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NO-STRIKE PACT IN STEEL

For Trade Union Independence and Workers' Internationalism!

Under pressure from the most serious inflation since the Korean War and a consistently precarious balance of payments position—the giant U.S. corporations are enlisting their allies in the labor movement—the trade-union bureaucracy—in the effort to completely subordinate the most basic interests of the workers and the trade-union organizations themselves, to the hapless task of saving American capitalism. Predictably, the trade-union "leaders" are performing like willing servants.

This is the meaning of the recent no-strike pact between the United Steelworkers (USWA) and major steel companies. Defended explicitly in terms of better enabling the companies to meet foreign competition and avoid the "disruption" of work stoppages, the special four-year deal bans a strike over the Steelworkers' next national contract and sets a precedent which is being eagerly pushed by all the big monopolies and their government. "This is the beginning of a new era in labor-management relations in the United States," crowed USWA president I.W. Abel after signing the deal.

Abel Gives Up Right to Strike for \$150

Under the terms of this agreement, steelworkers will get a minimum of 3 percent yearly wage increases, plus extension of a grossly inadequate cost-of-living allowance, in exchange for agreeing in advance not to strike for anything more! In this context, Abel's promise to "fight" against any ceiling on the cost-of-living allowance is simply a joke. Issues not agreed on in the bargaining will be submitted to an arbitration board controlled by supposedly neutral "public" members. (In fact, such "independents" almost invariably side with management, accepting the bosses' line that "high wages" cause inflation and strikes are "harmful to the public interest." Whether they are appointed by the capitalist government or are "respected individuals," arbitration boards represent the "national interest" of the tiny minority of the owners against the interests of the vast majority of the public, who are workers.) Likewise, while wage increases could go above this minimum, they will without a doubt be kept below the government's 5.5

percent wage control "guideline." To sweeten this foul-tasting deal steelworkers are to receive a one-time candy bonus—of a miserable \$150! Combined with the 3 percent minimum wage increase, this works out to a pitiful 15 cent/hour raise, in exchange for labor's right to strike!

Local steel unions will have the right to strike over local issues, but both union leaders and management point out openly that such strikes will of course be isolated and have "minimal effect" on the industry! This means that such crucial issues as speedup, layoffs and working conditions will simply be left as prerogatives of management, which is exactly where the companies want them.

The USWA bureaucracy has a sorry history of leading the trade-union aristocracy as a whole in subordinating the interests of the rank and file to capitalism. Steelworkers have never had the right to ratify contracts negotiated for them by their "leaders." (Approval of the present pact was made by the 600 officials of the Basic Steel Industry Conference.) This conformed to founding president Philip Murray's attitude toward union democracy, as expounded at the first USWA convention: "I do not want this convention to waste a single solitary moment of its time discussing, by resolution or otherwise, internal differences of any description." True to his heritage, Abel helped push along the employers' "productivity" drive in 1971 with a special joint union-management committee to "promote orderly and peaceful relations with employees and achieve uninterrupted (!) operations in the plant," i.e., using union officials to keep the workers in line. In accord with the bourgeoisie's current offensive of jingoistic national chauvinism, Abel produced jointly with the steel companies a film, "Where's Joe?" which justifies layoffs as the result of loss of business to foreign competition because of the threat and fear of strikes.

Precedent for Labor Peace

While the USWA bureaucracy has been selling out the membership for decades, the no-strike pact represents a new step toward full subordination of the unions to the state in the interests



Steelworkers' Abel and U.S. Steel's Larry announce no-strike pact.

of imperialism. "We hope what Steel has done will encourage others," said David Cole, chairman of Nixon's National Commission for Industrial Peace (NCIP), which is pushing similar arbitration schemes in trucking, maritime, construction, food retailing, auto and "defense." The *New York Times* (22 April 1973) proclaimed, "Growth of Arbitration Appears to Point to Era of Labor Peace" and pointed to similar developments toward "cooperation" and away from "the adversary relationship" with capitalists on the part of other union officials, ranging from reactionaries such as Gleason of the ILA to noted liberals like Wurf of AFSCME. Both union bureaucrats and capitalists see the extension of so-called "voluntary" arbitration agreements as an advantage over direct government intervention, compulsory arbitration laws, etc., since the "voluntary" cover preserves the image of bourgeois democracy and "neutrality" of the state. Instead of the direct use of capitalist power, the unions themselves extend their role of disciplining the labor force in the interest of safeguarding profits and the stability of the capitalist order. This has been the preferred method of the bulk of the capitalists since the rise of the CIO in the thirties accomplished the

organization of industrial workers without providing a political alternative to capitalism.

Yet while the bosses would prefer "voluntary" arbitration schemes and deals with the trade-union officialdom, they will also resort to brute force if the bureaucrats prove unable to hold down the ranks. Thus in 1971 Nixon tried to outlaw strikes in the transportation industry and broke the postal strike with the use of the National Guard. Either way, the course leads inexorably to increasing government control over the unions, until the unions have lost any semblance of independence whatsoever.

Foreign Competition

The excuse for surrendering labor's hard-won right to strike is the increasing threat posed to U.S. capitalism by its increasingly powerful economic rivals in Europe and Japan. The labor bureaucracy's policy has always been one of partnership in U.S. imperialism, but in the past this has been based on the expansion and dominance of American power in the world economy. As U.S. hegemony disappears and its competitive position is weakened, the

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NEW AUGUST BLOC— VNL/CSL Form Anti-Spartacist League

Pursuing its characteristic policy of unprincipled combinationism, based primarily on hatred of the Spartacist League, Harry Turner's Vanguard Newsletter grouplet has just pompously announced a "fusion" between itself and the Class Struggle League (formerly the Leninist Faction of the SWP).

But as if bent on demonstrating anew the political axiom that the strength of a rotten bloc is inversely proportional to the political distance between its components, the process of "fusion" has merely exposed some of the inherent instabilities of the component groups.

As far as Vanguard Newsletter is concerned, Turner's headlong rush to stave off disaster by an unprincipled merger with the CSL resulted in the loss of two members of VNL's "Editorial Board." The three VNLers who split denounced "the accommodation of the majority of VNL, as led by Turner and Platsky, to the petty-bourgeois radicals of the CSL." But what was really involved here was merely the coming unstuck of a previous and equally unprincipled bloc between Turner and David Fender, along with two of Fender's associates in the former "Communist Tendency" of the SWP. This bloc had apparently been superseded by an alliance between Turner and Henry Platsky, the latter, along with two supporters, having found a home in VNL after leaving the Marcyite Workers World grouping and then the "New York Revolutionary Committee."

The CSL, which "fused" with VNL at a conference in late April, represents most of the leadership and perhaps half of the supporters of the former Leninist Faction of the SWP. In order to achieve this merger with VNL, the CSL underwent no less than three splits—the "Revolutionary Socialist Faction" which spun off in the direction of pure anti-Leninist syndicalism; the "Revolutionary Workers Faction" which bases itself on the 1921 Workers Opposition; and one additional comrade who became the tenth member of the former LF to join the Spartacist League.

VNL Revolving Door

For Turner, this is only the latest in a series of unstable combinations which have been his trademark since his departure from the Spartacist League in 1969. Drawn through cranky impatience into the Ellens faction in the SL, Turner served as an "orthodox" cover for this syndicalist, state-capitalist, pro-black nationalist grouping until the Ellens group precipitously split from the SL, contemptuously neglecting even to inform Turner in advance. For Turner—who had pretensions to being the head of this semi-undergroundist, workerist tendency—this was his first experience of a full-blown rotten bloc. He has continued to recapitulate the same pattern ever since, with similar disastrous consequences.

Humiliated by the split of "his" faction, Turner resigned from the SL, pulling along behind him his one supporter (long-time personal friend Hugh Fredericks). After a brief period of chasing the Labor Committee of L. Marcus and then shamelessly groveling after G. Healy of the British SLL (see *WV* No. 11, September 1972), Turner and VNL settled down to pursuing his one real aim: vengeance against the Spartacist League.

The years that followed saw the loss of Fredericks and the temporary collection of a few burnt-out collaborators like state-capitalist Bob Davis and Harold Robins. In exchange for belated and cynically endorsing the Workers League's disgraceful slander that

"the SL is the finger man for the world capitalists" and implicitly repudiating the Leninist attitude toward work in the armed forces over the case of one Robert Sherwood, Turner briefly picked up the "Labor Action Committee" of Canada which Sherwood founded.

This proud acquisition was speedily dissipated when Turner, Sherwood and the Communist Tendency of the SWP were drawn into a fusion scheme which involved orienting to the French OCL. The fragile bloc promptly blew apart in a frenzy of hilarious organizational bickering, from which emerged again the three components, somewhat reshuffled: Robins aligned himself with the CT, which promptly liquidated into the IS; Fender came over to VNL; while Sherwood's group oriented to the OCL.

Fender and his West Coast supporter, Ed DiTullio, promptly became members of VNL's "Editorial Board." But they stood politically no closer to Turner than had any of VNL's previous collaborators. In addition to supporting the SWP's 1940 "Proletarian Military Policy," Fender had stood for critical support to the Liu wing of the Chinese Stalinist bureaucracy in the "Cultural Revolution" purge; Turner, however, had critically supported the Maoist wing. This diametrical counterposition was, of course, of no interest to these centrists, who simply avoided any further references to the issue in the pages of *VNL*!

In cementing his bloc with Fender, Turner even went so far as to publicly accuse the SL of slander for exposing Fender's bringing the cops into an argument with the Workers League in St. Louis (see *WV* No. 13, November 1972). Turner first challenged the SL to public ventilation of the issue, then sent up a smokescreen of pettifogging correspondence and finally unilaterally declared the matter closed. This incident may have contributed to the collapse of another Turnerite venture, the "Committee for Rank and File Causes" (a lowest-common-denominator pretense of union work), as CRFC "Secretary" Malcolm Kaufman of the "Socialist Forum" group became drawn in as Fender's de facto attorney.

Following the acquisition of Fender, Turner pulled off another "coup"—this time the recruitment of Henry Platsky, along with two supporters, originally from the Stalinist Workers World group of Sam Marcy. Platsky, who became a member of Turner's ubiquitous "Editorial Board" and has even served as VNL's international representative, still proclaims the Marcyite line of support for the Russian troops' crushing of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution!

Turner's last conciliatorist gyrations before he managed to rope in the CSL was the heedless pursuit of several former members of the SL who became involved in a series of counterposed secret cliquish machinations before resigning in several little clots. Recognizing these elements as true kindred spirits, Turner in the December 1972 issue of *VNL* published a letter by ex-SL CC member David Cunningham, along with a brief VNL introduction which charged that "these and others were driven out of the SL before they could even form a faction..." (whatever that means, since not one single violation of minority rights was ever even alleged). Since that time Turner has repeatedly denounced the SL for failing to publish anything in *WV* about these defectors. In fact, the onus is on Turner himself; VNL lent its meager weight to Cunningham's letter—including the statement that "we [ex-SLers] have since this summer produced several hundred pages of material"—while we have received from these individuals exactly nothing of these "hundreds of

pages." We may be permitted a bit of skepticism since Cunningham, before being "forced out" of the SL, never produced a single oppositional document, not even a resignation statement! But if such material exists, it is certainly Turner's responsibility to enlighten the working class as to the views of these people, with whom he so eagerly associated himself.

Turner had clearly hoped to draw Cunningham et al. into the "fusion" but none of these people was in evidence at the conference. He did manage, however, to attract a couple of observers, including one former Workers Leaguer who has been prominently involved in circulating a pamphlet of the British anarchist Solidarity group which is devoted to the position that the suppression of the Kronstadt uprising proved that the Bolsheviks were totalitarian butchers.

Enter the LF

Meanwhile a broad, programmatically amorphous opposition had developed within the SWP, the "Proletarian Orientation" tendency. As the result of a limited struggle against the SWP leadership over the single but vital issue of an orientation toward colonization into the working class, the PO began to experience internal differentiation between an essentially SWP-loyalist wing (some of which looked toward the SWP's European allies, the United Secretariat) and more leftist elements. Components of the old PO centered in Boston and Washington, D.C. began to investigate the degeneration of the SWP and to seek the roots of this degeneration in Pabloism itself.

These elements determined on the formation of a hard faction inside the SWP, the Leninist Faction, which traced a continuity to the 1961-63 fight of the SWP Revolutionary Tendency, which later became the Spartacist League.

The LF grouping in D.C. constantly declared openly within the LF its programmatic agreement with the SL and its intention to struggle to win the LF as a whole to a perspective of principled fusion with the SL.

However, the leap from the SWP to authentic Trotskyism proved to be too much for the core of the LF leadership, scarred by its experiences with the politically rotten and organizationally bureaucratic SWP. The LF leadership had previously declared that upon leaving the SWP, the group should either be organizationally independent or fuse with the SL. The Boston and D.C. groupings had collaborated on the drafting of a Declaration of Leninist Faction implicitly politically compatible with a perspective of SL fusion (see *Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972). But by the time of the LF convention held at Ashtabula, Ohio in August, the LF leadership had solidified hard around a workerist impulse, a position of "freedom of criticism, unity in action" and a call for a "Fifth International" (see *WV* No. 14, December 1972). Each of these represented an impressionistic overreaction against the SWP.

The SWP's arrogant refusal to un-

dertake work in the working class led the LF leadership to see proletarian implantation in moralistic terms, physical contact with the class becoming a talisman safeguarding against a petty-bourgeois line like that of the SWP. This same impulse, combined no doubt with a revulsion against the SWP's bureaucratism, led the LF leadership to reject the evolved Leninist practice of democratic centralism and to embrace Lenin's 1906 formulation, in deliberate repudiation of Lenin's later evolution and the organizational practice of the Fourth International under Trotsky. To deliberately embrace the inadequacies of Lenin's early positions—transcended in struggle through decisive historical experience such as the October Revolution and the founding of the Communist International—is to opt for a program alien to Leninism, just as do the Stalinists and social-democrats who point to Lenin's writings prior to the April Theses to justify a Menshevik policy.

The call for the "Fifth International" is based on an acceptance of the SWP-U.Sec.'s fraudulent claim that they do indeed represent the continuity of the Fourth. The thrust of this position became manifest when a grouping inside the CSL demanded that the group draw the logical conclusion and go back "From Trotskyism to Marxism."

Menshevik Backsliding Codified: VNL

Unwilling to openly repudiate a perspective of fusing with the SL, the LF leadership discovered a sudden attraction for VNL and sprung on its followers a proposal to investigate fusion with VNL as well. After some four and a half months of discussion on future perspectives in which the possibility of fusion with VNL had never been raised, Phil Stein presented a motion involving such a fusion at the LF Convention at Ashtabula. After two rounds of discussion in which he was attacked for refusing to defend VNL against numerous criticisms raised, Stein insisted that be simply "was not familiar with VNL's policies." A motion also made at Ashtabula concerning a three-way VNL-CSL-SL fusion was voted down by the membership. Not to be put off, however, the CSL leadership finally announced the upcoming fusion with VNL in a public leaflet—according to the "Revolutionary Workers Faction" even before it had been announced to the CSL membership or even to the CSL National Committee (*Workers Truth*, March 1973)!

Correctly recognizing the maneuver toward VNL as a desperate expedient designed to block fusion with the SL, five LF comrades resigned from the LF at Ashtabula to fuse with the SL. As a reward for having stated openly their perspective of SL fusion and having struggled consistently to win the LF as a whole to such a fusion, these comrades were (and continue to be) denounced by the LF leadership as "SL agents." They were in fact SWP members whose political evolution led them by a series of leaps from the SWP to the PO to the formation of the LF to

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the Spartacist League.

After leaving the SWP, the remaining LF supporters founded the CSL. But their troubles were only beginning. The CSL's Minneapolis grouping of trade union economists had predictably gravitated toward VNL and the CRFC strategy (a strategy so nakedly opportunist that the LF/CSL leadership, even as it moved toward merger with VNL, was forced to repeatedly disavow it). When formal discussions between the CSL and the SL were broken off—at the initiative of the SL, as it had become obvious that the CSL leadership was absolutely opposed to a perspective of SL fusion—four additional comrades broke away to join the SL. Most of the CSL's remaining Midwestern supporters were consolidating around a state-capitalist analysis of the deformed workers states and a syndicalist orientation and were moving rapidly toward split.

The shattering of the original Leninist Faction was a significant defeat for the SL, which had hoped that a real and principled fusion with the main core of the LF would illuminate the SL as the only viable alternative to SWP reformism and U.Sec. centrism. The resignation of Comrade Enrique Ayala from the CSL brings to ten the LF comrades who have found their way to authentic Trotskyism, but the SWP-U.Sec. leadership has been aided in its ability to ignore the SL and paint the world outside Pabloist revisionism as merely a plethora of centrist sects. While the LF leadership finds VNL a convenient centrist way-station, it has already spun off most of its original followers and has dissipated the political capital won in the LF's struggle inside the SWP.

Thus the "fusion" so proudly proclaimed in VNL has already precipitated the split of two groupings from the CSL (exclusive of the three splits which have regrouped as SL supporters) and the departure of Fender and his personal associates from VNL. Yet even after this paring down, and despite abject conciliationism displayed on all sides by those who remain, the components continue to have their disagreements.

The main continuing bone of contention continues to be the question of trade-union work—which both components piously insist is the central question facing revolutionaries! Although always exhibiting an unresolved contradiction between impulses toward workerism on the one hand and toward a communist approach to work among the proletariat on the other, the LF in its trade-union document had stated categorically:

"We do not have a 'trade union program.' We have a program—the Transitional Program. This is the program we want the trade unions to adopt. This is the program the advanced sections of the trade unions must adopt if there is to be a socialist revolution."

—The Transitional Program, the Party and the Trade Unions

This position has now been simply abandoned. The mammoth "Tasks and Perspectives" document drafted by CSL leaders Barbara Vukovich and Phil Stein along with VNL's Henry Platsky states:

"Unlike the SL, we know that what is involved here is a *process*. While we would prefer a situation where we could build mass caucuses on the full transitional program, such is not the situation we find today....

"We must not fall into the trap of 'single-issue focus' as practiced by the SWP...nor must we fall into the 'total program' trap of the SL, which insists that nobody but purists can belong to the caucus they build, and which will not build or participate in caucuses that have less than the full transitional program."

A response to this caricature of the SL position will have to await a future issue of *WV*. Here, we will restrict ourselves to noting that a concrete demonstration of the gulf separating the SL and CSL positions is the CSL's support for Arnold Miller's Labor Department-backed "Miners for De-

mocracy" campaign in the UMW (see *WV* No. 17, March 1973).

"Freedom of Criticism"

Concerning the various other differences in the new conglomeration, we find the same method of eclecticism and papering over. Thus the question of which International to build (the VNL calling for the Fourth, the CSL conjuring up a Fifth) has been neatly buried in a call for an unspecified "Trotskyist International." Regarding "democratic centralism," Turner has simply embraced the CSL's formulation of "freedom of criticism, unity in action," which in any case accords very well with VNL's years-long practice as a conglomeration of motley elements unwilling to struggle internally over their differences while preserving a common front externally.

Based on the syndicalist prescription that "the disputes of the party are the disputes of the class," the LF leadership adopted the position that public discussion of minority viewpoints, rather than the maintenance of discipline externally combined with full freedom of internal criticism, should be the norm in a revolutionary organization. When it was pointed out that a serious organization cannot permit its own members to propagate conflicting policies on the crucial issues facing the class, the reply was that discussion would be regulated by the Central Committee. Since the organization presumably does not distinguish between the right to raise criticism internally and externally, there is no guarantee of the rights of minorities internally except the presumed good will of the leadership.

The draft constitution of the "fused" organization carries this perversion of "democratic centralism" to its logical conclusion. In the context of fulsome protestations about how democratic the organization will be, appears the following ominous juxtaposition:

"While the Central Committee must print and circulate to the membership any contribution submitted by any League member, the CC has the right to recommend the expulsion of any member or tendency whose stated views contradict the requirements for membership as contained in Article III."

In other words, submit oppositional documents at your own risk!

Thus, instead of recognizing the practice of expelling members for their views rather than only for specific violations of discipline as a dangerous precedent which may be justified in certain unusual cases (in our eight years of organizational existence, the SL has never had such a case), these super-democratic centrists put it forward as a virtual norm. And predictably, following the resignation of the "Revolutionary Socialist Faction" from the CSL, a document signed by the CSL Central Committee demanded the expulsion of the RSF and wrote as a justification: "It is clear that the RSF constitutes a thorough-going opponent tendency to the CSL, can only hinder the functioning of the CSL as a Leninist organization, and does not belong in the CSL." Moreover, the constitution rejects the standard Leninist practice of guaranteeing minorities proportional representation on all leading bodies, instead exhorting the membership to try and be as inclusive as possible in elections.

As an interesting highlight on what passed for "democracy" and "full free discussion" among the Turnerites, in May 1972 a letter from DiTullio to Turner tentatively mentioned some disagreements with VNL's press, then hastened to add:

"If you think it worthwhile for me to go into any of this more carefully, a word from you locating my attention will be sufficient—the same way you corrected me on the question of the Bolivian revolution, simply by saying you rejected my arguments, which was sufficient to get me on the correct line, in time."

United only by its rejection of Leninist principle and its hatred of the SL,

Labor Committee Takes Anti-Communist Campaign to the Working Class

In the past several weeks, the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC) has been proceeding apace with its bombastic campaign to destroy the Communist Party "in six to eight weeks." In a number of hooligan attacks the NCLC managed to send a number of CP supporters to the hospital and get some of its own members knocked around as well. The CP, as was to be expected, called the cops on the Labor Committee, so the latter will now be faced with a series of court cases as a price for its stupid and disgusting thuggery.

In an editorial statement in *WV* No. 19 we stated our opposition to the use of violence in the workers movement and denounced these attacks as contrary to the Trotskyist tradition of workers democracy, wholly indefensible and anti-communist. Such methods simply play into the hands of the Stalinist CP, which has constantly used red-baiting, hooliganism and even assassination against revolutionary Marxists. The murder of Leon Trotsky is a prime example. But such agents of the bosses cannot be defeated by using their own methods, by going to the courts or using gangsterism. They must be defeated politically.

The anti-communist aspect of the Labor Committee campaign has become even more sharply focussed as they take their literature to the factories. The 26 April *Daily World* reports a red-baiting leaflet distributed at the Tarrytown, N.Y., GM plant, supposedly by a "UAW Committee to Stop Communism," and entitled "Stop the Pinkos." The leaflet is directed against Bill Scott, a leader of the Rank and File Committee of UAW Local 664, and contains stool-pigeon testimony from the House

Internal Security Committee (HISC). It also contains a reprint of an article from the NCLC's *New Solidarity* which refers to Scott as a "CP hack."

Similarly, while passing out free copies of their newspaper at the Mahwah, N.J., Ford plant recently, NCLC-ers asked auto workers to "help us smash the Communist Party." This is in the context of a scurrilous anti-communist smear leaflet, quite similar to the one reported in Tarrytown, entitled "Know Your Enemies," and supposedly put out by the "Mahwah Branch of the Anti-Communist Coalition." The leaflet listed names of four Mahwah workers who were cited by the witch-hunting HISC, all of them members of the Rank and File Committee of UAW Local 906. According to a RFC leaflet, "Stop Ford Repression," shortly after the red-baiting leaflet was passed out, three of the four workers mentioned in it (plus two others) were fired on the flimsiest trumped-up charges.

Everything about these leaflets, their use of HISC data, their coordinated timing and the firings, point to a concerted attempt by the union bureaucracy to get rid of rank-and-file militants. The NCLC position in this situation is quite clear—by their despicable anti-communist campaign they aid the bureaucrats in smashing oppositionists in the union. The position of the Spartacist League is also clear: Defend the workers fired at Mahwah (Eisenberg, Haddock, Mullen and Rentas), and build a class-struggle opposition in the unions that stands solidly on the principles of workers democracy and class independence. A revolutionary struggle for class solidarity, not petty gangsterism and anti-communism, is the means to fight the CP's reformist influence. ■

Forum

Communist Approach to Trade Unions

Speaker: JOSEPH SEYMOUR
SL Central Committee

Friday, MAY 25 at 7:30 p.m.

CLEVELAND

Cleveland State University
Main Classroom - Room 101

the new "fused" organization faces a dim future. It denounces the SL as "student-oriented" and "filled with 'members... who have no desire to enter the working class.' Yet despite its workerist pretensions, it is forced to admit that the SL is its 'competitor for cadres in this immediate period!'

These centrists may rest assured that the SL has no fear of such "competition." As we launch our bi-weekly newspaper and continue to deepen our implantation in industry, we have every confidence that the working class (yes, and some radical students too!) will be able to distinguish between a serious revolutionary organization like the SL and a conglomeration of burnt-out centrists. We will politically combat the pernicious opportunism of Turner-Platsky-Vukovich-Stein wherever it surfaces, be it exclusively around the edges of other radical organizations (as has been the case with VNL) or be it in the union movement. Either way, the SL will continue to go forward toward the building of the U.S. vanguard party, section of a reborn Fourth International. ■

Correction

In *Workers Vanguard* No. 17, March 1973 in an article "Capital's Labor Trustee—Australian Labor Party Elected" there appears a faulty formulation on the nature of the Labor Party. After a characterisation of the Labor Party's programme as that of "responsible reorganizers of the Capitalist system," there appears the statement that the "tactic of critical support for a mass social-democratic or stalinist party is designed to exploit the contradiction between its formal program and the aspirations of its working class base on the one hand with its betrayals in practice and its traitorous, bourgeoisified leadership on the other."

The phrase "formal program" was inserted in order to denote the fact of the Labor Party's pretense of furthering the interests of the working class. As in fact it suggests that the Labor Party puts forward policies which further the interests of the working class, it was an error to use it. The contradiction embodied in the Labor Party is between its occasional pretense to stand for the working class together with revolutionary aspirations and needs of its working class base on the one hand with its betrayals in practice and bourgeoisified leadership on the other. In no sense should it be suggested that the Labor Party programme has anything in common with the interests of the working class, socialism or revolution. However, the Labor Party cannot be defeated without destroying it in the eyes of its working class base. To do this it is necessary to intersect the Labor Party, to set the base against the top with the tactic of critical support: criticism, trenchant and unrelenting, for the traitorous programme and leadership; full support for its working class base.

Spartacist League of Australia
and New Zealand
22 April, 1973

Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam

John Sharpe

Saigon Insurrection 1945

Immediately following World War II, the Stalinist and Trotskyist groups in Vietnam faced the crucial test of a revolutionary situation. The working masses rose up against the occupying imperialist powers (France, Japan and Britain), and at the same time against the landlords and the native bourgeoisie. While the Stalinists, led by Ho Chi Minh, succeeded in betraying and crushing the revolutionary upsurge, they were not able to prevent the Trotskyists of the International Communist League (ICL) from playing a heroic role during the few short weeks between their liberation from French prisons and the brutal repression of the Saigon insurrection of September 1945.

Against these Bolshevik-Leninists Ho Chi Minh resorted to the ultimate tactic of Stalinists everywhere: assassination. From Leon Trotsky, to the entire remaining Bolshevik Central Committee of 1917, to the thousands of Russian Left Oppositionists in the Siberian labor camps, to the heroic Spanish, French, German and Czech Trotskyists, to the Vietnamese supporters of the Fourth International (the ICL and the Struggle group), Stalinism carried out its murderous work. The Stalinist parasites came close to destroying the living continuity of the Marxist movement internationally, but they could not tarnish the revolutionary program of the Fourth International.

The Viet Minh in World War II

The dismissal of the French popular front government in 1938 rapidly led to the banning of the CP in France. As a consequence, beginning in September 1939 the French colonial government outlawed all socialist groups in Vietnam, throwing hundreds of supporters of the Fourth International into prison. Both the Struggle (La Lutte) group and the International Communist League were broken up by the ferocious repression.

While many members of the Stalinist Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) were also imprisoned, Ho Chi Minh and his central committee were able to obtain refuge in Kuomintang China. This was no accident, as the Stalinists supported the Allies in World War II (as did Chiang Kai-shek) and were willing to make an alliance with the Kuomintang against the Japanese. The Trotskyists, in contrast, took the Bolshevik position of revolutionary defeatism during the war, refusing to support any of the rival imperialist camps and their puppets.

Beginning in September 1940, Japanese troops occupied Indochina, while the pro-Pétain colonial government remained in place. The occupation was met in the south by a large-scale peasant uprising in the Mytho region, an uprising led by Stalinist and Trotskyist forces, in November 1940. This and other abortive revolts were brutally put down by the French Foreign Legion, with more than a thousand arrests. (The Indochinese CP subsequently condemned the uprising as premature and in typical Stalinist fashion executed two of the leaders and expelled others.)⁶

In May 1941, the ICP called a congress in southern China to found the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (League for the Independence of Vietnam, or Viet Minh for short). The program of the Viet Minh was that of a typical popular front, saying nothing of socialism, limiting itself to "democratic" demands, such as national independence and allying itself with the Allies against Japan and the pro-Pétain French colo-

nial government. Its main demands for the exploited peasants, for instance, were reduction of rents and prohibition of forced labor and usury, with no more than a vague mention of agrarian reform.⁷

Disintegration of the Franco-Japanese Regime

On 9 March 1945 the Japanese, under tremendous military pressure in the Pacific, moved to tighten their control over Vietnam by ousting the fictitious French colonial government and disarming and interning the French troops. As a consequence of this move, however, bourgeois order began to deteriorate, allowing left wing groups to expand their activities clandestinely. The Viet Minh, which under Ho's instructions had avoided military operations up to now, established a guerilla base along the Chinese border in the north.

Meanwhile, the Trotskyists had begun to regroup. The International Communist League was reconstituted in Saigon in August 1944 with only several dozen members. However, among these were five founders of the Vietnamese Trotskyist movement, each having at least 12 years' experience of revolutionary struggle, and several experienced cadre formerly from the Hanoi section. After the March 1945 Japanese takeover, the ICL issued a manifesto calling for preparation for the imminent revolution:

"The capitalists and feudalists who today serve the Japanese general staff will also serve the Allied imperialist states. The petty bourgeois nationalists with their adventurist policies will also be unable to lead the people to a revolutionary victory. Only the working class fighting independently under the banner of the Fourth International, can accomplish the tasks of the vanguard of the revolution.

"The Stalinists of the Third International have already abandoned the working class in order to capitulate miserably before the 'democratic' imperialists. They have betrayed the peasants by no longer talking about the agrarian question. If they are marching today with the foreign capitalists, they will also aid the domestic exploiting classes to crush the revolutionary people in the coming hours.

"Workers and peasants! Assemble under the banner of the party of the Fourth International!"
—Manifesto of the ICL, 24 March 1945

In the meantime, the petty-bourgeois independence parties and the quasi-political religious sects were floundering without direction. The Cao Dai sect (a peasant grouping with a mystical Christian-Buddhist-Confucian ideology) had supported the French during the 1930's and then the Japanese during the war. Now, however, the leadership continued to support Japan while the ranks were openly revolting. The Hoa Hao, whose poor peasant and proletarian members were aroused by the prospect of independence, were forced to oppose the French. The Vietnamese Kuomintang, the VNQDD, while barely existing as an organized movement, had retained some support among the petty bourgeoisie because of its unsuccessful uprising in 1930 and also opposed the re-establishment of French rule.

While such bourgeois nationalist groups may oppose one or another foreign imperialist, they are not opposed to imperialism as a system, and therefore they must oppose the struggle of the working masses for their liberation from capitalist exploitation. It will sometimes be necessary for workers' organizations to enter into limited, essentially technical or military

agreements with a section of the bourgeoisie for joint action in a particular struggle, but it is a betrayal of Marxism to form a strategic alliance or long-term bloc with any bourgeois formation.

However, in spite of their claim to support the program of the Fourth International, the centrist Struggle (La Lutte) group formed just such a bloc, founding the "National United Front" together with the VNQDD, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao! This "Trotskyist"-bourgeois-feudal popular front effectively erased the class line separating exploiter and exploited. With its "democratic" program limited to national independence it was impossible to distinguish from the Viet Minh!

The August Days

On 16 August 1945 the news of the defeat of Japan reached Indochina. The following day the Japanese general staff declared the countries of Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) independent. The rapidity of the surrender surprised everyone. The Viet Minh, however, had already convened a congress which the same day formed a People's National Liberation Committee as a provisional government. Everywhere they moved rapidly to fill the governmental void, simply taking over the apparatus of the former Franco-Japanese colonial regime. Viet Minh troops rapidly occupied Hanoi without opposition from the Japanese. Seeking to avoid any appearance of revolution, the Viet Minh asked for and received the abdication of Bao Dai, the traditional emperor, who was henceforth "Supreme Political Advisor" of the new government.

In a significant gesture, Ho drafted (together with U.S. advisors) a Declaration of Independence, which begins by quoting the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, two of the key documents of the *bourgeois* revolution. According to the Stalinist theory of revolution in stages, to call for socialism at this point would have been "premature," as the defeat of the feudalists and imperialists was the immediate task. The reality of this "theory" was revealed by Ho's appeal to the French a month earlier for independence within the French Union in "not less than 5 and not more than 10 years," and by the agreement signed in Hanoi in early 1946 which permitted the reintroduction of French troops!

In the South, events moved at a somewhat different pace due to the relative weakness of the Stalinists. On 19 August the workers of the Ban Co district of Saigon formed the first People's Committee of the South. The following day a similar committee in the Phu Nhuan district, the largest workers' district of Saigon, took over governmental power. In the countryside the peasants rose up at the same time, burning villas of the large landowners, as well as several rice mills, in Sadek province on 19 August. In the province of Long Xuyen alone more than 200 government officials and police were killed by peasants in the first days after the Japanese surrender.

On 21 August the National United Front called an independence demonstration which attracted more than 300,000 participants. The Hoa Hao and Cao Dai marched behind the monarchist flag with a delegation of 100,000. The Trotskyists of the International Communist

League represented the other main pole of attraction in the march. Behind a huge banner of the Fourth International came a series of placards and banners with the ICL's main slogans: "Down with Imperialism! Long Live World Revolution! Long Live the Workers and Peasants Front! People's Committees Everywhere! Toward the Popular Assembly! Long Live the Arming of the People! Land to the Peasants! Nationalization of the Factories under Workers Control! Toward the Workers and Peasants Government!" As the banner of the Fourth International appeared, hundreds and thousands of workers who had never forgotten the revolutionary movement of the 1930's flocked behind it, embracing old friends, fighting over who would have the honor of carrying this or that placard, saluting each other with clenched fists. In a matter of a few hours the contingent of the ICL grew to 30,000. The Cao Dai and Hoa Hao peasants, against the discipline of their leaders, applauded the banner of the Fourth International each time it passed and listened attentively to the Trotskyist orators' agitational speeches on the national and peasant questions.⁸

The Viet Minh Coup d'Etat

Faced with the growing mass upsurge, the Stalinist leadership of the Viet Minh began to move quickly to take power. Their primary tactic was to present themselves as the legitimate representatives of the victorious allies. Thus, in a Viet Minh proclamation on 23 August, Tran Van Giau, the top southern Stalinist, proclaimed: "We have fought for five years alongside the democratic allies...." The previous evening, Giau had issued an ultimatum to a meeting of the National United Front calling on it to dissolve itself and turn over its administrative posts to the Viet Minh. The next day the NUF disbanded and joined the Viet Minh. (As a crowning touch to the betrayals of the Struggle group, which had set up the NUF as a "Trotskyist" popular front, they were accorded a seat on the "Southern Committee" of the Viet Minh on 10 September 1945!)⁹

The ICL was hardly inactive during this period, setting up a printing shop, issuing bulletins to the population every three hours and forming military units as a step toward arming the workers.

But the Stalinists moved faster. At 5 a.m. on 25 August the Viet Minh carried out a bloodless coup, occupying the city hall and police stations. Behind the backs of the masses, and with the participation of the bourgeois nationalists (Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, VNQDD), the Stalinists simply took over the existing state machinery and installed a new bonapartist bourgeois regime.

Later that day the Viet Minh called a mammoth demonstration, with more than one million participants. More than 30 political associations were present, but the outstanding forces were grouped behind the Stalinists and the ICL. With the break-up of the Japanese administration, the police itself divided into two sections, the majority supporting the Viet Minh, but a minority marching behind the banner of the Fourth International! The ICL delegation was noticeably smaller (only 2,000 marchers) than in the previous demonstration but this time many ICL supporters were marching with their trade union contingents.

By this time the difference between the Trotskyists and Stalinists was posed with razor sharpness. Two days after the coup, Nguyen Van Tao, now Minister for the Interior of the Viet Minh regime, issued a menacing challenge to the ICL: "Whoever encourages the peasants to take over the landed properties will be severely and pitilessly punished.... We have not yet carried out a communist revolution, which would bring a solution to the agrarian problem. This government is only a democratic [!] government, and therefore it cannot undertake this task, I repeat, our government is a democratic and bourgeois government, even though the Communists are in power."¹⁰ One could hardly ask for more clarity!

Military Support to the Viet Minh

Faced with this bonapartist bourgeois government, the Trotskyists of the International Communist League correctly adopted the position of an anti-imperialist united front. While Stalinists and ex-Trotskyist revisionists (such as the Bolivian POR) have used this slogan as

an excuse for forming a political bloc with bourgeois nationalists, the ICL had the Leninist policy of *political independence* of the workers movement from the bourgeois regime, but *military support against the imperialist* (British-Japanese-French) forces. While the Stalinists called for "All Power to the Viet Minh," the Trotskyists called for "All Power to the People's Committees."

Following Tao's press conference, the Viet Minh cranked up an incessant anti-Trotskyist campaign in its press, accusing the supporters of the Fourth International of sowing disorder. On 1 September Tran Van Giau declared: "Those who incite the people to arm themselves will be considered saboteurs and provocateurs, enemies of national independence. Our democratic liberties will be granted and guaranteed by the democratic allies."

While Ho Chi Minh was reading the Declaration of Independence in Hanoi, the southern Viet Minh organized a demonstration on 2 September to greet the British troops which were to arrive imminently. Late in the afternoon more than 400,000 persons joined in a peaceful demonstration proceeding to the Cathedral. As a priest known as sympathetic to the Vietnamese was speaking from the steps of the Cathedral, shots rang out and he was killed. The crowd ran for cover, but more than 150 were wounded in the shooting which followed. The situation developed into a generalized riot, with attacks on French colons suspected of responsibility for the criminal attacks on the demonstration. A number of French were arrested, but then immediately released the next day by the Stalinist police chief Duong Bach Mai, who issued a statement "deploring" the "excesses."

In response to the events of 2 September the Stalinists and Trotskyists issued two clearly counterposed appeals. As the British troops under General Gracey were expected to arrive any day, the Viet Minh proclaimed:

"In the interests of our country, we call on everyone to have confidence in us and not let themselves be led astray by people who betray our country. It is only in this spirit that we can facilitate our relations with the Allied representatives."

—leaflet of 7 September 1945



Ho Chi Minh toasting March 1946 accords introducing French troops to North Vietnam, with General Leclerc (left) and High Commissioner Sauty, who soon after expelled the Viet Minh government.

In contrast the ICL declared:

"We, internationalist communists, have no illusions that the Viet Minh government will be capable, with its class collaborationist policies, of fighting successfully against the imperialist invasions in the coming hours. However, if it declares itself ready to defend national independence and to safeguard the people's liberties, we will not hesitate to aid it and to support it with all technical means in the revolutionary struggles. But in return we must repeat that we will strictly observe the absolute independence of our party with respect to the government and all the political parties, because the very existence of a party calling itself Bolshevik-Leninist depends entirely on this political independence."

—communiqué of 4 September 1945

The People's Committees

Under the influence of the ICL, during the three weeks after 16 August more than 150 "People's Committees" (To Chuc Uy Banh Hanh Dong) were set up in the Nam Bo (southern Vietnam), approximately 100 of them in the Saigon-Cholon region. A Provisional Central Committee composed of 9 members (later expanded to 15) was constituted after the 21 August demonstration.

The question of the historical role of these "people's committees" is of paramount im-

portance to revolutionary Trotskyists. In the *Quatrième Internationale* article cited earlier, "Lucien" (a Vietnamese leader of the ICL) writes: "The ICL led the revolutionary masses through the intermediary of the People's Committees.... Despite its numerical weakness, the ICL achieved, for the first time in the history of the Indochinese revolution the grandiose historic task of creating the People's Committee or Soviet."¹¹

The ICL and the People's Committees did consistently call for political opposition to the bourgeoisie. Thus the People's Committees gave no political support to the bourgeois Viet Minh government, while calling for a military bloc against the invading Allies (which the Viet Minh naturally rejected, since its policy was to greet the Allies). The ICL called for the arming of the working masses and took practical steps to carry this out. The ICL slogans called not for a "democratic" revolution limited to national independence, but also for expropriation of industry under workers control.

Nevertheless, the very term "People's" Committee obscures the need for the independent mobilization of the proletariat as a separate class. While an alliance with the peasantry and sections of the urban petty bourgeoisie against imperialism and semi-feudal landowners is a burning necessity, this alliance must be based first of all on the independent organization of the working class. In predominantly peasant countries, indiscriminate mobilization of the "people" guarantees the domination of the unstable petty bourgeoisie over the working class. The necessary alliance of workers and peasants Soviets must destroy the bourgeois state and replace it with a workers state.

These general considerations had an immediate practical consequence. While the People's Committees refused the ultimatums of the Viet Minh to subordinate themselves to the bonapartist regime, the class difference between the two powers was not always clear to the masses. The People's Committees, especially in Saigon, were essentially organs of workers power, while the Southern Committee government of the Viet Minh was a popular front

regime based on the existing bourgeois state. But to the masses this appeared simply as the difference between two "people's governments," one dominated by the Stalinists, the other by Trotskyists. Between these two state powers a violent clash was inevitable but by calling for People's Committees the Trotskyists of the ICL failed to adequately prepare the masses politically for the impending battle.

Massacre of the Trotskyists

The inevitable clash soon took form. On 7 September Giau issued a decree ordering the disarming of all non-governmental organizations. All weapons were to be turned over to the Viet Minh's "Republican Guard." This affected the religious sects but also the "vanguard youth organizations" and factory-based self-defense groups led by the Trotskyists. The most important such group was the workers militia jointly organized by the workers of the Go Vap streetcar depot and the ICL. The militia issued an appeal to the workers of Saigon-Cholon to arm themselves for the struggle against the inevitable British-French invasion.

The British and Indian troops under General Gracey arrived in Saigon on 10 September. Along the road from the airport the Viet Minh had put up banners and slogans welcoming the

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Allies; at city hall Allied flags were flying on both sides of the Viet Minh flag. The Viet Minh "Southern Committee" sat inside doing its paper work, while the British proceeded to eliminate its power in the city. Gracey, who only a few weeks earlier had declared, "The question of the government of Indochina is exclusively French," banned the Vietnamese press, proclaimed martial law and imposed a strict curfew. All demonstrations were forbidden as was the carrying of any arms, including bamboo sticks.

On 12 September the People's Committees and the ICL issued a joint manifesto denouncing the policy of treason of the Viet Minh government. Popular discontent was seething in the workers' districts. Faced with the likelihood of insurrection, the Viet Minh moved to head it. At 4 p.m. on 14 September Duong Bach Mai, Stalinist head of the police, sent a detachment of Republican Guards to surround the local of the People's Council which was in session at the time. Incredibly, the Trotskyists simply gave up to these butchers! In the words of the ICL account:

"We conducted ourselves as true revolutionary militants. We let ourselves be arrested without using violence against the police, even though we were more numerous and all well armed. They took our machine guns and automatic pistols. They sacked our office, breaking furniture, ripping our flags, stealing the typewriters and burning all our papers."¹²

By this single act of cowardice, the ICL leadership sealed its own doom and that of the first Vietnamese revolution. Behind such a capitulation must have lain a serious misunderstanding of the true nature of Stalinism. It is true that during the 1930's the southern leaders of the ICP were in a long-term bloc with the Struggle group, and showed themselves to be somewhat more "leftist" than Ho. But this was only a tactical adaptation to the presence of significant Trotskyist forces. In a similar fashion the Bolivian CP agreed to form the Popular Assembly in 1971 along with the "Trotskyist" POR, but only in order to better betray it. A proof that this was only a temporary aberration is given by the Stalinists' own criticism of the southern party for its "leftist deviations... its underestimation of the Trotskyist danger and its unprincipled cooperation with the Trotskyists"¹³ in the popular front period.

(Among the ICL leaders who were shot as a result of the Stalinist coup were Lo Ngoc, member of the central committee of the ICL; Nguyen Van Ky, ICL labor leader; and Nguyen Huong, young leader of the workers militia, killed by the Stalinist police in July 1946.)

By 22 September the British had sufficiently fortified their position to try an open test of strength. The British took over the Saigon jail, while the French troops of the 11th Colonial Infantry were armed. The French colons went wild later that day, arresting, beating and killing innumerable Vietnamese. During the following night French troops reoccupied several police stations, the post office, central bank and town hall, all without armed resistance.

As the news reached the working-class districts a spontaneous movement of resistance broke out. The Viet Minh opposed "violence," instead trying to obtain "negotiations" with General Gracey. In the outlying suburbs trees were felled, cars and trucks overturned and furniture piled up in the street creating crude barricades. During this time the workers' suburbs (Khanh Hoi, Cau Kho, Ban Co, Phu Nhuan, Tan Dinh and Thi Nghe) were firmly in the insurgents' hands. In some areas French were shot indiscriminately in an outburst of racial hatred, the result of 80 years of brutal colonial domination. In the center several important factories and warehouses were burned down, and the port was under continuous attack. Water and electricity were cut off completely and supplies were precarious. The following day the Vietnamese insurgents openly paraded in the main streets of the city center.

The most significant organized contingent in the insurrection was the workers militia of the Go Vap streetcar depot, a force of 60. The 400 workers of the company were well known for their labor militancy. While affiliated to the Stalinist-dominated labor federation, they refused to use the label of Cong Nhan Cuu Quoc ("Workers Saviors of the Fatherland"), and refused to carry the Viet Minh flag (yellow star on a red background), saying they would fight instead under the red flag of the workers. The force was organized into shock groups of

11 members under elected leaders, with the overall command headed by Tran Dinh Minh, a young ICL leader and novelist formerly from Hanoi.

(Faced with the joint opposition of the Allies and the Viet Minh police, the Go Vap workers militia tried to open a line of retreat to regroup in the Plaine des Jones area. After several battles with the French and Indian troops they reached the regroupment area, where they established contact with the poor peasants. Already having lost 20 men, and on 13 January 1946 its leader Minh, in battle against the imperialist forces, the militia was eventually overwhelmed, several of its members stabbed to death by Viet Minh bands.)

In this revolutionary atmosphere the Viet Minh Committee of the South issued its appeal: "There is only one answer—a food blockade." Futilely hoping to starve out the French (while British ships controlled the port!), Glau concentrated on negotiations with the British. A truce was announced on 1 October, but by 5 October General Leclerc and the French expeditionary force arrived and rapidly moved to "restore order" and "build a strong Indochina within the French Union."¹⁴ The truce was the best present the beleaguered French and British troops could have received, an obscene betrayal of the insurgent masses.

While the Viet Minh continued its policy of appeasing the Allies, agreeing to allow free passage to British and Japanese troops through rebel areas, the French and Indian troops launched a general attack to the northeast, thus breaking the blockade of the city. Instead of fighting back, the Stalinists concentrated their efforts on eliminating the Trotskyists. Having eliminated the ICL and the People's Committee leadership on 14 September, they now moved on the Struggle (La Lutte) group and, surrounding its headquarters in the Thu Duc area, they arrested the entire group and interned them at Ben Suc. There they were all shot as French troops approached. Among those thus murdered were Tran Van Thach (elected a Saigon municipal councillor in the 1933 elections), Phan Van Hum, Nguyen Van So and tens of other revolutionary militants. Shortly after this the Viet Minh were forced out of Saigon.

Ho Sells Out to the French

In the North, Ho was following a similar policy of capitulating to the Allies, in this case the Chinese and French. However, the process took considerably longer than in the South, as the first Chinese troops did not arrive until late September, giving the Viet Minh time to consolidate its rule. Also, the Viet Minh had its own makeshift guerilla army in the North, and the Chinese were not actively opposed to an independent Vietnam. In line with his policy of "broadening" the coalition to include bourgeois nationalists and Catholic leaders, Ho in November ordered the complete liquidation of the Indochinese Communist Party. The Central Committee statement said that "in order to complete the Party's task... a national union conceived without distinction of class and parties is an indispensable factor" and that this step was being taken to show that Communists "are always disposed to put the interests of the country above that of classes, and to give up the interests of the Party to serve those of the Vietnamese people" [our emphasis].¹⁵

At this same time, however, opposition was still strong in the North. The Struggle group at this time was publishing a daily newspaper in Hanoi, *Tranh Dau* (Struggle), which had a circulation of 30,000 in late 1945.¹⁶ A letter to the International Secretariat of the Fourth International in this period spoke of a well-organized but persecuted organization of the Struggle group in the North. Led by "Th...", former leader of the Tonkin printers during 1937-38, it held large meetings and published several books in addition to its daily newspaper. One region where the line of the Struggle group had particular success was Bach Mai. As a result of a large meeting there, Ho Chi Minh gave the order to arrest Th... and other supporters of the Fourth International. (Th... was able to escape from his Viet Minh captors and was fighting in the guerilla operations in the countryside at the time.) Already a large number of Trotskyists had perished in the resistance.¹⁷ Eventually this group, too, was wiped out entirely by the Stalinist repression.

At this time, Ta Thu Thau, the leader of the

Struggle group was in Hanoi, working on coordinating flood relief and "conferring" with Ho Chi Minh. On his way south he was arrested on the orders of the Viet Minh. Tried three times by local People's Committees, he was acquitted each time—a tribute to the Trotskyists' reputation in Vietnam at that time. Finally, he was simply shot in Quang Ngai in February 1946, on orders from the southern Stalinist leader Tran Van Giau. Gullible souls have questioned whether the wise Uncle Ho could ever have carried out such a vicious act. Such doubts are an expression of political light-mindedness, as there is no known account of Thau's murder that even suggests that he was not killed by Viet Minh forces, acting on orders. As for Ho, his only known statement on the subject was made in a conversation with the French socialist Daniel Guerin:

"He [Thau] was a great patriot and we mourn him," Ho Chi Minh told me with unfeigned emotion. But a moment later he added in a steady voice, 'All those who do not follow the line which I have laid down will be broken.'¹⁸

Having physically liquidated the entire leadership of the Trotskyist movement in Vietnam, Ho was now ready to conclude a "deal" with the French government (which included the Communist Francois Billoux as minister of defense!). The preliminary convention between France and the "Democratic Republic of Vietnam," signed in Hanoi on 6 March, provided among other things that "the Government of Vietnam declares itself prepared to receive the French army amicably," and for the stationing of 15,000 French troops north of the 16th parallel. The overall content of the accords was for a limited independence, within the French Union. Defending this despicable betrayal against revolutionary Trotskyist criticism, which lived on in spite of the physical extermination of the Trotskyist cadres, Ho was forced to call a mass rally in Hanoi the following day, during which he declared: "The people who are not satisfied only understand total independence as a slogan, a demand on a piece of paper or in the mouth. They do not see independence of the country results from objective conditions..."¹⁹ Primary among these objective conditions, of course, was the fact that the French Communist Party and Stalin were opposed to Vietnamese independence!

It was with the arrival of Allied troops that the defeat of the first Vietnamese revolution was sealed. The primary responsibility for this defeat lies clearly with Ho Chi Minh and the Stalinists who consistently sabotaged the popular uprising and murdered its leaders. Only by realizing the magnitude of this betrayal can one gauge the significance of the capitulation of the Struggle group in joining the Viet Minh, a move which led to its physical annihilation and to the generation-long war against French and U.S. imperialism. While the International Communist League demonstrated a similar underestimation of the lengths to which the Stalinists would go to eliminate revolutionary opposition, its overall policies in this period presented a clear Trotskyist opposition to the class collaboration of the Viet Minh.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

⁶ Hammer, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁷ Jean Chesneaux, *Contribution à l'histoire de la nation vietnamienne*, Paris, 1955, p. 230.

⁸ Lucien [Ho Huu Thuong?], "Quelques étapes de la révolution au Nam-Bo du Viet-Nam," *Quatrième Internationale*, September-October 1947, p. 43. Much of the factual information in this section is taken from this article.

⁹ Devillers, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁰ Lucien, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Pierre Rousset, *Le parti communiste vietnamien*, Paris, 1973, p. 26.

¹⁴ "1945: The Saigon Insurrection," *Spartacist West* No. 17, 22 August 1969. Most of the details on the September insurrection come from this article.

¹⁵ Alan W. Cameron, ed., *Viet-Nam Crisis, A Documentary History*, Vol. 1, pp. 66-67.

¹⁶ I. Milton Sacks, *Nationalism and Communism in Vietnam*, unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1960, p. 224.

¹⁷ "Les Trotskyistes au Tonkin (Lettre de Hong Kong)," *Quatrième Internationale*, January-February 1948, pp. 71-72.

¹⁸ Quoted by Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh*, New York, p. 148.

¹⁹ Chesneaux, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

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STEEL...

corporations are seeking to convince public opinion that, as NCIP chairman Cole put it, "now workers and management both must make sure there is a pie to divide."

However, in spite of foreign competition, increased steel productivity gained through recent modernization, coupled with the temporary advantage gained by the recent currency realignments (which have increased the price of Japanese steel), has led steel executives to predict dramatic increases in sales and profits. In fact, U.S. Steel's profits are booming already, up by 157.9 percent in the first quarter according to the company's own figures (*New York Times*, 25 April 1973).

Reformists Stress Wages

As the key bargaining year of 1973 progresses, in which contracts for over four million workers terminate, the need for a program expressing the interests of the working class on the full range of domestic and international political questions is becoming increasingly clear. No mere bread-and-butter program, no matter how militant, can answer such questions as currently face steel workers, and no "leader" whose vision is restricted to the perspective of one trade union can go beyond the "answers" of Abel.

Yet reformist trade unionists, such as the oppositional groupings in the USWA supported by the Communist Party—the National Steelworkers Rank and File Committee (NSRFC), the Ad Hoc Committee of Concerned Steel Workers, the Rank and File Team (RAFT) and the Lorain Save Our Union Committee—are all now working toward the local June elections on campaign platforms that do not even include rejection of the no-strike pact! The aim of all four groups is to "get progressive trade unionists elected to local leadership" (*Daily World*, 28 April 1973). Such trade-union reformists may oppose, at first, such openly pernicious deals as Abel's no-strike pledge, but their method is the same as his and their betrayals will, if anything, ultimately be more serious, since they threaten to fool more of the angry young workers whom the likes of Abel are unable to string along. Their mentors in the Communist Party wholeheartedly supported the trade-union bureaucrats' World War II no-strike pledge when the bosses and the Kremlin cracked the whip. These "progressive trade unionists" will hardly do better.

At the same time that the NSRFC talks in general against "cooperation" and compulsory arbitration, it invites the government into the unions as an arbiter of the labor movement's internal affairs: Both William Litch of RAFT and Tony Cascone of NSRFC are appealing to the Labor Department to reverse the disqualification of oppo-

sition candidates for top union offices on the "grounds" that they lacked endorsement from a sufficient number of locals. While oppositionists occasionally obtain favorable rulings from the bourgeois courts, in particularly blatant cases, this very "success" goes against the most fundamental interest of the class, its independence from the bourgeoisie and its government. To really defeat the bureaucrats and their class-collaborationist policies there is only one method—to mobilize the ranks around a program of class struggle.

Another ostensibly revolutionary grouping, the pseudo-Trotskyist Workers League, has occasionally made noises about building a national opposition in the Steelworkers union. Like the CP its main emphasis is on "more." Recently it has reached the absurd heights of declaring wages to be a revolutionary issue in itself. The reformism implied by such statements has characterized the WL's relatively meager trade-union work for years. Thus its ill-starred "instant caucus" which appeared (and disappeared) in the course of the 1971 steel negotiations also stressed wages as the key, specifically its demand for a \$2/hour wage increase. However, it had a few moments of embarrassment as the arch-reformist CP was pushing the same "key demand" and it was hard to distinguish the groups. But the WL's *Bulletin* could explain it all. You see:

"Talking about \$2 an hour is one thing, winning it and winning it in the first year of the contract means a perspective of war with the bureaucracy.... This means a sharp clash with the bureaucracy and their Stalinist allies, as the only way to build a real rank and file movement in basic steel."

—*Bulletin*, 28 June 1971

A year later the "anti-bureaucracy" WL was looking to Abel for the building of a labor party in the U.S.! While the WL's 1971 program did contain a few other, subordinate, demands, its 1973 program does not even pretend to adhere to the Trotskyist transitional program. Even the demand of international working-class solidarity—especially critical in a union which tries to put over its sellouts by claiming the necessity of enhancing the position of American business vis-à-vis foreign competition—is completely ignored.

Abel's no-strike agreement, and other "voluntary" arbitration plans are mere scraps of paper which will not be able to suppress the class struggle. On the one hand stand the naked power and authority of the capitalist state before which Meany, Abel et al. cringe. On the other hand lie the power of the organized working class and the spreading rank-and-file revolt, which can overthrow both the pact and the cowardly bureaucracy which produced it. But "rank-and-file revolt" is not enough. Abel himself, and many of the local presidents who voted for his rotten deal, are themselves the product of rank-and-file revolts which, however, failed to go beyond the bounds of narrow trade unionism.

A real victory for steel workers, and all workers, requires a program which joins the individual trade unions

in struggle with the international proletariat, a program which expresses, within each union, the interests of all the workers against the capitalists. A revolutionary opposition must fight consistently for trade-union independence from the state and genuine workers democracy; for nationalization of basic industry without compensation



under workers control of production; for factory committees to take working conditions, hiring, firing and layoffs out of the hands of management; for international class solidarity across all borders and against all forms of racial and sexual discrimination; for a sliding scale of wages and hours to provide work for the unemployed at no loss in pay to any worker; and for a workers party based on the trade unions to fight for a workers government. Only such a program, raised in steel and other unions by organized caucuses of class-conscious militants, can be a part of, and complement, the struggle of a proletarian vanguard party for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by socialism. ■

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WORKERS VANGUARD

Continued from page 8

PL Night Riders...

which could unify everyone, would solve all problems and could be won under capitalism! Want to fight against racial discrimination, speedup, inflation, unemployment? Then fight for "30 for 40," says PL, because it solves everything.

The most notable clash between the reality of the class struggle and this reformist utopia is the question of racism. While PL makes a big issue of its "fight against racist ideology" in SDS, in the working class where it really counts it pushes the WAM program which has nothing to say about racism! While it is fine for WAM to pass abstract resolutions against racism, PL refuses to include concrete programmatic demands to fight it. The reason is quite simple: PL wishes to build the *broadest possible* movement around a single issue, just like the ex-Trotskyist SWP in the anti-war movement, and consciously wishes to avoid confronting head-on the widespread racism in the working class and the trade-union bureaucrats and would-be bureaucrats who might support "30 for 40" as an isolated demand, but never the broad program of class struggle of which it must be part. Just get people in motion—whatever brand of reformism you desire, "30 for 40" is the answer: this is PL's program for the working class.

SDS Conference: Stick to Textbooks

In contrast to the WAM conference, PL initially intended to make a show of democracy and allow other tendencies into the Students for a Democratic Society meeting, probably figuring it had little to lose in an organization which has long since given up any pretensions to revolutionary politics. However, just to make sure, they devoted approximately seven out of eleven conference hours at SDS to workshops. This tactic, justified as a way to "really involve" people, in fact was intended to keep real political struggle off the main floor.

In the workshops, the depths of PL's current single-issue sub-reformism were clearly revealed. At the workshop on "Racism and Imperialism," SL/RCY supporters charged that the SDS anti-racist textbook campaign resembled the SWP's NPAC, which seeks to unite those of all classes opposed to the war. In reply, PL leader David Levy said that there were many criticisms one could make of the SWP, but one of these was not that they built a mass movement around one demand. (Strange that PL used to say that the SWP's single-issue approach was inadequate to fight imperialism!) When an SDSer, stung by the SL criticism, argued that SDS was not and should not be organized solely around the textbooks campaign, Levy again disagreed, saying that in any situation one struggle must be primary, and in the present period that meant smashing racist ideology (for the students, of course).

While there were periodic threats of exclusion of the SL at the Saturday sessions, on Sunday morning the SL was met at the door by 30 to 40 goons armed with clubs and steel pipes and was prevented from entering. In justification of this anti-communist exclusionism, a PL speaker in the plenary said that the SL had "disrupted" two workshops with its criticism and was seeking to crush SDS. Since those two workshops had not rubber stamped PL's reformist resolutions, it was also "arranged" informally to have another session of the workshops, without the presence of revolutionary criticism, to take care of business! Thus in the end, the reformists can only resort to the cowardly Stalinist techniques of exclusionism, manipulation and open gangsterism against the communists. ■

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PL Night Riders Attack Boston SL

Progressive Labor
in Reformist Frenzy

SDS, WAM Exclude Communists

With *Challenge* sales drastically down, recruitment stagnating and internal demoralization, the Progressive Labor Party (PL) turned to outright gangsterism in an attempt to seal off the weekend pep rallies of its trade-union and student front groups from revolutionary criticism. In a desperate effort to keep the Spartacist League out of the conferences of both Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Workers Action Movement (WAM), held in New York on 28-29 April, the Boston PL branch went on a rampage of hooliganism in the week prior to the events, entering the homes of SL comrades, slashing tires of their cars and throwing rocks and bottles of acid through their windows.

On the night of 23 April a carload of PL members and supporters went out night-riding: At about 1 am they entered the house of one SL member on the pretext of delivering a telegram, then quickly retreated, shouting threats to physically wipe out every member of the Spartacist League. Earlier that night they had visited the home of other SLers, presumably with similar intentions of intimidation, but left as someone came to the door. The car they used was identified as the same brown stationwagon used as the SDS sound-car in Boston the following day.

The next day at Boston University, PL members Eddy Egelman and Ira Helfand and long-time supporter John Liffman attacked a Spartacist League supporter, who had earlier been a member of SDS for three years. The comrade was stopped, pushed around and a copy of *Workers Vanguard* ripped from his hand. He was warned that if the SL showed up in New York City during the conference weekend, "you'll be sorry you came." Later that day Egelman and Helfand approached another comrade, who was selling *WV* in the Boston University cafeteria, telling him that if Spartacists came to New York, SDS and WAM members would physically take them apart so that the SL press would have to come out in technicolor to reflect the blood.

On 25 April, the SL issued a leaflet exposing these gangster tactics and distributed it at an SDS forum at Boston University. That night, one of the SLers who had received a threatening visit from PL two days earlier, returned home to find a carload of PLers waiting for him. Later that night all of the tires on his car were slashed. A few minutes after that "visit," several rocks, one of them wrapped with the Spartacist League's leaflet, were thrown through the window of another comrade's bedroom, accompanied by a bottle of butyric acid. Only because no one was at that moment sleeping in the room was serious injury avoided. Some time that same night other comrades living in another part of the Boston area, had the tires on their car slashed also.

Finally, on 26 April, Egelman blocked the car of an SL/RCY supporter with his own and, bragging about the



Rocks thrown by PL thugs into Boston SLers' home along with butyric acid.

previous night's rampage, yelled, "you haven't seen anything yet."

Since that time, PL has taken up a disgusting two-faced policy of self-righteously denying the events to the public, while sneakily admitting and "justifying" this hooliganism to their friends. At the SDS convention the SL allegations of gangsterism were denounced as "lies and slander." In Boston, several PL members who were approached appeared to be genuinely unaware of these events! But meanwhile, PLer Ira Helfand brazenly acknowledged the midnight rides to a mutual contact, saying they were necessary to intimidate the SL from attending the SDS/WAM conference.

This slinking deceitfulness and blatant disregard for workers democracy is absolutely impermissible in the socialist movement! We have made serious charges of gangsterism against well-known PL members and the organization itself. These allegations are backed up by written affidavits from SL members and unaffiliated individuals who witnessed the events in question. We believe that every serious working-class tendency opposed to gangsterism in the workers movement and to calling the cops against other socialist groups will agree that a workers commission of inquiry must be formed to ruthlessly pursue the truth in this matter, in order to put an end to this despicable thuggery within the left.

WAM Conference: "30 for 40" Solves Everything

Outside the hall at the Workers Action Movement conference, SL/RCY supporters distributed a leaflet entitled "WAM: Militant Reformism," which said in part:

"The three-point WAM program (30 for 40; support other workers' struggles; for democratic unions) makes no mention of the need to struggle against racial and sexual oppression and imperialism, the demand to expropriate basic industry (without compensation) under workers control and to build a workers party to fight for a workers government. Because these key demands that link the struggle against unemployment to the need to end capitalism are absent from WAM's program, it can easily be misled by the labor bureaucrats and even the capitalist politicians themselves, such as liberal Democrats."

The conference turned out to be little

more than a pep rally to pick up sagging morale. The conference site itself was kept a secret, and any known or suspected members of other tendencies were excluded, including some who had pre-registered. When the issue of the exclusion of other left tendencies was raised inside the conference, a PLer justified this anti-democratic procedure by saying they had business to do, instead of "listening to the Trots."

The atmosphere in the conference was wholly in keeping with the reformism of the WAM program. Hardly anyone ever mentioned taboo subjects like revolution or socialism, although PLers occasionally made sly hints at "taking care of the bosses once and for all," which is presumably their current codeword for the unmentionable. (And this coming from a group which once insisted that the key to fighting revisionism was for everyone to be "open communists" in the unions; now they can't even be open communists

in their own front group!)

In a significant confirmation of our predictions that slick bureaucrats could move to coopt WAM because of its low-level reformist program, the keynote speech stated that it is possible that "30 for 40" will be taken over by the bureaucrats, in which case WAM would have to fight even harder. In contrast to this apolitical "we fight harder" approach, the SL calls for the formation of caucuses based on the Transitional Program, including demands which start from the present conditions and immediate needs of the working class today and point directly to the need for the independent political mobilization of the proletariat for socialist revolution, such as workers party and workers government.

While a number of independents brought up different reforms they wished to fight for, PL simply counterposed "30 for 40" as the super-reform,

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Maritime Bureaucrats Scab on Shell Strike NMU Insurgents Fight for Labor Solidarity

"Electioneering"

The American labor movement is infamous for its lack of elementary trade-union solidarity. Unions regularly scab on each other in "jurisdictional" disputes and sell out each other's strikes in the interest of short-term, bureaucratic advantage. Sometimes this reaches the level of a full-scale assault to destroy another union, as the Teamsters are now engaged in against the United Farmworkers in California.

The Militant-Solidarity Caucus of the National Maritime Union is fighting to replace this policy with one of labor solidarity based on class-struggle policies. The caucus is exposing and attempting to reverse the Curran/Wall NMU bureaucracy's policy of ignoring the oil workers' strike against Shell Oil. The bureaucrats have been forcing seamen to scab on the oil workers by manning tankers carrying Shell oil.

This is not the first time the bureaucracy has scabbed on other workers, the caucus points out. In a special supplement (13 April 1973) to its paper, the *Beacon*, entitled, "Stop the Scabbing, Support Shell Strikers," the M-SC charged that NMU officials allowed scab grapes on NMU ships during the California grape strike, thereby helping lay the groundwork for the Teamsters' current strike-breaking offensive, and refused to halt oil on NMU ships during the 1971 oil workers' strike. As part of its effort to get the membership to reject this contemptible "policy" (members usually are not aware of the nature of the cargo on a ship until after they sign on), the caucus conducted a special mailing of its *Beacon* supplement to all NMU tankers, according to *Beacon* editor Gene Herson.

At the April New York port meeting, Militant-Solidarity Caucus members called for giving the "hot cargo" (refusing to handle) treatment to all Shell products in the following resolution:

"...whereas our union officials are shipping jobs on tankers which are breaking the Shell strike, forcing NMU seamen to transport Shell products and thereby assist the Shell Oil Co., and

"whereas this strikebreaking violates the most basic principle of labor solidarity, while denigrating the name of the NMU, be it therefore

"resolved, that the port of New York membership, at this monthly meeting call for a complete and total halt to the movement of all Shell products on NMU contract vessels and demand that the National Office direct all NMU crews to 'Hot Cargo' Shell Oil."

The Militant-Solidarity Caucus is distinguished by its full political program, which includes nationalization of shipping without compensation under workers control; international organization rather than the social patriotism of Curran and Morrissey in response to "runaway shipping"; opposition to imperialist wars, racial and sexual discrimination and government intervention in the labor movement; and for a workers party to fight for a workers government. Such a program, which represents the interests of the international working class, requires a complete break from the "militant" trade unionism of Morrissey and the ostensibly revolutionary organizations—Communist Party, International Socialists, Socialist Workers Party, Workers League, etc.—all of which adapt to "bread-and-butter" unionism. ■

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