentless pressures of the world capitalist market and world imperialism. But with capitalist counterrevolution, the Stalinist fragments who formerly advocated “socialism in one country” have simply become outright bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists. The RKRK, KPRF, [Nina Andreyeva’s] All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (VKPB), etc. are not parties based on the working class, even in the sense of the reformist British Labour Party, which is organizationally linked to the British trade unions. It is notable that all of the remaining Stalinist fragments on the territories of the ex-USSR are suffused with hostility to the proletariat; thus they all refused to support the strikes of the coal miners, or the strike of the air traffic controllers in August 1992.

The rump Stalinists have increasingly taken on the political coloration of the open reactionaries they tail, overlapping and interpenetrating with fascists, monarchists, the Orthodox Church and anti-Semitic chauvinists. The real content of their call for “restoration of the Soviet Union” is an appeal for a stronger Russian-dominated *capitalist* state, a modern version of the tsarist Russian empire. Gennadi Zyuganov, the chairman of the KPRF, is virtually an embodiment of

the “red-brown” coalition—co-chairman with General Aleksandr Sterligov of the fascistic Russian National Sobor at its June 1992 founding, and a prominent figure in all the actions of the “left-right” National Salvation Front from its founding in the summer of 1992 to its formal banning in October 1993. The March 1992 “Declaration on the Founding of the United Opposition,” signed by all the Stalinist leftovers as well as their monarchist and fascist bloc partners, formalized the repulsive “red-brown” coalition and called for “salvation of the Fatherland...on the basis of civil peace and national trust.”

One of the by-products of 70 years of Stalinist perversion of Marxism is the violence it has done to Marxist terminology. It is necessary to be clear about what we mean by words like “soviet,” “internationalism,” etc. One of the reasons for not using slogans like “reforge the Soviet Union” is that even many people who consider themselves Marxists do not understand that soviets were institutions for *workers rule*. Thus, in your letter you write that almost everywhere in the former USSR, except Russia, soviet power still exists, “at least formally.” But this is a Stalinist myth. The soviets that came to power in October 1917 were revolutionary organizations of the working class that wielded government power. They were organized on the basis of the principle of workers democracy—election of delegates at the workplace and subject to immediate recall, the free competition of parties and platforms which did not seek the counterrevolutionary overthrow of the state—and became the realization in practice of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat (for a fuller exposition of this question, see in particular Friedrich Engels’ 1891 introduction to Karl Marx’s *The Civil War in France*).

In the course of the Civil War in Russia, on account of the collapse of industry and the fact that proletarian cadre were needed at the front and to administer the young workers state, the role of the workers soviets declined. The preservation of the regime of workers democracy was in practice embodied in the Bolshevik Party, where free discussion was not only normal and practiced, but was the very wellspring which fed the party’s revolutionary fibre, notwithstanding the temporary ban on factions introduced at the 10th Party Congress in 1921. However, it was the onset of Thermidor in 1923-24 (see discussion below) which delivered the definitive blow to the soviets as instruments of the revolutionary will of the proletariat. The official “soviets,” just like the CPSU and the trade unions, became in reality simply part of the bureaucratic state apparatus.

The “soviets” which remain today—the name notwithstanding—are in fact nothing other than subordinate organs of the bourgeois state apparatus, in no wise different from the sort of municipal councils which have long existed in capitalist countries in the West. To talk about taking over “soviets” today can at best only be camouflage for some kind of bourgeois parliamentarism. Our task is not to get immersed in such reformist fantasies, but to make known the lessons of the collapse of the Soviet workers state so that we can

assemble the cadre for a party that can lead the masses to socialist revolution. And key to that is the struggle against all forms of nationalism.

The Bolshevik Party was proletarian-internationalist to the core—a fact that was reflected in its leadership. Alongside the Russians Lenin and Bukharin there were the Pole Dzerzhinsky, the Bulgarian Rakovsky, the Georgian Stalin, the Armenian Shaumyan, the Jews Sverdlov and Trotsky, and others. The Bolsheviks steadfastly opposed any form of national inequality or privilege, and supported the right of all nations within the tsarist prison house of peoples to self-determination, that is, the right to set up independent states. Support for this democratic right in no way represented support to bourgeois nationalism, but was the means by which to “take the national question off the agenda.” As Lenin emphasized, only by implacably opposing the chauvinism of its own bourgeoisie could the proletariat of the oppressor nation (i.e., the Great Russian proletariat) win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities, transcend national divisions and lay the basis for *class* unity.

Bolshevism and the National Question

Among the first acts of the revolutionary workers government that took power in October 1917 was a renunciation of the Great Russian annexationist policies of both tsarism and Kerensky’s Provisional Government. This was a critical factor in achieving victory in the bitter Civil War and extending workers rule beyond the area where it initially held sway, which was mainly limited to the great cities of northern and central Russia. Let’s look briefly, for example, at the case of the Ukraine, where successive tsarist governments had instituted forced Russification of the Ukrainian population, including banning Ukrainian literature and newspapers.

The new bourgeois-nationalist government of the Rada [council] sought to poison the Ukrainian masses against the Bolshevik government, which they portrayed as simply another version of Russian “imperialism.” But while the bourgeois Kerensky government in Russia had forcibly maintained the subject peoples within the confines of the tsarist empire, the Bolshevik practice was completely different. Their assertion of the right to self-determination, contained in such proclamations as the “Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia,” did much to neutralize the dirty work of the Ukrainian nationalists and enabled the Bolsheviks to pose more sharply the need for workers rule. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks did not bow down to the fiction of “self-determination” when it was bandied about by bourgeois nationalists as a cover for counter-revolutionary intrigues.

When Bolshevik forces fought to foster the growth of soviets on Ukrainian soil, the Rada—deeply hostile to the spectre of proletarian rule—made a military bloc with the counterrevolutionary White Guard generals Kornilov and Kaledin, and the French and British governments. A telegram to the Rada from the Bolshevik government sent in December 1917: (1) recognized “without reservations everything that pertains to the

Ukrainian people's national rights and national independence," while (2) simultaneously declaring war on the Rada "because of its attitude of unexampled betrayal of the revolution and support of the Cadets and the Kaledinites—the bitterest enemies of the national independence of the peoples of Russia, the enemies of Soviet power and of the working and exploited masses."

Over the next three years, as the Civil War raged, the Ukrainian bourgeoisie made a series of blocs with the White Guards and their imperialist allies. After a short interlude of a Ukrainian Soviet government, put in power with the assistance of the Red Army, German military forces swept across the Ukraine and installed a puppet government under the reactionary Cossack hetman [chief] Skoropadsky. With the collapse of German military power, the Ukrainian bourgeoisie turned to General Denikin, in alliance with French military detachments. In the final episode, the Ukrainian nationalist Petliura, notorious for carrying out massacres of the Jewish population, made a bloc with the reactionary Polish leader Pilsudski.

The intervention of the Red Army, as well as indignant revolutionary proletarian insurgency, was a critical factor in the extension of proletarian rule to such areas as the Ukraine and Georgia. For the Bolsheviks, the right to self-determination was a democratic right, subordinated to *class* considerations. In reality, the question of self-determination was inextricable from the life and death issues posed in the Civil War, as was evident in the Ukraine. Independence was a bogus issue. As the British historian E.H. Carr noted, "The choice was not between dependence and independence, but between dependence on Moscow or dependence on the bourgeois governments of the capitalist world."

The Bolshevik leadership did *not* maintain that the various nations and peoples of the former tsarist empire had to be reorganized within the framework of a *single* federated Soviet (workers) state. Lenin was open to the prospect of an alliance of Soviet states in the region if the non-Russian workers and peasants so desired. Thus, he wrote in late 1919:

"There are other questions—the fundamental interests of the proletarian dictatorship; the interests of the unity and discipline of the Red Army which is fighting Denikin; the leading role of the proletariat in relation to the peasantry—that are more important; the question whether the Ukraine will be a separate state is far less important. We must not be in the least surprised, or frightened, even by the prospect of the Ukrainian workers and peasants trying out different systems, and in the course of, say, several years, testing by practice union with the R.S.F.S.R., or seceding from the latter and forming an independent Ukrainian S.S.R. or various forms of their close alliance, and so on, and so forth."

— "The Constituent Assembly Elections and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat"
(December 1919)

Later, Lenin insisted over Stalin's opposition on incorporating the right of national self-determination into the founding constitution of the USSR.

"Socialism in One Country" —A Nationalist Lie

Lenin intransigently opposed every manifestation of Great Russian chauvinism within the Bolshevik Party

and the Soviet state. His last struggle, undertaken when he was already seriously ill, was over the national question in the Caucasus. In late 1922, Lenin broke with Stalin over Stalin's arrogant treatment of Georgian Communists and his attempt to impose a single Transcaucasian republic against the will of local Communists. As we noted above, Trotsky wrongly compromised when Lenin urged that he lead an open and uncompromising political fight against Stalin and in defense of the Georgian Communists—accepting Stalin's confessions of good faith and self-criticism (see "Pierre Broué's Trotsky: Tailored for Perestroika," *Spartacist* [English Edition] No. 45-46, Winter 1990-91). But Christian Rakovsky, then head of the Ukrainian Soviet government and later to become Trotsky's closest co-thinker in the Left Opposition, spoke out sharply at the 12th Party Congress in 1923 against the emerging Russian-centered bureaucratic apparatus: "Our central authorities begin to view the administration of the whole country from the viewpoint of the comfort of their office armchairs. Naturally, it's tiresome to administer twenty republics; how convenient it would be if the whole lot were unified, and you had only to press one button to administer the entire country."

The ugly manifestation of Great Russian chauvinism over the "Georgian affair" foreshadowed the onset of Thermidor in 1923-24. This was a *political counterrevolution*: although the social gains of the October Revolution, embodied in the collectivized property relations, remained in place, the proletariat was politically expropriated. Party democracy was strangled. This was first and foremost aimed at those who continued to struggle for the goal of world revolution—Trotsky and the Left Opposition. As we noted in our article "When Was the Soviet Thermidor?" (*Spartacist* [English Edition] No. 43-44, Summer 1989): "After January 1924, *the people who ruled the USSR, the way the USSR was ruled, and the purposes for which the USSR was ruled* had all changed."

Particularly given Stalin's embrace of the nationalist lie of "building socialism in one country," this was necessarily reflected in policy on the national question. Already in the late 1920s, the Stalin faction was dipping into the arsenal of tsarist reaction to use anti-Semitism as a weapon against the Left Opposition. During World War II, Stalin dissolved the Chechen and neighboring Ingush autonomous regions and deported their entire populations to Central Asia. This was also done to the Crimean Tatars, the Volga Germans and several other peoples. As part of his attempt to whip up Russian nationalism, Stalin revived the Russian Orthodox church and glorified tsarist generals, and then in the aftermath of the war sharply escalated anti-Semitism.

However, it would be a mistake to view national relations in the Soviet degenerated workers state as a simple continuation of what existed under the tsarist prison house of peoples. The policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy had a *contradictory* impact. The existence of a socialized economy with centralized planning provided the material basis for developing the more

backward areas of the Soviet Union. Trotsky noted in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936):

“It is true that in the sphere of national policy, as in the sphere of economy, the Soviet bureaucracy still continues to carry out a certain part of the progressive work, although with immoderate overhead expenses. This is especially true of the backward nationalities of the Union, which must of necessity pass through a more or less prolonged period of borrowing, imitation and assimilation of what exists.”

One need only look at the high level of education and cultural development, and the advancement of women, that occurred in such areas as Soviet Central Asia, which at the time of the Russian Revolution was a feudal backwater. This is in marked distinction to the way in which imperialism works, where a handful of wealthy capitalist states ruthlessly exploit the peoples of the colonial and semicolonial world, leading to the ever greater absolute and relative impoverishment of the “Third World.”

The Khrushchev years marked the last period of official “socialist” idealism in the USSR. This was sparked by the victory of the Red Army over Hitler’s Nazis—which brought in its wake the elimination of capitalism in what became the deformed workers states of East Europe—followed by the exceptional rate of Soviet economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s. Sputnik and the cosmonauts dramatically demonstrated that Soviet science and technology had attained world-class levels in key fields. Anti-western colonial revolutions—in particular the Cuban Revolution of 1959-60—vastly enhanced the prestige of the Soviet Union in world politics to the detriment of U.S. imperialism.

Khrushchev’s declaration in the UN in 1960 that “we will bury you” and his promise that the USSR would attain “full communism” in 20 years expressed the false consciousness of the Kremlin bureaucracy at that time. And such views had a resonance in Soviet society, where wide layers of the populace maintained socialist aspirations, while believing the bureaucracy’s lie that a socialist society with full national equality could be constructed in the USSR without overthrowing capitalism in the advanced industrial countries. This “Soviet patriotism” was a *halfway house* between the proletarian internationalism of Lenin and Trotsky and traditional bourgeois nationalism. The fact that the Soviet proletariat remained subjectively pro-socialist for many years is a telling indictment of those who prematurely wrote off the Soviet Union as “state capitalist.”

But as Trotsky had reasserted in *The Revolution Betrayed*, the creation of a socialist society entails a level of economic productivity higher than that of even the most advanced capitalist economies. That requires an internationally planned economy, since the seizure of power by the proletariat in one country could not eliminate the pressure of the world capitalist market. Stalin and his heirs, seeking to justify their treacherous dealings with the imperialist bourgeoisies, claimed that if only foreign military intervention could be averted there was nothing to block the USSR’s road to socialism. But as Trotsky bluntly noted in his 1928 work, *The Third International After Lenin*, “It is not so much

military intervention as the intervention of cheaper capitalist commodities that constitutes perhaps the greatest immediate menace to Soviet economy.”

As economic growth slumped, the Soviet bureaucrats in the early 1970s pronounced their intent to switch to intensive economic growth through retooling the existing economic plant. The USSR was given a breathing spell from imperialist pressure as a result of U.S. imperialism’s protracted, humiliating defeat in Indochina—achieved at the cost of millions of lives of the heroic Vietnamese workers and peasants—and of the economic boost derived from the world oil price hike. But such conjunctural factors were not to last indefinitely. As Trotsky had warned, intensive economic development could not be effected under central planning in the absence of soviet democracy. As it became obvious that the USSR was not going to overtake the level of economic productivity of Western/Japanese capitalism, the Brezhnev regime tacitly abandoned even “socialism in one country.” While continuing to pay lip service to “Marxism-Leninism,” the Brezhnev generation had as its real, functional ideology “superpowerism.”

But once the Soviet Union is simply viewed as a contending world power, and not in class terms as a workers state, “Soviet patriotism” ultimately reduces itself to the nationalism of the predominant Great Russian nation. Trotsky fought against such a disastrous outcome in the ’20s, including in *The Third International After Lenin*, when he underlined the social-patriotic thrust implicit in “socialism in one country,” which necessarily led to the abandonment of the international proletariat. In 1935 Trotsky wrote, “Stalin Has Signed the Death Certificate of the Third International,” calling the Seventh Congress later that year the “Liquidation Congress” because of its codification of all-embracing class collaboration through the “people’s front against fascism.” In 1943, in order to appease his wartime imperialist allies, Stalin formally liquidated the Third International with the stroke of a pen. At the same time, he cast the heroic war of the Soviet peoples against the Nazi invaders in nationalist colors, as a “Great Patriotic War,” replete with appeals to the Russian Orthodox church and the military traditions of the tsarist autocracy.

Nationalism as a Motor Force for Counterrevolution

This Stalinist nationalism flourished in the years that followed. Specifically and significantly, the Brezhnev regime tolerated and to a degree promoted reactionary Russian nationalist groups and currents (e.g., around the journal *Nash Sovremennik*). At the same time, this regime certainly would have suppressed any claiming to be Trotskyists or other independent leftists. The “democrat” Yeltsin paid homage to Pamyat, whom he legitimized in one of his first acts as Moscow CPSU chief in the mid-1980s. The official sponsorship of such scum further corroded the consciousness of workers and military cadre. In “Where Is the Soviet Union Going?” (Part Two, WV No. 521, 1 March 1991), we quoted a Soviet officer: “The Communist Party made our country a great state—a superpower.” We noted

that this vision was alien to that of Lenin and Trotsky, who “saw the Russian October as the first act of an international proletarian revolution which would lead to a global communist society through the withering away of the nation-state.”

As the Stalinist bureaucracy disintegrated, it tended to split along national lines and make common cause with traditional anti-Communists. In the Russian federation, much of the Gorbachevite intelligentsia became the pro-Western imperialist “democrats.” Arrayed against them was a “patriot” wing whose nationalist agitation in the guise of “anti-imperialism” revealed a no less visceral hostility to the interests of the international working class and world communism. Hence, the “red-brown bloc.” Among the non-Russian peoples, in the Baltics, the Caucasus and the Ukraine, former CP apparatchiks embraced anti-Soviet—and, at times, anti-Russian—nationalism, fawning over Western imperialism. Gorbachev’s perestroika policies greatly intensified national antagonisms, fueling the aspirations of the more advanced republics like the Baltics and Armenia for an even greater slice of the pie. Meanwhile, Gorbachev’s appeasement of imperialism by withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan and selling out the DDR [East Germany] only further whetted the appetites of bourgeois nationalists here and imperialists abroad. As the floodgates were opened to capitalist counterrevolution, bitter communalism erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh [in the Caucasus] and elsewhere.

In that context, we called “for the democratic reorganization of the Soviet Union and for the right of any nationality with a leadership that *opposes* counterrevolution to withdraw to any extent it sees fit (“Where Is the Soviet Union Going?” Part Three, WV No. 522, 15 March 1991). We noted that Great Russian chauvinism undermined the defense of the Soviet Union, and we called on the working masses to mobilize to drive the fascists, particularly nativist Russian fascists like Pamyat, off the streets. We did not consider the borders or the boundaries of the various entities within the USSR as sacrosanct. We noted that the right of constituent *workers* republics to withdraw from the USSR had been written into the Soviet constitution at Lenin’s insistence. But we vigorously combated capitalist restoration even when it sought to cover itself with the fig leaf of “national independence.” In contrast, Ernest Mandel’s fake-Trotskyist United Secretariat saluted the fascist Estonian “Forest Brothers,” who allied with the Nazis against the Red Army in WW II, while the U.S. Workers League of David North championed the cause of the counterrevolutionary Lithuanian Sajudis, going so far as to denounce U.S. imperialist chief George Bush for not imposing sanctions against the USSR on behalf of Lithuanian independence!

As Trotskyists, we stood for unconditional defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution, while fighting for proletarian political revolution to sweep out the Kremlin gang that was undermining the very existence of the workers state. We fought for a world party that could lead the revolution internationally, before it was

too late to save the Soviet Union. In August 1991, we pointed to the need for proletarian mobilizations to sweep away Yeltsin’s counterrevolutionary barricades. Behind the seeming incompetence of the GKChP (“gang of eight”) plotters lay the fact that these bureaucrats *accepted* capitalist restoration, albeit at a slower pace and under the thumb of the Moscow bureaucracy—what we dubbed “perestroika without glasnost.” Had the workers mobilized to sweep away Yeltsin & Co., this would have posed a civil war between the proletariat and the active forces of counterrevolution and would have marked the beginning of a proletarian political revolution. Fearing proletarian mobilizations far more than capitalist restoration, not one of the so-called hardline Stalinist “patriot” groups tried to organize resistance to Yeltsin, instead hiding behind the impotent coup plotters.

Even after the defeat in August 1991, we did not write off the Soviet workers state. Our position was determined by the understanding that a new bourgeois state apparatus had not yet been consolidated, and that the working class had not yet been defeated and dispersed. The Soviet proletariat still had the possibility to stop capitalist restoration by means of political revolution. When, in December 1991, Yeltsin & Co. pronounced the Soviet Union “juridically” dead, we countered with the slogan “Reforge the Soviet Union on Leninist principles,” underscoring our call for a return to the revolutionary-internationalist road of Lenin and Trotsky. However, the proletariat remained politically atomized, reflecting the erosion over many years of the socialist consciousness of the Soviet working class, fundamentally as a result of Stalinist betrayals.

“Soviet Patriotism” and Proletarian Internationalism

Political slogans are appropriate only when they correspond to the concrete circumstances for which they were fashioned. As Trotskyists, our “Soviet patriotism” was based on one fundamental premise: that the Soviet Union was a workers state, albeit bureaucratically degenerated since 1924. As Trotsky himself wrote in *The Third International After Lenin*: “Whenever the power is in the hands of the workers, patriotism is a revolutionary duty. But this patriotism must be an inseparable part of revolutionary internationalism.” Trotsky sought to use “Soviet patriotism” as a bridge back to the proletarian internationalism of Lenin’s Bolsheviks. Today, after capitalist counterrevolution, we are dealing with bourgeois states. Necessarily this imposes different tasks on the working class.

To take but one example: in 1979 we said, “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” pointing out that on the Soviet side this was a war for defense of a degenerated workers state against imperialism. Moreover, Soviet troops were fighting on the side of social progress against the reactionary *mujahedin*. We called for extending the social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples, while warning that the Stalinist bureaucracy was perfectly capable of treacherously making a deal with the imperialists. (In the upshot, Gorbachev pulled

the troops out even without a quid pro quo from the Western powers.) In contrast, Russia's war in Chechnya is completely reactionary: we call for the defeat of the Russian invasion forces, and we point out that the military defense of Chechnya is in the interests of the multinational working class of Russia.

With the consolidation of capitalist counterrevolution and bourgeois Russia's emergence as a regional overlord, to call for "restoring the Soviet Union" simply becomes a fig leaf for support to a Great Russian "strong state." In the context that all of the states in the area are capitalist, this call would appear to many people in the non-Russian republics as a barely camouflaged version of the open demands for their national oppression and domination that regularly emanate today from the Kremlin. And if national inequalities were in the past somewhat muted by virtue of the existence of a workers state, albeit bureaucratically degenerated, that is no longer the case. As we have noted, "Without the social base of a genuine bourgeoisie, such as existed in West Germany for the takeover of the DDR (East Germany), aggressive nationalism has been both the driving force for capitalist restoration in East Europe and the Soviet Union, and the product of the counterrevolutionary drive" ("East Europe: Nationalism and Counterrevolution," *WV* Nos. 547 and 548, 20 March and 3 April 1992).

The eruption of national chauvinism is a necessary by-product of capitalist restoration because, as Marx noted, the bourgeois *nation*-state is based on the dominant position of one nation and the subjugation and oppression of all other nationalities within its borders. The system of capitalist imperialism is based on economic and military rivalry of the large powers, competing with each other to dominate various markets and steal from and eventually exploit colonial and semi-colonial peoples. Today bourgeois Russia aspires to the role of a regional imperialist power. Its bloody handiwork is evident enough in the brutal colonial-style war being waged by the Russian bourgeoisie against the Chechen people. Meanwhile, in the Balkans, Russia is seeking to become a "player" in the region like in the days of the tsars, when it acted as the great-power protector of the Serbs, while serving as the soft cops for particularly German imperialism, as it seeks to impose a carve-up of the former Yugoslavia that suits its interests. This goes hand in hand with increased attacks against Caucasians, Jews and other minorities in Russia.

The Old Boundaries Are Not Sacrosanct

Another problem with the slogan of "restoring the Soviet Union" is that it presumes that a future proletarian revolutionary upsurge will duplicate the political and geographical contours of the 1917 October Revolu-

tion. But the Soviet Union developed through a series of contingent historic circumstances. There was a certain Russian centrality to the 1917 Revolution, in the sense that decisive insurrectionary battles were fought and won early in such cities as Petrograd and Moscow, and then extended to the periphery over the next three years in the course of the Civil War. While this may recur, to assume that it must necessarily do so implies a misguided and implicitly chauvinist Russian bias.

Where a new revolutionary upsurge will originate and along what paths it will spread simply cannot be predicted. Revolution is a convulsive process, and to attempt to preordain its length and breadth in what is a new period would be foolish. We certainly are not fixated on the old geographical borders, as we seek to make evident in our call for plebiscites that will enable the people of Crimea and Chechnya to determine their own fates. Nor is it possible to foresee the outlines of future federations of workers states, particularly given the fact, as we noted, that the "break-up of the Soviet Union has revealed a situation of considerable interpenetration of peoples and of economic production units which were inherited from and geared to a (bureaucratically) centralized planned economy." What will the interpenetrated and heavily assimilated Eastern Ukraine population want to do in the aftermath of proletarian revolution—go with Russia, the Western Ukraine, a socialist federation linking them, or some other variant? It's possible that there will be federations with countries that didn't earlier participate in the USSR, for example, a victorious social revolution could embrace both Iran and Azerbaijan. And what sort of federation might be envisaged should the combative Polish proletariat come to power before its eastern neighbors, with a revolutionary wave emanating outward from Warsaw?

The outcome of such questions depends heavily on the course of the class struggle. The central thrust of a new surge of revolutionary proletarian ferment in the area between the Oder and the Urals is not now known to us. To talk of "restoring the USSR" is a nationalist trap. What is necessary is to sweep away the new bourgeois states and replace them with the rule of workers soviets. We know of no other road to this goal but the one pursued by Lenin and the Bolsheviks—a thoroughgoing struggle against all manifestations of nationalism and chauvinism as part of patient but persistent propaganda aimed at winning the proletariat to the program of international socialist revolution. In short, as we wrote in the June 1993 introduction to the first Russian-language edition of Trotsky's 1928 book, *The Communist International After Lenin*: "It is imperative that the political heirs of the proletariat which made the October Revolution reclaim their true revolutionary birthright." ■

Spartacists Reject the Slogan of the Restoration of the USSR

At the end of last year, the International Communist League (Spartacists) issued a special document entitled "Why Marxists Don't Call for the 'Restoration of the Soviet Union'," which declared this group's rejection of support to the slogan "Restoration of the USSR." "Talk of 'restoring the USSR,'" says the document, "is a nationalist trap."

This turnabout of position by the Spartacists on one of the key questions of revolutionary strategy for the working class in the former Soviet Union testifies to a deep degeneration of this petty-bourgeois leftist tendency, which by now has completely broken with Marxism. This turn is also the best confirmation and proof of the correctness of the uncompromising fight led by the International Committee of the Fourth International against the Spartacist tendency during the almost three decades of existence of this group.

The Decline of Petty-Bourgeois Leftists

The refusal to defend the slogan of restoration of the USSR by the Spartacists is not an accidental zigzag in the politics of this group. Just the opposite; it is the logical as well as inevitable result of the entire previous history of the Spartacist tendency. This example, like a drop of water, likewise reflects the degeneration of all the Western petty-bourgeois leftists in the present epoch who grew up during the period of student demonstrations and antiwar protests of the '60s.

The crisis of the postwar world order in the '60s, following a period of economic prosperity and social reforms, led to a sharp activation of the radical layers of the middle class. At the peak of their activity, these layers attempted to turn to the revolutionary traditions of international proletarian struggle for socialism. Some of the militants and groups from these layers came under the powerful influence of the Fourth International. The majority of them, however, in the end proved unable to lift themselves to the level of revolutionary Marxist politics.

The main program of petty-bourgeois leftists—national reformism—was cultivated during the experience of postwar liberal reforms and became a decisive obstacle on the road to their development and transformation into revolutionary battalions of the international working class.

The new spiral of globalization of the world capitalist economy that followed the epoch of crisis at the end of the '60s and beginning of the '70s, and which was connected to the introduction of computers and new technologies, led to the decline of national reformist strategies. The culmination of this process was the disintegration of the autarchic Stalinist regimes in the USSR and East Europe. But this process is developing

further and puts pressure on all existing states without exception, undermining the basis of the "welfare state" in places where until only recently it seemed unshakable and producing absolutely destructive consequences where social reforms and standards of living had never developed very far.

The crisis of the system of national states and national reformist programs causes a breakdown of traditional political systems in the West and a sharp rightward shift of the entire official political spectrum. This shift likewise drags along all the petty-bourgeois leftist groupings oriented on national reformist programs. It forces them to ever more openly express their hostility to the international struggle of the working class for socialism and to openly renounce the Marxist rhetoric they until just recently paid lip service to.

Hostility to the Working Class

The International Communist League is the most typical example of this kind. Formed in the wave of protests against the Vietnam War in the U.S.A. in the mid-'60s, the Spartacists to this day claim that they are the only international tendency representing the continuity of Bolshevik and Trotskyist traditions and that they alone today represent genuine Marxist theory and politics.

In fact, the Spartacists are a noisy, demoralized sect of mostly middle-class and bohemian elements, who found an original way to "lead a fast life" as "proletarian revolutionaries." In spite of their hysterical attacks against the privileged layers of the *nomenklatura* of the Soviet Union, this tendency has always played no role beyond that of a pressure group on the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Throughout its almost three decades of existence, the Spartacist tendency has clearly shown its anti-working-class features. Two decisive factors became proof of this: first, support to the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; secondly, support to the suppression of Polish "Solidarność" by the Stalinist bureaucracy of the Polish People's Republic in the early '80s.

From the viewpoint of the interests of the working class, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was an adventure organized by the Kremlin Stalinist bureaucracy at a time of deep crisis for Stalinism and its program of building socialism "in one, given country." Through some kind of inspiring foreign policy "success," the Soviet bureaucracy wanted to demonstrate to the Soviet workers that the regime grown out of the suppression of the socialist movement in the Soviet Union during the 1920s-'30s remained strong and indestructible.

On the other hand, the introduction of Soviet troops

was an attempt to save the collapsed politics of Stalinism in Afghanistan, which were totally directed from Moscow. The Afghan adventure did not have the slightest support inside the USSR or beyond its borders. That is precisely why it was destined to a shameful defeat and became one of the decisive factors that prompted and hastened the collapse of Stalinism.

Instead of using the Afghan adventure of the Soviet bureaucracy in Afghanistan to unmask the counterrevolutionary and anti-working-class politics of the privileged bureaucratic caste, as would have followed from everything written by Trotsky and the Fourth International, the Spartacists, with the help of pathetic subterfuges, stood unconditionally on the side of the Soviet bureaucracy and even tried to organize independent military support to the Afghan adventure by calling for the creation of an international "Yuri Andropov Brigade."

The pro-Stalinist character of the Spartacist tendency was no less clearly revealed in Poland. The "Solidarność" movement grew on the basis of spontaneous Polish working-class protest against the arbitrariness and privileges of the bureaucracy. There were several political tendencies fighting inside "Solidarność." The question of which was going to achieve overwhelming dominance depended entirely on whether the Polish proletariat could break from the influence of Stalinism and liberalism and construct its own vanguard by assimilating the experience of the struggle of the Fourth International against Stalinist betrayals.

This task required intensive and patient work to develop the political consciousness of the Polish working class. Jaruzelski's coup imposing martial law and the persecution of "Solidarność" expressed the fear of the bureaucracy in the face of spontaneous protest by the working class that could have led to a new political revolution in Poland and the establishment of a genuine workers republic there.

At that moment, the obvious duty of any political tendency committed to the struggle for working-class liberation was to oppose the suppression of the proletariat by the privileged or ruling tops and to denounce the violence of the Stalinists in Poland. Instead, the Spartacists stood unequivocally on the side of the bureaucracy and completely justified Jaruzelski's military coup, the imposition of martial law and violent measures used for the suppression of "Solidarność."

The results of Jaruzelski's coup were the exact opposite of what the Spartacists had hoped for. They had hoped that preserving bureaucratic tyranny—at the cost of betraying the working class—would postpone at least for a little while the restoration of capitalism in Poland. However, on the one hand it was precisely the violent suppression of "Solidarność" which drove it to total anti-communist degeneration, and on the other, it was the regime of Jaruzelski itself that in just a few years turned to the right and launched the restoration of capitalism in Poland.

Thus, in the broad historical sense, it turned out that the suppression of "Solidarność" was but one of the preparatory stages on the path of the bureaucracy's striv-

ings toward the rehabilitation and restoration of private property in the basic sectors of the Polish economy.

The ICFI's Analysis in 1986

Among ICFI materials dedicated to analyzing Spartacist politics over the course of almost three decades, there stands out a series of articles written in 1986 by M. McLaughlin, a member of the Workers League/USA, and published in the weekly newspaper of the Workers League, the *Bulletin*.

M. McLaughlin provided a full, detailed analysis of Spartacist politics on the war in Afghanistan and the suppression of "Solidarność" in Poland, and exposed the pro-Stalinist character of the Spartacist tendency.

Above all, M. McLaughlin absolutely correctly takes as his point of departure the following demand of Trotsky, which flows from the understanding of the USSR as a degenerated workers state: In order to correctly evaluate the foreign policy actions of the USSR, it is necessary in any concrete case to differentiate between when the Red Army is the instrument of the counterrevolutionary bureaucracy and when it serves the interests of the defense of the foundations of that workers state.

Did there exist in Afghanistan a danger to the Soviet planned economy and nationalized property? Did a modern industrial proletariat, that could support and guarantee ongoing social reforms, exist in Afghanistan? And finally, did the intervention of Soviet troops facilitate the development of the international working-class struggle? To all these questions, M. McLaughlin gives the categorical answer: no. The redirection of an enormous quantity of resources was undermining the planned economy. The Afghan proletariat, extremely small in number, was either ignored or suppressed. The position of the USSR in the world had weakened and world imperialism gained invaluable advantages using the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan to escalate the "Cold War" (*Bulletin*, 8 July 1986).

Using the same arguments in defense of the bureaucratic adventure as Stalinist propaganda, the Spartacists clouded the class consciousness of the world proletariat and in fact acted as direct defenders of the counterrevolutionary Soviet bureaucracy, identifying foreign policy carried out in the interest of the bureaucracy with actions in defense of the foundations of the workers state.

This kind of identification displayed itself to an even greater extent in the Spartacists' evaluation of the Polish events. M. McLaughlin writes in the aforementioned article that originally the Spartacists reluctantly supported the anti-bureaucratic struggle, while opposing any possible Soviet invasion and at the same time warning against the danger of restorationist tendencies, headed by the Catholic church. However, after "Solidarność"'s first congress in September 1981, they declared that this trade union had consolidated on the basis of a counterrevolutionary program. In particular, the demand for free trade unions raised by "Solidarność" was, in the opinion of the Spartacists, equivalent to the demand for "free enterprise," i.e., the restoration of capitalism.

Such an evaluation of this demand is completely untenable from a Marxist viewpoint. As McLaughlin points out, it suffices to refer to the following point in the Transitional Program of the Fourth International, which the Spartacists formally acknowledge: “The struggle for freedom of the trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly and freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration of soviet democracy” (L. Trotsky, “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International”—as cited in the newspaper quoted).

Through their evaluation of the Polish events, the Spartacists demonstrated their complete incapacity to analyze real struggle by the working class. Instead of attentively observing each stage of this struggle, instead of explaining the limitations of their purely democratic demands to the workers and explaining that it is possible to realize them only in connection with a socialist program of action, instead of seeing in the real struggle a way to cultivate working-class consciousness, which does not fall from the sky but is born in the crucible of class struggle, instead of trying to use an organization of the working class that is truly massive and independent from the Stalinist bureaucracy for this purpose, the Spartacists declared that “Solidarność” was a counterrevolutionary organization on the basis that its program was not socialist but democratic and that several bourgeois governments and the reactionary leadership of the AFL-CIO, trying to take advantage of the crisis of the Polish bureaucracy, declared their support for “Solidarność.”

On this basis, the Spartacists issued in advance their indulgence to the Soviet bureaucracy and declared: “If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily to stop it [“Solidarność”], we will support this.” (from the Spartacist pamphlet *Polish Company Union for the CIA and Bankers*—as cited in the issue of the *Bulletin* quoted). M. McLaughlin wrote in this connection that: “After taking such a political position, it is not surprising that the Spartacists enthusiastically supported the imposition of martial law by General Jaruzelski on December 13, 1981, which criminalized ‘Solidarność’ and led to the mass arrests of leading workers activists throughout Poland.”

The Dual Nature of the Stalinist Bureaucracy

The main theoretical reason that made the Spartacists eager defenders of Stalinism was their inability to understand the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR. This dual nature was fully determined by the transitional state of Soviet society as a society on the road from capitalism to socialism.

This is how Leon Trotsky approached the question: “The Soviet Union,” he wrote, “is a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism, in which (a) the productive forces are still far from adequate to give the state property a socialist character; (b) the tendency toward primitive accumulation created by want breaks out through innumerable pores of the planned economy; (c) norms of distribution preserving

a bourgeois character lie at the basis of a new differentiation of society; (d) the economic growth, while slowly bettering the situation of the toilers, promotes a swift formation of privileged strata; (e) exploiting the social antagonisms, a bureaucracy has converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism; (f) the social revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and in the consciousness of the toiling masses; (g) a further development of the accumulating contradictions can as well lead to socialism as back to capitalism; (h) on the road to capitalism the counterrevolution would have to break the resistance of the workers; (i) on the road to socialism the workers would have to overthrow the bureaucracy. In the last analysis, the question will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena” (*The Revolution Betrayed*).

From the interim, transitional condition of the USSR flowed the dual nature of the Soviet bureaucracy, which was forced to simultaneously preserve and destroy the foundations of the workers state. “Will the bureaucrat devour the workers state,” Trotsky writes, “or will the working class clean up the bureaucrat? Thus stands the question upon whose decision hangs the fate of the Soviet Union.... Without a planned economy the Soviet Union would be thrown back for decades. In that sense the bureaucracy continues to fulfill a necessary function. But it fulfills it in such a way as to prepare an explosion of the whole system which may completely sweep out the results of the revolution” (*The Revolution Betrayed*).

“The recognition of the USSR as a workers state—not a type but a mutilation of a type—does not at all signify,” in Trotsky’s opinion, “a theoretical and political amnesty for the Soviet bureaucracy. On the contrary, its reactionary character is fully revealed only in the light of the contradiction between its anti-proletarian politics and the needs of the workers state. Only by posing the question in this manner does our exposure of the crime of the Stalinist clique gain full motive force. The defense of the USSR means not only the supreme struggle against imperialism, but a preparation for the overthrow of the Bonapartist bureaucracy. The experience of the USSR shows how great are the possibilities lodged in the workers state and how great is its strength of resistance. But this experience also shows how powerful is the pressure of capitalism and its bureaucratic agency, how difficult it is for the proletariat to gain full liberation, and how necessary it is to educate and temper the new International in the spirit of irreconcilable revolutionary struggle” (Trotsky, “Not a Workers’ and Not a Bourgeois State?”).

Contrary to Trotsky’s warning quoted above, that it is necessary “to differentiate between progressive and reactionary tendencies and to underscore their interaction,” the ICL bases itself in its political activity on an uncritical understanding of the “progressive role” of the Soviet bureaucracy in terms of defense of the foundations of the workers state. From the fact that the bureaucracy had to defend the social basis of the Soviet Union for a long time, the Spartacists conclude

that it is necessary to support the bureaucracy.

For a correct understanding of the class nature of the Spartacist tendency, it is important to remember that Trotsky especially warned against such a mistake: "Mistakes on the question of defense of the USSR most frequently flow from an incorrect understanding of the methods of 'defense.' Defense of the USSR does not at all mean rapprochement with the Kremlin bureaucracy, the acceptance of its politics, or a conciliation with the politics of her allies. In this question, as in all others, we remain completely on the ground of the international class struggle.... 'Defense of the USSR' as interpreted by the Comintern, like yesterday's 'struggle against fascism,' is based on renunciation of independent class politics. The proletariat is transformed—for various reasons in varying circumstances, but always and invariably—into an auxiliary force of one bourgeois camp against another.... Our tasks, among them the 'defense of the USSR' we realize not through the medium of bourgeois governments and not even through the government of the USSR, but exclusively through the education of the masses through agitation, through explaining to the workers what they should defend and what they should overthrow....

"The defense of the USSR coincides for us with the preparation of world revolution. Only those methods are permissible which do not conflict with the interests of the revolution. The defense of the USSR is related to the world socialist revolution as a tactical task is related to a strategic one. A tactic is subordinated to a strategic goal and in no case can be in contradiction to the latter." ["The USSR in War" (1939)]

The Spartacists have thrown this entire analysis overboard. They never understood that even if the bureaucracy was obliged to defend the social basis of the USSR with its own methods over a lengthy period of time, it was in the last analysis only to secure their own dominance for themselves.

The bureaucracy simultaneously guarded and looted the foundations of the workers state. The longer this went on, the more intolerable it became, not just for the working class, but for the bureaucracy itself as well, which looked for an advantageous moment to carry out its counterrevolutionary overturn to the end and restore capitalism—as took place in the early '90s.

The progressive function of the bureaucratic caste was always relative, but its counterrevolutionary role was absolute. Bureaucratic management of the planned economy was a temporary condition that could be resolved only in two directions, either back toward capitalism or forward to genuine socialism—only this time without bureaucracy.

The Spartacists did not at all understand this dialectic of social development. However, the reason for this is rooted not in individual intellectual weakness on the part of Spartacist leaders. It is rooted in the social basis of this tendency which has nothing in common with the working class.

The Spartacists in the Former USSR

It is utterly obvious that the Spartacists' rejection of the slogan of restoration of the USSR does not have an

accidental character, but flows from the long history and class orientation of this tendency.

The clearly pro-Stalinist character of the Spartacists' politics revealed itself immediately after they began their work in the former Soviet Union. Formulating strategy for political work in the former USSR, one of the leaders of the ICL, Joseph Seymour, wrote in a programmatic article, "On the Collapse of Stalinist Rule in East Europe," dated 10 October 1990, "Our immediate goal should be to forge a Trotskyist propaganda group which can cut through the present polarization between the forces of the 'bourgeois democratic' counterrevolution and their conservative Stalinist/Slavophile opponents. In the first place, we should orient toward those worker activists and intellectuals who want to defend socialism as they understand it, such as the militants of the United Front of Toilers" (*Spartacist* No. 45-46, Winter 1990-1991).

Certain characteristic peculiarities of the Spartacists' political work immediately jump off the page here: (1) instead of advocating the necessity of building a new independent party of the working class (which flows both from the programmatic basis of the Fourth International and from the whole tragic history of struggle against Stalinism in the USSR), they only pose the question of "forging" a "group." Just what the activity of this "group" should consist of becomes clear from the following demand, which suggests (2) to fight not for the independent mobilization of the working class but to "wedge between" already existing factions. Thus, the purpose of this "forged group" should be maneuvering and pressuring various kinds of existing parties and organizations (of Stalinist or liberal orientation). (3) This worst kind of tailism is further combined with a complete rejection of the struggle to bring a socialist worldview to the working class, since Seymour calls not for a fight against existing illusions and misconceptions, but adaptation to them: "In the first place," he says, "we should orient toward those worker activists and intellectuals who want to defend socialism as they understand it, such as the militants of the United Front of Toilers."

These words cannot signify anything but the Spartacists' witting readiness to collaborate with the Stalinists under the pretext that they think of themselves as "socialists" and "defend" it "as they understand it." There is no need to underscore once again that the OFT, mentioned by Seymour as an example, is a typical Stalinist group, created toward the end of "*perestroika*" for specific ends through the efforts of the former *nomenklatura*.

It is hardly accidental that the Spartacists immediately wound up tailing Stalinist parties that arose from the rotting corpse of the CPSU. Long before this, the Spartacists had completely adapted their program to the activity of these organizations. Since one of the points of Stalinist propaganda after 1991 was the demand for the "restoration of the USSR," so the Spartacists also raised it. Their latest turn, however, shows the real value of this slogan when it comes from the mouths of the Spartacist tendency.

The class character of the entire "opposition" movement

of 1992-1993 clearly revealed itself in the culminating events of the fall of 1993. Together with all Stalinists, the ICL turned out to be an appendage of one of the factions of the former *nomenklatura*, which during the events of the fall of 1993 came out under the leadership of Ruskoi and Khasbulatov. Justifying their support to defense of the White House in September-October 1993, the Spartacists wrote, "A proletarian vanguard would have sought to mobilize the working masses against Yeltsin's bonapartist moves, including a military bloc with the forces around Ruskoi/Khasbulatov during the fighting" ("Post-Soviet Russia: Immiseration and Chaos," *Workers Vanguard* No. 595, 4 March 1994).

So as to leave no doubt on the part of the reader about the participation of the Spartacists in support of the White House defenders, the same article says that the supporters of Ruskoi and Khasbulatov are "the side" for the working masses "that fights for their interests."

The Spartacists Against the Restoration of the USSR

The refusal of the Spartacists to raise the call for the restoration of the Soviet Union is a continuation of their policy of accommodation to Stalinism and to the national bourgeoisie. The main reason why the Spartacists took this step now is the deep regroupment among the layers of the former *nomenklatura* and new owners that has taken place over the last few years.

In 1991, the Stalinist bureaucracy of the USSR, relying upon cooperative owners and speculators and supported by Western imperialism, needed to destroy the devastated remnants of the federated state that emerged from the October Revolution in order to begin openly carrying out a program of capitalist restoration. This period corresponded to sermons in favor of absolutely unlimited separatism and "sovereignization."

After the disintegration of the USSR and the redistribution of property, the new ruling class quickly exhausted opportunities for enrichment through simple looting of previously accumulated wealth. In the face of growing protest by the working class and in order not to lose what was already plundered, the new owners were confronted by the need to organize actual production. This induces them to go over to the restoration of torn-up economic links with former republics of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, Russia, as the strongest economic partner of the "near abroad," is trying to imperialistically subordinate weaker republics, and secure for itself more advantageous conditions for competition on the world market as well.

These moods among the new owners were best expressed by that part of the former *nomenklatura* grouped around the apparatus of the KPRF. The KPRF was thus able to likewise win, for a certain period of time to come, relatively wide influence among the masses. The trick was that although the "*derzhava*" [strong state], which the Zyuganovites along with the new bourgeoisie are preparing to "restore," has nothing in common with the Soviet Union, the mass of the toilers has not yet managed to figure this out. A deep

respect for the history of the USSR as a union of equal nations lives on in the working class. And the Zyuganovites are cynically trying to exploit this respect by relying on the fact that the truth about many historical questions has been erased by a long period of bureaucratic rule.

In this context, seeing that support to the slogan of restoration of the USSR—in the way that the KPRF would bring it about—would mean direct betrayal of the masses, the Spartacists hastened to renounce it, taking in fact one more additional step in the direction of their degeneration and political degradation. This step shows that the Spartacists have never been able to understand the class nature of the USSR.

Let's turn to the document put out by the Spartacists. The ICL correctly writes that, in the hands of the KPRF and the RKRP, the slogan of the restoration of the USSR has the character of nostalgia for the Stalin-Brezhnev order: "But such nostalgia, which today is almost universally a harking back not to the October Revolution but to the Soviet Union under the Stalinists, is not a program for socialist revolution."

"The real content of their [KPRF and RKRP] call for 'restoration of the Soviet Union'," continue the Spartacists, "is an appeal for a stronger Russian-dominated CAPITALIST state, a modern version of the tsarist Russian empire."

This is all absolutely correct. But what should a Marxist conclude from that? First of all, he would consider it his duty to explain to the working class that the nature of the Soviet Union, having nothing in common with imperial "*derzhava*," was incompatible with the uncontrolled power of a privileged bureaucracy, that it was precisely the cancerous tumor of bureaucracy that led the Soviet Union to its destruction, and that the restoration of the USSR is possible only in connection with a struggle against Stalinism, including its modern forms, such as the KPRF and RKRP.

It is unconditionally necessary to restore the USSR, a Marxist would say. But not together with the Stalinists from the KPRF/RKRP and not according to their plans, but without them and in spite of them. But the Spartacists sing a completely different tune....

Zyuganov proposes to restore the Russian empire, i.e., a "prison house of peoples," and to do it "from the top down," through agreements between government tops and without any participation by the peoples. This is precisely what Yeltsin proposes and does. But this is not at all what the Soviet Union was. It was established by the masses of peoples themselves through their conscious activity "from below."

But the main distinction between the "*derzhava*" of Yeltsin/Zyuganov and the USSR is in the social basis on which these states stood. The USSR was based upon nationalized property created by a socialist proletarian revolution in October 1917. It was the basis upon which to build a planned, developing society of social equality, i.e., socialism. The USSR as a transitional state was the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat; it expressed the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population and defended new, more

progressive property forms from the decomposing corrosion of private property.

The “*derzhava*” being built by Yeltsin and Zyuganov is based upon private property. It is the state of a dominating and oppressing minority, and its main purpose is to preserve the rights of private property.

In this situation, the duty of Marxists is to expose the lie and deception of the two main factions of the former *nomenklatura* headed by Yeltsin and Zyuganov and to counterpose to their “*derzhava*” the slogan of restoration of a genuine Soviet Union as a voluntary union of peoples. The USSR can be recreated only from below, on a democratic and socialist basis by the working class of the former republics of the Soviet Union in unity with the workers of all other countries and continents. This is the program that the International Committee of the Fourth International defends.

In contrast, the Spartacists declare that there is no other way to restore the USSR other than the one offered by the Zyuganovites and that therefore it is necessary in general to reject the restoration of the USSR. They write in their declaration: “With the consolidation of capitalist counterrevolution and bourgeois Russia’s emergence as a regional overlord, to call for ‘restoring the Soviet Union’ simply becomes a fig leaf for support to a Great Russian ‘strong state.’ In the context that all of the states [here, i.e., in the former USSR] are capitalist, this call would appear to many people in the non-Russian republics as a barely camouflaged version of the open demands for their national oppression and domination that regularly emanate today from the Kremlin.”

The Spartacists have never been able to differentiate between the social basis of the Soviet Union and the mercenary interests of the parasitic bureaucracy. They still haven’t changed. They simply cannot imagine that there could be any other understanding of the USSR than the one offered by the former *nomenklatura* under the leadership of the KPRF or the RKRP.

“Talk of ‘restoring the USSR’ is a nationalist trap,” the Spartacists believe. In fact, the trap is the pro-Stalinist politics of the Spartacist tendency. On the question we have analyzed, the working class of the former USSR should clearly understand whom they are dealing with under the name of Spartacists and categorically reject all the pretensions of this petty-bourgeois radical group to be the continuity of Marxist traditions and of the fight of the Fourth International.

The Slogan of Restoration of the USSR and the War in Chechnya

The question of the slogan of the restoration of the USSR is closely tied to the question of the war in Chechnya. The Spartacists advocate the “military

defense of Chechnya” as a way to solve the Chechen question. In this, they fully concur with numerous anti-communist liberal types, like the “human rights defender” S. Kovalev. This is the road to deepening national differentiations, the road of war in the name of the “national” interests of the Chechen or Russian bourgeoisie.

The genuine internationalist position on this question can only be a call for united efforts of the Chechen and Russian proletariat in joint struggle against the ruling classes of Russia and Chechnya, which is inseparable from the struggle for the restoration of the Soviet Union.

In a previous issue (No. 8) of *Worker-Internationalist*, we published a resolution on the events in Chechnya by the Center of the KRД in Ufa, where it was said: “Neither Yeltsin’s regime in the Kremlin nor the Dudayev regime in Grozny ever represented the interests of the working class of Russia and Chechnya.... Yeltsin’s victory brings colonialist oppression to the proletarians of Chechnya and to Russian workers, it brings death in other imperialist military campaigns which will surely come, for example, to the Ukraine or toward the ‘Indian Ocean.’ For Chechen toilers, a victory of Dudayev means neocolonial oppression by Muslim countries, as well as maintaining a semi-fascist regime domestically....

“In imperialist war, communists must not justify or prettify a government or bourgeoisie of any of the fighting powers because it means supporting the right of one of the fighting blocs (in this case Western or Muslim imperialism) to rob and oppress dependent peoples (including Chechnya). We cannot support ‘self determination’ of the Chechen people in the abstract without posing its dependence on the revolutionary proletarian movement in Chechnya and in the other republics of the former USSR.

“The rebirth of the international socialist workers movement in the former Soviet Union and the re-establishment of the USSR from below on an equal, democratic and socialist basis as a component part of the Socialist United States of Europe and Asia, this is the real key to resolution of the Chechen question” (*Rabochii-Internatsionalist* No. 8, February 1996).

These words describe in a sufficiently full manner the program which in principle is counterposed to both liberalism and Stalinism and to their yes-men like the Spartacists—the program which expresses the real interests of the working class and which is fully supported by the ICFI and their supporters in the former Soviet Union.

V. Volkov
6 May 1996

“ICFI”/Northites: Counterfeit Trotskyists

As Trotskyists, the International Communist League stood for the unconditional military defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution, while fighting for proletarian political revolution to oust the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy that undermined the October Revolution. The erosion of the revolutionary internationalist consciousness of the Soviet proletariat, as a result of decades of Stalinist misrule, ultimately led to the collapse of the USSR and the consolidation of new capitalist states in the area. This was a historic defeat for the proletariat, ushering in catastrophic declines in the living standards of the peoples of the former Soviet bloc, while freeing up the imperialists to unleash renewed attacks on the working masses in the West and the already savagely oppressed peoples of the semi-colonial world.

With the restoration of capitalism, the tasks for Marxists changed: we do not defend the Russian state, which is a capitalist state with resurgent imperialist ambitions. We fight for socialist revolutions throughout the lands of the former Soviet Union. As we have noted, aggressive nationalism was both the driving force for capitalist restoration in East Europe and the Soviet Union, and a product of the counterrevolutionary drive. From Milosevic's Serbia to Tudjman's Croatia and Yeltsin's Russia, nationalist demagoguery is being used to turn working-class anger over economic immiseration against neighboring peoples and minority communities. The decomposition of the USSR resulted in bloody nationalist conflicts in every republic of the former Soviet Union, with nationalist wars in the Caucasus and a sharp increase in Great Russian chauvinism. As we noted in our article, "Why Marxists Do Not Raise the Call 'Restore the Soviet Union'":

"Today bourgeois Russia aspires to the role of a regional imperialist power. Its bloody handiwork is evident enough in the brutal colonial-style war against the Chechen people.... To talk of 'restoring the USSR' is a nationalist trap. What is necessary is to sweep away the new bourgeois states and replace them with the rule of workers soviets. We know of no other road to this goal but the one pursued by Lenin and the Bolsheviks—a thoroughgoing struggle against all manifestations of nationalism and chauvinism as part of patient but persistent propaganda aimed at winning the proletariat to the program of international socialist revolution."

In an article by V. Volkov in *Rabochii-Internatsionalist* (May 1996), the Russian supporters of the so-called "International Committee for the Fourth International"

(ICFI) attack us because of our opposition to the slogan of restoring the Soviet Union. The ICFI is a gang of political charlatans who falsely claim the mantle of Trotskyism. Led with an iron hand by Gerry Healy in Britain until it spectacularly imploded in 1985, producing a number of rump organizations, the "ICFI" is currently headed by one David North of the U.S. Workers League.

In his article, Volkov protests our call for the military defense of Chechnya in the war, asserting that this is "anti-communist" and "liberal." The ICFI's refusal to call for the defense of the Chechens in this brutal colonial-style war, and their opposition to the right of Chechen independence, is unvarnished Great Russian chauvinism. The Northites prove our point, that those who today loudly proclaim themselves for the "Soviet Union" are nothing more than Russian nationalists. Their whole history shows them to have been enemies of the defense of the Soviet Union; now, *for the first time in their history*, they have come out for the Russian army—now that it is the army of a capitalist Russia!

Thus the call to "restore the Soviet Union" in the mouths of the Russian Northites is simultaneously a self-solacing "left"-sounding slogan and a cover for naked chauvinism in a capitalist state. In the wake of the October Revolution's final undoing, which we fought to the best of our ability, we now raise the call for new October Revolutions that go all the way to the destruction of imperialism on a world scale. This was the Bolsheviks' program and it is ours still.

Volkov writes at length, purporting to show "the pro-Stalinist character of the Spartacist tendency" through such examples as our positions on Afghanistan and Polish Solidarność. In reality what Volkov, North & Co. have against us is that we are *Trotskyists*. In his 1933 article, "The Class Nature of the Soviet State," Trotsky warned of the "tragic possibility" that the Soviet workers state "will fall under the joint blows of its internal and external enemies":

"But in the event of this worst possible variant, a tremendous significance for the subsequent course of the revolutionary struggle will be borne by the question: *where* are those guilty for the catastrophe? Not the slightest taint of guilt must fall upon the revolutionary internationalists. In the hour of the mortal danger, they must remain on the last barricade."

In contradistinction, the ICFI under North and his predecessor Gerry Healy supported every counterrevolutionary

movement internal to and on the borders of the Soviet Union. Thus they supported Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalists in Iran; the CIA-backed *mujahedin* in Afghanistan; the Pilsudskiite Polish nationalists of Solidarność; and bourgeois-nationalist movements, encouraged by the imperialists, within the USSR. They enthused over all manner of pro-imperialist Soviet "dissidents," publishing for example a glowing obituary for Andrei Sakharov. Sakharov was the quintessential pro-capitalist "dissident," winning kudos from the imperialists (and eventually the Nobel "Peace" Prize) for his advocacy of unilateral disarmament of the USSR, while of course opposing disarmament for the bloody-handed U.S. imperialists.

When the hour of decision came, in August 1991, an ICFI statement "welcome[d] the humiliating collapse of the August 19 Stalinist putsch in Moscow." This was also welcomed by every imperialist power in the world! Yeltsin's counter-coup marked the ascendancy of counterrevolutionary forces in the Soviet Union itself, which led ultimately to the consolidation of a Russian capitalist state.

For our part, in August 1991 the ICL—while giving no support to the pro-*perestroika* coup plotters—called for a workers mobilization to sweep away Yeltsin's counterrevolutionary barricades. We raised the call for the formation of independent workers committees to take over the plants, as the basis for soviets drawing in collective farmers, oppressed minorities, working women, Red Army soldiers and officers, pensioners, etc. We called for workers militias to defend workers, Communist Party members, Jews and other minorities against Yeltsinite reactionaries and racist pogromists. And we wrote:

"The alternatives posed before the Soviet bureaucratically deformed workers state have always been: counter-revolution or Trotskyism. Today Stalinism is dead. The key to frustrating the bloody plans of Bush, Yeltsin and their counterrevolutionary cohorts is the early forging of a Trotskyist nucleus in the Soviet Union, representing those elements in the workers movement, the army and throughout society who would fight for the program of October."

— "Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!" *Workers Vanguard* No. 533, 30 August 1991

While the Soviet Union existed, we recognized the right of self-determination for the constituent nations of the USSR, as long as this was not a cover for capitalist restoration. As Trotsky explained, the right of self-determination is a general democratic right, subordinate to *class* considerations:

"We do not only recognize, but we also give full support to the principle of self-determination, wherever it is directed against feudal, capitalist and imperialist states. But wherever the fiction of self-determination, in the hands of the bourgeoisie, becomes a weapon directed against the proletarian revolution, we have no occasion to treat this fiction differently from the other 'principles' of democracy perverted by capitalism."

— *Social Democracy and the Wars of Intervention in Russia, 1918-1921* (1922)

Today, when the Soviet Union is no more, the Northites are a mouthpiece for Russian chauvinism and defend the territorial integrity of the Russian capitalist state. But

earlier the Northites had no problem in supporting all manner of fascist-infested nationalist movements, which the imperialists sponsored as a means of tearing apart the Soviet Union. An example was the Sajudis—a Lithuanian secessionist movement shot through with outright fascists—which had its own program of "ethnic cleansing" for the non-Lithuanian component of the population. In 1990, North's Workers League denounced U.S. president Bush for not imposing imperialist sanctions against the Soviet workers state on behalf of Lithuanian "independence," i.e., capitalist restoration. At the same time the ICFI demanded "immediate pullout of all Soviet troops from the Baltics, Moldova and other republics where Moscow's Stalinists are trying to strangle the democratic hopes of the oppressed nationalities. The working class must unconditionally defend the right of these peoples for self-determination including national independence from the USSR" (Russian-language *Bulletin of FI*, February 1995).

Afghanistan: How the Northites Backed the CIA

When all the imperialists raised a hue and cry about "poor little Afghanistan," the ICFI chimed in, calling the actions of the Soviet Army "a brutal campaign of military and police repression against a semi-colonial people" whose "national rights were being criminally violated" and stated that "the movement of the Red Army into Afghanistan" was "aimed at sealing off the radical impulse of the [Khomeini-led] Iranian Revolution" (*Bulletin*, 8 July 1986).

Unlike the Northites, who gloried in supporting the counterrevolutionary, CIA-backed Islamic *mujahedin*, we in the ICL said, "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend Social Gains of October to Afghan Peoples!" We noted that Afghanistan was not a nation but a pre-industrial society of different peoples and tribes with little or no indigenous proletariat. Although the Brezhnev bureaucracy certainly did not intervene from the perspective of proletarian internationalism, we pointed out that a prolonged Soviet military occupation would likely mean the integration of Afghanistan with the economy of the USSR, thereby posing social liberation of a society saturated with medieval backwardness.

The Soviet Army intervened in a civil war between the left-nationalist government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and Islamic reactionaries. This was the first and only time in modern history that a civil war was ignited centrally by the issue of women's rights. After coming to power in an April 1978 coup, pro-Moscow intellectuals and army officers in the PDPA sought to implement some minimal reforms to bring the country closer to the 20th century: land distribution, freeing women from the *burka* (the head-to-toe veil), reducing the bride price to a nominal sum and providing education for girls. However, such basic democratic reforms can be explosive in a cruelly backward country like Afghanistan, not least because women's subordination in the family meant that they were considered the "bearers" of the "national culture" to the next generation. Afghan

landlords, tribal chiefs and mullahs launched a ferocious *jihad* (holy war), burning down schools and flaying teachers for the “crime” of teaching girls to read.

The conservative Brezhnev leadership didn’t send 100,000 Soviet troops to Afghanistan to make a social revolution. But independently of the motives of the Soviet bureaucracy, the intervention of the Red Army in this civil war on the side of social progress strengthened the position of women, providing the possibility for young Afghanis to learn to read and write, and opened the road to progress through social assimilation by the Soviet Union.

But Islamic reaction, the woman question, and defense of the Soviet Union from imperialism are precisely what the Northites do not mention, in order to portray the Soviet intervention as one continuous brutality. It is no accident that they never say a word about the \$2 billion invested by the CIA in the arming of the *mujahedin*, since for years their goals and the goals of the CIA-backed fundamentalist cutthroats coincided. In 1980, their German newspaper, *Neue Arbeiterpresse*, headlined: “Pull Soviet Troops Out of Afghanistan! Defend the Iranian Revolution!”

Much of the Soviet and Western “left” compared the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan with the American imperialists’ slaughter in Vietnam—a shameful position later echoed by Gorbachev. During the Vietnam War some two million Vietnamese were killed, while Saigon was transformed into a giant bordello. The Soviet military presence in Afghanistan was manifestly different, as aspects of Soviet society began to be reproduced, attracting youth looking for a future and the deeply oppressed women.

Our fight for Red Army victory was *counterposed* to the halfhearted policies of the Soviet bureaucracy. We fought for a proletarian political revolution in the USSR, pointing out that the Kremlin gang was perfectly capable of selling out the Afghan peoples in order to placate the imperialists. Instead of fighting the war to a victorious finish, Brezhnev sought to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, while at the same time offering concessions to sections of the fundamentalists. Land reform was sharply curtailed, as the government declared a “general amnesty” under which feudal landlords who had defected to Pakistan would be given back their property if they returned, while many categories of landowners were now exempted entirely from the reform. Meanwhile, compulsory education for girls was revoked.

All wings of the Kremlin bureaucracy ultimately agreed to abandon Soviet intervention into Afghanistan. So-called “hardliners” like Yegor Ligachev were crucial in delivering to Gorbachev the necessary support in carrying out the decision to withdraw the troops. None of the Stalin-loving “patriots” (such as Nina Andreyeva and Viktor Anpilov) ever tried to mobilize against withdrawal. Thus all wings of Stalinism were complicit in this outright capitulation to imperialism which emboldened the imperialists, guaranteed a bloody revenge against modernizing nationalists and women in Afghanistan, and brought capitalist

counterrevolution much closer to the Soviet Union.

While impudently accusing us of supporting the politics of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the ICFI’s Volkov literally repeats the arguments that the defeatist Gorbachev bureaucracy used to justify withdrawal and *demobilize and dismiss* pro-socialist and would-be internationalist sentiments among Soviet workers and soldiers. Thus Volkov claims:

“The redirection of an enormous quantity of resources was undermining the planned economy. The Afghan proletariat, extremely small in number, was either ignored or suppressed. The position of the USSR in the world had weakened and world imperialism gained invaluable advantages using the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan to escalate the ‘Cold War’.”

This is a mixture of factual nonsense, pro-imperialist cant and outright anti-internationalism. The Afghan proletariat could not be an independent factor: in fact there were more mullahs in Afghanistan (more than 250,000 of them) than there were industrial workers, and only two factories in the entire country! At the time the USSR intervened, more than 90 percent of the population of Afghanistan was illiterate; life expectancy was only 40.

The assertion that the Soviets were responsible for escalating the Cold War because of their intervention in Afghanistan is simply a rendition of the line spouted by Ronald Reagan. As far as the imperialists are concerned, the whole world belongs to them to plunder however they see fit, and nobody better get in the way...or else. Gorbachev in effect endorsed this line to justify abandoning Afghan leftists and women to their fate.

Many Soviet soldiers serving in Afghanistan rightly believed they were doing their internationalist duty. The claim that the money would have been “better spent at home,” which the Gorbachevites argued, was not only anti-internationalist but racist as well, deliberately appealing to sentiments like “why should our boys die in Afghanistan for those blacks?” It is no accident that today as well, the Northites scandalously maintain silence about racism directed against people from the Caucasus.

In Afghanistan, soldiers from Soviet Central Asia were particularly aware that they were fighting against the same kind of benighted social relations that had held their own grandmothers in virtual bondage prior to the victory of the Bolsheviks. A *New York Times* reporter traveling through Soviet Central Asia in 1980 found absolutely no sympathy for the Afghan “rebels” and broad support for the Soviet Army’s intervention. An irrigation engineer in Khiva, near Dushanbe, showed the reporter where the town’s slave market had been located before the Soviet authorities deposed the last Khan of Khiva. He added, “The Afghans are our neighbors. Where there is poverty and backwardness it is our duty to help” (*New York Times*, 11 April 1980).

More generally, the position expressed here by Volkov is an apology for the nationalism of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which viewed “export of revolution” as the original Trotskyist heresy. The conservative bureaucracy’s suicidal “theory” of “socialism in one

country” was based on the illusory search for peaceful coexistence with capitalist regimes abroad. To be sure, the Bolsheviks did not believe the victory of world socialism would come mainly through military triumph by the Red Army. But they did not reject revolutionary war as an instrument of social liberation. Perhaps the most important example came in the summer of 1920 with the Red Army’s counteroffensive in Poland. In a speech at the Ninth Party Conference, Lenin forcefully defended the Polish campaign against conservative critics of this attempt to extend the revolution militarily, pointing out that on the other side of Poland lay Germany, whose powerful proletariat was the key to the European revolution: “*Rote Fahne* [German Communist Party daily] and others could not accept the idea that we should help with our own hands to sovietise Poland. These people regard themselves as Communists, but some of them are still nationalists and pacifists.” (“Political Report of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party to the Ninth Conference of the RCP(B),” printed in *In Defence of the Russian Revolution* [1995]).

The revolutionary imperative to extend the revolution—taken for granted by the Bolsheviks until this program was overthrown by Stalin—flows straight from Marx’s elementary observations that capitalism had become a world system, hence it had to be destroyed on a world scale. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels pointed out that the international development of the productive forces made possible by world revolution

“is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it *want* is merely made general, and *destitution*, the struggle for necessities, and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced.... Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples ‘all at once’ and simultaneously, which presupposes the universal development of productive forces and world intercourse bound up with communism.”

In the 1920s, the Red Army’s smashing of the reactionary Basmachi in Central Asia propelled the Soviet Central Asian republics on a course of intensive economic growth, significantly raising living standards while achieving an impressive success in the liberation of women. A similar process occurred in Mongolia, a terribly backward country similar to Afghanistan, with little in the way of an indigenous proletariat (and therefore no material basis for proletarian revolution). A Soviet republic was established there in 1921-22 largely through the intervention of the Red Army, leading to the founding of the first city in Mongolia, Ulan Bator (Red Dawn).

The expropriation of capital and elimination of the bourgeois state apparatus through military occupation in the western Ukraine and Byelorussia in 1940, and in the East European countries following World War II, are other examples where the Red Army was an instrument of social liberation, although in a bureaucratically deformed way. The Soviet Army, as an instrument of the Soviet bureaucracy, reflected both aspects of the bureaucracy’s contradictory nature. The crushing of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the suppression of the “Prague Spring” in Czechoslovakia in 1968 were coun-

terrevolutionary acts of Stalinist repression which we Trotskyists forthrightly opposed. The Afghanistan intervention, though undertaken for defensive geopolitical reasons, opened up the possibility for social liberation and cut against the grain of the Kremlin’s “peaceful coexistence.”

Trotsky certainly did not fetishize national borders, and he never placed the “sovereignty” of so-called neutral and buffer countries above the revolutionary obligation to defend the Soviet Union. Indeed, he sharply criticized the Stalinist bureaucracy for fostering the illusion that long-lasting agreements could be negotiated with the imperialists in order to stabilize the world order. Thus in *The Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky wrote:

“The question of Mongolia is already a question of the strategic positions to be occupied by Japan in a future war against the Soviet Union. The Soviet government found itself this time compelled to announce openly that it would answer the intrusion of Japanese troops into Mongolia with war. Here, however, it is no question of the immediate defense of ‘our land’: Mongolia is an independent state. A passive defense of Soviet boundaries seemed sufficient only when nobody was seriously threatening them. *The real method of defense of the Soviet Union is to weaken the positions of imperialism, and strengthen the position of the proletariat and the colonial peoples throughout the earth.* An unfavorable correlation of forces might compel us to surrender many ‘inches’ of land, as it did at the moment of the Brest-Litovsk peace, the Riga peace, and in the matter of the handing over of the Chinese-Eastern Railroad. At the same time, the struggle for a favorable change in the correlation of world forces puts upon the workers’ state a continual obligation to come to the help of the liberative movements in other countries. But it is just this fundamental task which conflicts absolutely with the conservative policy of the status quo.” [our emphasis]

The betrayal in Afghanistan was a significant milestone in advancing capitalist counterrevolution. The withdrawal of Soviet troops was followed by counterrevolutionary Solidarność taking power in Poland, Gorbachev giving the green light to capitalist reunification of Germany, and Yeltsin’s pro-imperialist counter-coup in Moscow in August 1991. And in Afghanistan the military defeat of the PDPA government by Islamic fundamentalists has led to the institution of a reign of medieval terror, torture and virtual enslavement of women, and continuing bloody civil war between the ultrareactionary local factions. These are the fruits of the victory of the reactionary forces that the Northites supported.

We sought to fight counterrevolution while there was still time: far better to defeat counterrevolution in Afghanistan than be defeated by it later in the Soviet Union. When Gorbachev pulled the Soviet troops out, we offered to the Afghan government that we would organize an international brigade to fight against the CIA-backed *mujahedin*. Not least, this would have served to awaken the revolutionary internationalist consciousness of Soviet workers and soldiers in the direction of proletarian political revolution. Several months later, we threw a significant proportion of our international resources into East Germany, fighting for workers and soldiers soviets throughout Germany to smash capitalist reunification, through political revolution in the East and socialist revolution in the West. We

called for "A red Germany of workers councils, part of a Socialist United States of Europe."

Poland: Northites in League with Solidarność

At a time when virtually the entire Western left was proclaiming "Solidarity with Solidarity," our tendency sought to expose before the world's working class that Lech Walesa & Co. were a counterrevolutionary agency for the CIA and Western bankers, Ronald Reagan, the Pope and clerical nationalists. We supported the Jaruzelski regime's spiking of Solidarność's bid for power in December 1981, while emphasizing that the Stalinist progenitors of Poland's crisis were incapable of politically defeating Solidarność and that what was necessary was to forge a Trotskyist party that could lead a proletarian political revolution to oust the sell-out bureaucracy. Volkov quotes as if it were an outrage our forthright statement from that period: "*If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily...we will support this.* And we take responsibility in advance for this; whatever the idiocies and atrocities they will commit, we do not flinch from defending the crushing of Solidarity's counterrevolution" (WV No. 289, 25 September 1981). David North et al., in the name of "anti-Stalinism," lined up with the counterrevolutionary Solidarność cabal and held them up as a model "trade union."

The purpose of the Northites' embrace of Solidarność had little to do in any case with the Polish workers. Fully in step with other fake leftists at whom the Northites like to sneer as "diseased petty-bourgeois" tendencies, they were joyfully cuddling up to the American AFL-CIO, the German SPD, the British and Australian labor parties, etc. In hailing Solidarność, the social democrats and their "left" tails were simply doing the bidding of their imperialist masters once again, providing a "labor" face for Cold War anti-Sovietism.

According to Volkov, Jaruzelski's coup "expressed the fear of the bureaucracy in the face of spontaneous protest by the working class that could have led to a new political revolution in Poland and the establishment of a genuine workers republic there." But had Solidarność taken power, it would not have been a political revolution but a *social counterrevolution* (and when Walesa & Co. did eventually take power as Stalinism was collapsing worldwide, a counterrevolution is exactly what it was). The Northites are cynically distorting the views of Leon Trotsky, who used the term "political revolution" to mean the overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucratic caste by the workers and the establishment of a regime of soviet democracy, based on *preserving the dictatorship of the proletariat and the nationalized planned economy*. Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the October Revolution and organizer of the Red Army, stood unconditionally for the defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state against capitalist counterrevolution.

The implicit methodology of Volkov & Co. is that any attempt to overthrow the Stalinist bureaucracy constitutes a "political revolution." But Solidarność was very different from the pro-socialist Hungarian workers who

rose up against the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1956. And the consciousness of the Polish working masses in 1981 was much different than during earlier periods of working-class protests in 1953, 1956, 1968 and 1970-71, when the influence of capitalist-restorationist tendencies was far weaker. What is decisive here is from what *class* standpoint the Stalinist bureaucracy is opposed. As we have noted, "whether the collapse of Stalinist rule led to a workers government or to capitalist restoration would be determined by the political consciousness and leadership of the working class, specifically the ability of the workers movement to overcome and combat illusions in parliamentarism and nationalist prejudices" ("On the Collapse of Stalinist Rule in East Europe," *Spartacist* No. 45-46, Winter 1990-1991).

Back in 1981, North's U.S. Workers League literally gushed over Solidarność, hailing it as "an undaunted, young, vigorous and independent trade union movement" (*Bulletin*, 15 September 1981). Naturally now that the Polish workers have been through the brutal experience of Walesa's capitalist-restorationist government, it is no longer fashionable for fake leftists to be cheerleaders for Solidarność. To prettify their earlier support to Walesa & Co., Volkov has to pretend that somehow the organization has degenerated. Thus he writes that "it was precisely the violent suppression of Solidarność which drove it to total anticommunist degeneration."

This is utterly absurd. When Solidarność first emerged in a wave of strikes in August 1980, a revolutionary leadership would have sought to *split* Solidarność, winning the mass of the workers away from the anti-Soviet and pro-Vatican leadership around Walesa. But by the time of its founding conference, in September 1981, the forces of clerical reaction and capitalist restoration had decisively taken the ascendancy. In sharp contrast to the Hungarian workers councils of 1956, the Solidarność congress resolutions made no mention of socialism. Instead they espoused "self-management," calling for the abolition of centralized economic planning. Solidarność's central political demand was for "free elections" to the Sejm (parliament), thereby rejecting soviet democracy in favor of "democratic" counterrevolution.

Taking its cue from its advisers in the fanatically anti-Communist bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO, the American trade-union federation, Solidarność called for "free trade unions." While the demand for trade unions independent of bureaucratic control is integral to the Trotskyist program of proletarian political revolution, the *slogan* of "free trade unions" was long associated with NATO imperialism. For the U.S. Cold Warriors who authored it, it had one meaning: trade unions without communists, i.e., its central thrust was the same as the slogan of "soviets without Bolsheviks" raised by the Kronstadt mutineers of 1921. Were the ICFI more honest, it would denounce Trotsky for the necessary suppression of the counterrevolutionary Kronstadt uprising.

There was nothing "independent" about Solidarność, least of all its financing. Years later, the American bourgeois weekly *Time* (24 February 1992) said openly

what we had exposed years before: “Until Solidarity’s legal status was restored in 1989 it flourished underground, supplied, nurtured and advised largely by the network established under the auspices of Reagan and [Pope] John Paul II.... Money for the banned union came from CIA funds, the National Endowment for Democracy, secret accounts in the Vatican and Western trade unions.”

Solidarność leaders hobnobbed with anti-Communist leaders of the American “AFL-CIA” and big-time capitalists. Invited to Solidarność’s first conference in 1981 as part of the AFL-CIO delegation was one Irving Brown, identified by ex-CIA official Philip Agee as the “principal CIA agent for control of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.” Brown’s notorious career began in the post-World War II years, when he used hundreds of thousands of CIA dollars and the services of gangsters to split and destroy militant Communist-led unions in West Europe. And in October 1981, barely two months before Solidarność’s bid for power, Walesa was wined and dined at a hush-hush breakfast (subsequently exposed in *Le Canard Enchaîné*, 16 December 1981) with some 20 top-level American financiers and industrialists who flew in just to meet him at a posh restaurant at Paris’ Charles de Gaulle airport. As the saying goes, “Tell me who your friends are, and I’ll tell you who you are.”

Nor did Solidarność solidarize with the struggles of the workers in the capitalist West. When Ronald Reagan fired 12,000 striking air traffic controllers in 1981—the entire national union membership—practically every trade-union federation in the Western world protested. But not Polish Solidarność! Nor did Walesa & Co. support the British miners when they went on a *year-long* strike in 1984-85. Not for nothing did we say that Solidarność was the only “trade union” in the world supported by Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and the Vatican!

On the eve of the British coal strike, it was North’s own international leaders, in Gerry Healy’s Workers Revolutionary Party, who instigated an anti-communist witchhunt against Arthur Scargill, the head of the miners union. Healy’s press blasted Scargill for accurately calling Solidarność an “anti-socialist” organization. This was a completely calculated act on the part of the Healyites, timed to be a bombshell, and one which was played for all it was worth by Thatcher, the bourgeois press and the anti-Communist labor bureaucrats in Britain in their campaign to cut off solidarity with the miners. The Healyites were so proud of themselves that they published an entire pamphlet about it.

The British miners strike was a class confrontation which could have toppled the Tory government and posed the question of which class would rule. And it was seen as such by the British state. Subsequently it emerged that the political police (MI5) were up to their necks in a vendetta against Scargill, which sought to starve the miners into submission by seizing their treasury and the funds being raised in solidarity internationally, including from Soviet trade unionists. On a more modest scale, our tendency, working with our defense organization, the Partisan Defense Committee,

also raised funds for the British miners, in the face of hostility from the American AFL-CIO tops who considered Scargill a dangerous “red.”

Whitewashing the counterrevolutionary character of Solidarność, Volkov claims that there were “several political tendencies fighting inside ‘Solidarność.’ The question of which was going to achieve overwhelming dominance depended entirely on whether the Polish proletariat could break from the influence of Stalinism and liberalism.” But the leaders of Solidarność were not Stalinists or social democrats, or even liberals. They were ardent enthusiasts for Western capitalism and the Roman Catholic church hierarchy. Thus, one of the demands of the Gdansk ship workers who struck in August 1980 was for access to the mass media for the Roman Catholic church. And the church had strong support particularly among the one-third of the population employed in agriculture, most of whom worked on privately owned farms. This represented a substantial spearhead for capitalist counterrevolution.

Indeed, the “several political tendencies” which Volkov refers to as fighting within Solidarność did not include a single known current which opposed capitalist restoration. “Tendencies” there were: liberal anti-Communists, Catholics, monarchists, fascists, etc. The “left wing” of Solidarność, including Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron (who later became minister of labor in capitalist Poland), refused to oppose the church. Their newspaper *Rabotnik* enthusiastically greeted the visit of Pope John Paul II to Poland in 1979 (*Rabotnik*, 1 June 1979). Nor were the ranks mostly workers—at the time of Solidarność’s bid for power, two-thirds of its members were peasants and priests!

As we noted in our article headlined “Stop Solidarity’s Counterrevolution!” (WV No. 289, 25 September 1981):

“What do revolutionaries do when the Marxist program stands counterposed to the overwhelming bulk of the working class, a situation we of course urgently seek to avoid? There can be no doubt. The task of communists must be to defend at all costs the program and gains of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Today Trotskyists find themselves in such a position over Poland, and it is necessary to swim against a powerful current of counterrevolution.”

In this same article we note that “in Poland it is the Stalinists themselves, through decades of capitulation to capitalist forces, who have produced the counterrevolutionary crisis.... The crimes of Stalinism, not least the present counterrevolutionary situation in Poland, mandate proletarian political revolution in the Soviet bloc.” Naturally, Volkov does not quote this!

Nor does he acknowledge that after Jaruzelski’s counter-coup, we wrote: “As the immediate counterrevolutionary threat passes, these martial law measures must be ended, including release of the Solidarność leaders. A Trotskyist vanguard seeks to defeat them *politically*, by mobilizing the Polish working class in its true class interests” (“Power Bid Spiked,” WV No. 295, 18 December 1981). In fact, nowhere in his long screed does Volkov ever admit that we have consistently raised the slogan of proletarian political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy in our propaganda directed to the

deformed and degenerated workers states. This alone testifies to the total intellectual mendacity of North, Volkov & Co.

Dual Role of the Bureaucracy

Volkov claims that “the main theoretical reason that made the Spartacists the eager defenders of Stalinism was their inability to understand the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the USSR.” What chutzpah from the people who systematically and with loud “theoretical” fanfare falsified Trotsky’s views on the bureaucracy while in practice portraying it as a pure and simple “counterrevolutionary” agency working hand in hand with imperialism. Thus in his 1989 tract on *Pere-stroika Versus Socialism*, North declares that “the political and economic goals of the bureaucracy in its relations with world imperialism” are “the destruction of the planned economy and the social conquests of the October Revolution” and restoration of capitalism. And, more generally, in his 1988 tome, *The Heritage We Defend*, he declares that “Trotsky had branded the Stalinist bureaucracy as ‘counterrevolutionary through and through.’” This stupidly one-sided formulation was the banner of every latter-day anti-Soviet fake Trotskyist.

Trotsky *never* said the Stalinist bureaucracy was “counterrevolutionary through and through.” In fact this dubious formulation had its origins in the 1953 faction fight in the American Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) against the pro-Stalinist Cochran-Clarke faction. Used in the heat of argument by the majority’s Dave Weiss, the formulation was then picked up and defended by Joseph Hansen.

Today Volkov seeks to refurbish the Northites’ long-time perversion of Trotsky’s analysis of the USSR with a new twist: the claim that they agree that the bureaucracy has a “dual nature.” Their best hope is that the reader will emerge totally confused. So a selection of excellent quotes from Trotsky is followed by the mind-twisting statement that “the progressive function of the bureaucratic caste was always relative, but its counterrevolutionary role was absolute”! Of course, the bureaucracy—the usurpers of political power from the proletariat and the executioners of the Old Bolsheviks—never had any “progressive function.” But so long as it rested on the proletarian property forms, it was constrained to behave in a contradictory fashion with respect to the defense of the degenerated workers state.

When Trotsky referred to the dual role of Stalinism in the USSR, he meant that the bureaucracy was not a ruling class but a brittle caste, resting on the collectivized property forms inherited from the October Revolution, while serving as a transmission belt for the pressures of imperialism. Thus at times the bureaucracy was constrained to defend—in a bureaucratic fashion—the workers state in order to protect its own privileges. Simultaneously, in myriad other ways it was undermining the workers state. In a 1937 article against the future renegade Burnham, Trotsky noted:

“The function of Stalin, like the function of Green [then head of the American trade-union federation, the AFL],

has a dual character. Stalin serves the bureaucracy and thus the world bourgeoisie; but he cannot serve the bureaucracy without defending that social foundation which the bureaucracy exploits in its own interests. To that extent does Stalin defend nationalized property from imperialist attacks and from the too impatient and avaricious layers of the bureaucracy itself. However, he carries through the defense with methods that prepare the general destruction of Soviet society. It is exactly because of this that the Stalinist clique must be overthrown. But it is the revolutionary proletariat who must overthrow it. *The proletariat cannot subcontract this work to the imperialists.* In spite of Stalin, the proletariat defends the USSR from imperialist attacks.”

— “Not a Workers’ and Not a Bourgeois State?”
(November 1937) [our emphasis]

In situations where the bureaucracy felt compelled to defend the workers state, albeit in a bureaucratic fashion, it was in order for Marxists to enter into a united front “with the Thermidorian section of the bureaucracy against open attack by capitalist counter-revolution” (in the words of the founding program of the Fourth International). This was the situation in Poland in 1981, when Jaruzelski took measures that *temporarily* suppressed capitalist counterrevolution. But for North, Volkov et al., since in practice the bureaucracy was “counterrevolutionary through and through,” it was permissible, indeed obligatory, to support any force that opposed it, no matter how reactionary. Using this revisionist methodology, the ICFI ended up in bed with the imperialists’ favorite “union” in Poland, the CIA-backed mullahs in Afghanistan, and fascist-infested nationalists in the Baltics.

Northites Cover Their Tracks

Having supported every counterrevolutionary force that sought to destroy the Soviet Union, now that it no longer exists the Northites seek to pose as “Soviet patriots.” They take us to task, claiming that “the refusal of the Spartacists to raise the call for the restoration of the Soviet Union is the continuation of their policy of accommodation to Stalinism and to the national bourgeoisie.” The Northites admit that the progressive social foundations of the former Soviet state—based on the overthrow of capitalist class rule by the October Revolution and the construction of a planned, collectivized economy—have been smashed and capitalism restored. So what could the call to “restore the Soviet Union” mean today? It is cynical nonsense mouthed by the degenerate Stalinist remnants—now capitalist politicians who are outright nationalists—who seek to play on nostalgia for the Soviet Union in order to build support for a program of racist, anti-Semitic Great Russian chauvinism. And notwithstanding Volkov’s declarations that the ICFI has nothing in common with the Russian nationalism of the Communist Party (KPRF), the facts show otherwise.

As we explained in our article “Why Marxists Do Not Raise the Call ‘Restore the Soviet Union,’” even after the Stalinist degeneration, the Soviet Union still retained a progressive character based on the collectivized economy established by the October Revolution. This progressive character had nothing whatever to do with its particular national composition. There is

nothing inherently progressive about a state incorporating in its boundaries Russians and Uzbeks, Ukrainians and Chechens, etc. It is not for nothing that Lenin termed the tsarist empire a "prison house of peoples."

As is well known, Lenin strongly and clearly advocated the right of national self-determination, i.e., the right to secede and form independent states, for the subject nations of the tsarist empire. This was key in enabling the Bolsheviks to win the support of the non-Russian toilers. And later, after the successful October Revolution and against the opposition of Stalin, Lenin insisted that the right of national self-determination for the constituent *soviet* republics be written into the founding constitution of the USSR.

With the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state, the key task for communists in the former USSR is to work for proletarian socialist revolutions to overthrow the new bourgeois states. Whether future workers states in this region will form a multinational federation and what its configuration would be is a historically open and, at the present time, rather abstract question. What is sharply and directly posed at present is the defense of non-Russian peoples against renescent Russian chauvinist ambitions, including those would-be Russian imperialists who call for "restoring the Soviet Union."

A central question for would-be Russian communists was the war in Chechnya. While giving no political support to Chechen nationalism, we called for the defeat of the Russian invading and occupying forces and for the right of Chechnya to decide its own fate. This obviously includes the right to establish its own state if the population so desires, as is apparently the case. As for the Stalinist has-beens in the KPRF, they attacked the Yeltsin government *from the right*, denouncing the withdrawal of Russian troops as a "betrayal."

No less than for the Stalinists, the ICFI's call for "restoring the Soviet Union" serves as a cover for Russian chauvinism. Thus Volkov cites with approval a resolution by the KRD in Ufa, which says in part:

"Yeltsin's victory brings colonialist oppression to the proletarians of Chechnya and to Russian workers, it brings death in other imperialist military campaigns which will surely come, for example, to the Ukraine or toward the 'Indian Ocean.' For Chechen toilers, a victory of Dudayev means neocolonial oppression by Muslim countries, as well as maintaining a semi-fascist regime domestically...."

"In imperialist war, communists must not justify or prettify a government or a bourgeoisie of any of the fighting powers because it means supporting the right of one of the fighting blocs (in this case Western or Muslim imperialism) to rob and oppress dependent peoples (including Chechnya). We cannot support 'self-determination' of the Chechen people in the abstract without posing its dependence on the revolutionary proletarian movement in Chechnya and in the other republics of the former USSR."

This "even-handed" position on the war reflects a chauvinist refusal to distinguish between a regional imperialist power (capitalist Russia) and a subjugated people (the Chechens). To seize on the Muslim leadership of the Chechen people to raise a spectre of Russia being in danger from "Muslim imperialism" simply reflects racist Russian imperialist propaganda. The

position of Leninists and Trotskyists in wars between imperialists and colonial peoples is to call for military defeat of the imperialists. Thus in the war between China and Japan in the 1930s, while not giving any political confidence to the anti-communist butcher Chiang Kai-shek, the Trotskyists gave military support to the Chinese against Japanese imperialism. A similar position was taken in military defense of Haile Selassie's Ethiopia in its war against Mussolini's Italian imperialism.

In *opposing* independence for the Chechens, the Northites are making a political bloc with Yeltsin, Russian fascists like Zhirinovskiy and chauvinists of the Zyuganov ilk. This kind of methodology, with the false appeal to "proletarian internationalism" as a smoke-screen to avoid taking a side for the military defeat of one's own imperialist bourgeoisie, is typical of the methods of the social-patriotic Second International and alien to Leninism.

It is notable that nowhere in their statement do the Northites make any reference to the whipping up of a racist witchhunt against the Caucasian minority in Russia, fueled by the war in Chechnya. There is no criticism whatsoever of the anti-Semitism, anti-gay and racist bigotry which saturate the Stalinist milieu, nor any mention of the need to mobilize against fascist scum like Pamyat or the other fascist groups that have proliferated in Russia. Indeed, the Northite press in Russia is notorious for failing to address any of the questions of special oppression. In contradistinction, readers of our Russian-language material (see for example *Biulleten Spartakovtsev* No. 3) are well aware of our insistence that a Leninist party must be a "tribune of the people," combatting all manifestations of oppression in society.

The Northites try to dress up their chauvinist line on Chechnya by claiming they are "fighting" bourgeois nationalism. Likewise, they have "discovered" that the Tamils in Lanka, the Québécois in Canada, etc. have no right to independence. (See our article, "David North 'Abolishes' the Right to Self-Determination," *WV* Nos. 626 and 627, 28 July and 25 August 1995.) There's hardly anything "leftist" about this position. As we noted earlier, Healy/North were shameless enthusiasts for bourgeois nationalists like the Sajudis, or Walesa's Pilsudskiites, when such outfits were being supported by the imperialists as a means to destroy the Soviet Union. But now that the USSR is no more, the imperialist powers are not happy that the spoils they hoped to loot from the victory of capitalist counterrevolution are being drowned in a sea of nationalist-inspired regional conflicts. And the Northites follow suit. It's notable that the American and European governments supported the territorial integrity of Russia and its war against Chechnya. U.S. president Clinton grotesquely drew a parallel between the Russian attempted rape of Chechnya and the struggle against the Southern slavocracy in the American Civil War, claiming that the common principle was "that no state has a right to withdraw from our union."

It's particularly obscene to hear lectures about the

dangers of bourgeois nationalism from this lot. The Northite tendency is not just a bunch of opportunists with bad ideas, but is deeply corrupt. Today fanning fears of “Muslim imperialism” in Chechnya, the Northites for years operated as shameless apologists for a number of Arab nationalist regimes. In 1979, North’s *Bulletin* reprinted articles from Gerry Healy’s *News Line* hailing the execution of 21 Iraqi Communist Party members by Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist government. That same year, celebrating the “Tenth Anniversary of the Libyan Revolution,” the Workers League sent a telegram to Qaddafi praising his “progressive socialist policies.” Operating as press agents for a variety of oil-rich Middle Eastern regimes, the ICFI was rewarded with millions in money from Iraq, Kuwait, Libya and Abu Dhabi, among others. Of course, today the Northites would like to claim that it was all Healy’s fault. But none of the leaders of the ICFI objected to the vicious betrayals that were carried out to get the money that came pouring in from Middle Eastern regimes. On the contrary, Healy was deposed by his former lieutenants only *after* the money was no longer coming in (see “Trotskyism: What It Isn’t and What It Is” [“Shto Takoe Trotskism,” *Biulleten Spartakovtsev* No. 1, Autumn 1990].

With the Northites, yesterday’s orthodoxy is tomorrow’s anathema. During the Vietnam War, the Workers League appealed to the viciously anti-Communist AFL-CIO union bureaucracy headed by George Meany to build a “labor party.” The Healyites’ platform for such a party made no mention of either the war or the fight against racism, which is key to unlocking proletarian struggle in the U.S. But today the Workers League preaches that the trade unions are totally bourgeois institutions that cannot serve as economic defense organizations for the working class. The only constant here is the refusal to politically fight the sellout bureaucracy within the unions; formerly they prettified the “labor lieutenants of capital,” today they write off the unions, which they equate with the pro-capitalist leadership.

Or take Volkov’s assertion that our tendency originated “in the wave of protests against the Vietnam War.” Actually our origins are earlier, in the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) of the American Socialist Workers Party. The leaders of what became the Workers League were also part of the RT until they and Healy decided to conciliate the then-centrist SWP tops by fingering us to the party leadership. One of the central planks of the RT was its criticism of the SWP majority for uncritically enthusing over the Castro regime in Cuba—a fact which it is inconvenient for Volkov to admit since it runs counter to his line that we are pro-Stalinist. Moreover, during the Vietnam War the Healyites oscillated between slavish support to the reformists who sought to keep the antiwar movement chained to the capitalist Democratic Party politicians, on the

one hand, and opportunist lunges after assorted Stalinist outfits. Thus, they uncritically hailed Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Stalinists, who murdered the urban-based Vietnamese Trotskyists; they acted as cheerleaders for Mao’s bogus “Cultural Revolution” in China—a power struggle between wings of the Stalinist bureaucracy which was ultimately settled by the army.

The Healy/North operation is sometimes capable of putting some orthodox-sounding stuff on paper, but the reader had better “hold on to his wallet.” To use Lenin’s term, these people are “political bandits”—that is, they function as political pirates who will show *any* flag in order to attack any target. When it has suited its episodic interests, the ICFI has taken subsidies from oil-rich regimes; they have served the queen and the venal right-wing British trade-union bureaucracy by smearing the leader of the miners union as a desperate class battle was looming. And they crawled before any and all forces hostile to the social gains that existed for working people in the collectivized property forms of the former USSR. In their own small way, the Northites facilitated the destruction of the Soviet Union as they made common cause with the imperialist enemies of October, in the name of “anti-Stalinism.” We, the Trotskyists, fought for the only program that would have prevented the catastrophe of counterrevolution: proletarian political revolutions in the deformed and degenerated workers states, and the socialist overthrow of capitalism on a worldwide scale.

The final undoing of the October Revolution has unleashed in its wake intensified capitalist attacks on the working class on every continent, as each imperialist power scrambles to improve its competitive position against its rivals, seeking to turn the screws of exploitation tighter at home while jockeying for the spoils of neocolonial plunder abroad. Defensive struggles, often sharp, have broken out as the toiling masses seek to protect their living standards. But what is required to win such struggles and take the working class over to the offensive to finally put an end to the capitalist imperialist system is an internationalist revolutionary leadership rooted in the working class—a Leninist party which must fight to the finish to defend every past proletarian conquest as part of fighting for new ones. As we wrote in the last issue of *Spartacist*:

“In the remaining deformed workers states which emerged while the USSR existed, there is still a narrow window of time open for Trotskyist intervention, fighting to defend the remaining gains of the revolutions from China to Cuba through workers political revolution. Trotskyist parties, part of a reformed Fourth International, must be built to lead new October Revolutions to bring the workers to power all over the globe. It is for this aim and purpose that the International Communist League fights.”

—“Trotsky’s Fight Against Stalinist Betrayal of Bolshevik Revolution,” *Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 53, Summer 1997

—7 October 1997

Bulletin No. 6

March 1991, \$2 (16 pages)

“Bundestag Election '90—What Do the Others Stand For?: The SpAD—Provocateurs Against the Fourth International”

— Translated from *Neue Arbeiterpresse* No. 633, 23 November 1990

“Statement of the Gruppe Spartakus on the Bundestag Elections: No Vote to the SPD/No Vote to the PDS—Critical Support to the SpAD”

— Translated from a leaflet by the Gruppe Spartakus, German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency, 17 November 1990

A Letter on “Spartacism”

— Typescript of a letter by Barry Weisleder, longtime spokesman for the United Secretariat in Canada, 15 November 1990

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“Real Trotskyist Platform or Spartacist Platform”: Contribution to the Debate with Algerian PST Militants

— by Damien Elliott, editor of *l'Egalité*, newspaper of the JCR, youth group of French section of the United Secretariat, August 1992

“Open Letter to the JCR-*l'Egalité*”

— by the Ligue Trotskyste de France, 27 July 1992

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— Published by the Norden “Group,” July 1996

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— Reprinted from the *International Workers Bulletin*, 7 October 1996

“Healyites of the Second Mobilization—Workers Vanguard De-Collectivized”

— Photocopied from 1917, closing date 15 July 1996

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The Spartacist League Makes Available the Polemics of Its Opponents on the Left

“He who takes somebody’s word for it is a hopeless idiot who can be dispensed of with a simple gesture of the hand.” —V.I. Lenin

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March 1975, \$3 (58 pages)

Reprint of “Spartacist League: Anatomy of a Sect”

— From an “Education for Socialists” bulletin (June 1974) nominally published by the Canadian Revolutionary Marxist Group in the interests of its American cothinkers, the Internationalist Tendency

Reprint of the Spartacist League’s critique “Mandelites Falsify History to Attack SL”

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 59, 3 January 1975

Bulletin No. 2

April 1975, \$1.75 (34 pages)

Reprint of “The Fall of Allende and the Triumph of the Chilean Counterrevolution—the Spartacist League and the Strategy of Abstentionist Putschism”

— Originally published by The Communist Internationalist Group, November 1973

Preface: Letter to Spartacist League Central Office from Comrade Small, 12 February 1974

Bulletin No. 3

August 1975, \$2.75 (95 pages)

Reprint of “What is Spartacist?”,
by Tim Wohlforth,
Second Edition (June 1973)

Reprint of “The Workers League and the
International Committee: A Statement by
Tim Wohlforth,” 11 January 1975

Reprint of “The Wohlforth League:
Counterfeit Trotskyists”

— From *Spartacist* No. 17-18, August-September 1970

Reprint of “Confessions of a ‘Renegade’:
Wohlforth Terminated”

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 61, 31 January 1975

Bulletin No. 4

Winter 1986, \$1 (32 pages)

1917, *Journal of the Bolshevik Tendency*, No. 1

First issue of the publication of the Bolshevik Tendency, formerly “External Tendency of the Spartacist League,” includes “‘I Liked Gerry Healy...’: The Robertson School of Party Building” and “SL’s Cop-Baiting Celebrity: ‘Powerful Testimony’...to the Police”

Bulletin No. 5

July 1988, \$2 (26 pages)

Letter to *Workers Vanguard* by Cathy Nason for
the Bolshevik Tendency, 8 April 1988

“On the Slogan ‘Marines Out of Lebanon,
Now, Alive’: Reuben’s Tangled Web”

— From *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*
No. 2, January 1984

“BT Says Don’t Hail Red Army in Afghanistan”

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 449, 25 March 1988

“WV Flinches on 007: A Textbook Example”

— From *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*
No. 2, January 1984

“BT Protests Too Much” (reply from letters
column)

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 453, 20 May 1988

“Challenger’s ‘Major Malfunction’: No Disaster
for the Working Class”

— From 1917 No. 2, Summer 1986

ET Statement of 12 November 1983: “A Loss of
Nerve and a Loss of Will”

— From *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*
No. 2, January 1984

“Marxism and Bloodthirstiness”

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 345, 6 January 1984

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